

SCHOOL TALK

A Newsletter of M.S.A.D. #54

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The Nuts and Bolts of the District

Support Services



Superintendent Brent Colbry, left, talks with maintenance worker Mark Frederick in front of the Old Milk House, recently renovated for the special education offices.

Superintendent of Schools Brent Colbry is an administrator who wants his work force to feel important and involved in their jobs. He is aware and appreciative of the contribution all employees make. Colbry is very clear about what is first on everybody's list. As he says, "The primary mission for us is a quality educational experience for our kids." But he is quick to point out the role

that support services has in making that happen.

"People take it for granted, but a huge part of a quality educational system is the support services provided to students," he said. Support services employees such as maintenance personnel, bus drivers, secretaries, custodians and food services workers are all part of the infrastructure of a big, rural school

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Supporting the System for 17 years

Janice Murray, a secretary in the main office at Skowhegan Area High School, grew up in Skowhegan. As a teenager she worked at Murray's Home Lunch, a restaurant her family owned for 14 years. In August of 1988 Murray became an employee of MSAD #54. For the first seven years in the district her responsibilities were payroll, workers compensation, insurances, OSHA and unemployment claims in the administrative offices. She obtained an associates degree at Thomas College during that time. Ten years ago Murray was ready for a change. "I was tired of working with numbers. I wanted to work with people again," she said. Murray interviewed for the

secretarial position at Skowhegan Regional Vocational Center and moved to the school in 1995. She liked being around the students. "I really got involved with the



Janice Murray at the front desk in the main office of SAHS.

vocational kids," she said. Murray took pictures of student activities and awards. She was an advisor for VICA, (Vocational Industrial Club of America,) an organization that

promotes vocational school ideals, before SRVC instituted its own Skills Showcase/Open House and Student Leadership programs.

In 1998 Murray went back to Thomas College to earn her Bachelors degree in business and psychology. She made the change to SAHS in 1999 because she needed to work full-time. "At first it seemed very different here," said Murray. But gradually she found the position less stressful and very fulfilling. She likes the idea of being on "the front-lines" as she put it. "We deal with students, parents, teachers, administrators, the public and any emergencies that

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Support Services *continued from page 1*

district. There is even a newly-created position of a district-wide delivery person. But, as Colbry pointed out, their work can often be overlooked. In the everyday hustle and bustle of students, teachers, vital classroom activities, and curriculum, employees who answer the phones or sweep the floors after school might not seem as important. Colbry doesn't think so. "We have a dedicated and hard-working support staff. They are committed and care about the schools," said Colbry. And he wants to do everything he can to help them do the best job possible.

Colbry works hard at what he calls "empowering employees." "I'm around talking to everyone," he said. "The most important thing is

that we ask people what they think." And if there are obstacles in a worker's way, Colbry tries to get rid of them. If a suggestion makes sense, he is quick to make a change. "I don't take a long time to make up my mind," he said. He will tell you that an administrator has far more power if he empowers his workers. "You have much more ability to make change when everyone is working together," he said.

Colbry is proud of the work that has been done to upgrade the parking lots, the football field and many of the school buildings. He has received many compliments about the general appearance of the schools and school grounds. "Community members have

mentioned that they like what they see," he said. Given that the district is in the middle of spending monies obtained through a bond issue, it pleases Colbry that these efforts are being noticed. Along with the building of new Norridgewock Central Grade School, another 1.6 million dollars will go to the renovation of the SAHS heating and ventilation system. It was a testimony to his commitment to an all-inclusive philosophy that the maintenance crew met with renovation designers and engineers to give their input into the project. Colbry's view is that if there is to be efficiency and high quality in the work being done in the district, workers have to have some input. "It only makes sense," he says.

A Great Team

Maintenance team leader Jim Leo and his coworkers work hard but they enjoy coming to their jobs each morning. That's evident when most of them sit down at a table in their maintenance building at lunch time to



Maintenance crew: Front: (left to right) Peter Rebar, Scott Washburn, Bill Sincyr, (back) Jim Leo, Gurdon Boothby. (absent from photo) Robert Arris, Mark Frederick.

explain to a visitor what they do and how they do it. They are smiling, relaxed and joke easily with one another. They've been working together for five years now and, as carpenter Scott Washburn said, "Everyone helps each other out."

Leo, Washburn, Gurdon Boothby, Bill Sincyr, Peter Rebar, Robert Arris and Mark Frederick are all part of the maintenance crew that keep MSAD #54's facilities up and running as smoothly as possible. They are a busy bunch.

The team is responsible for all of the 16 buildings in the district plus 10 portable classrooms. They take care of the school grounds. If there are power outages or frozen pipes, they're the first ones called. They shingle roofs as well as do dry wall and vinyl siding. They also install

new heating, plumbing and electrical systems. Two years ago they completed a new heating system for Margaret Chase Smith School. When a septic system needs attention, plumber Peter Rebar checks it out.

"We are a very self-sufficient crew," said Leo. For a district that encompasses a 100 mile radius (58 miles from Canaan to Mercer), they need to be.

Business manager Daryl Mitchell, the crew's direct supervisor, meets with them every

respect they get.

Last fall the crew took on a new project. During down time they rebuilt the Old Milk House located on the property across the street from the administrative offices and near their maintenance building, the distribution barn building, the technology center and the Marti Stevens Learning Center. "The initial plan was to tear it down," said Leo. "It was falling apart. One third to one half of the building was rotted out." But the special education department needed offices so Superintendent Colbry changed his mind and the crew got to work. First they gutted the structure. They rebuilt the front part of the roof and put up new inside walls. They made the outside walls 12" thick. With all new plumbing, heating and electrical systems, the building is

morning. He brings emails and work orders and together they prioritize the day's schedule. They have instituted a program of "preventative maintenance" which the team likes very much. "We used to be known as 'little firemen' because it seemed as though we were always running from one emergency to another," said Leo. "Now we get a lot more done in the summer and more money is available to us." The atmosphere has improved for them and they are appreciative of the



Groundskeeper Robert Arris works on the SAHS soccer field.

very energy efficient. "You can heat it with a candle," Boothby jokes. With the old slab jack-hammered out, the only jobs contracted out were the

50 Years of School Lunches

The School Nutrition Program was first conceived in the 1950's to combat malnutrition in children. "Malnutrition was a concern because, during World War II, so

managed by the state but controlled by the USDA. "The program is under federal mandate. It has to be re-authorized every three to six years," Harris said. Harris

lunch." Now strict production records are kept. In 1990 the Point of Service system was initiated whereby a student paid cash, had a ticket or was on a checklist when he or she got a food tray. Now there is the Power Lunch Program where student accounts are in a computer and individual lunch fees are deducted as they would be in a checking account. The food services department also distributes and processes the federal applications for free and reduced lunch.



Photo taken by Dan Swain

Food workers at the SAHS production kitchen: From left to right — Debra Sincyr, Barbara Clukey, Val True, Liane Johnson, Esther Tracy, Melissa Collins, and Barbara Clement.

many men in the Armed Services, were found to be malnourished," said Richard Harris, food services director for MSAD# 54. Harris is the person who manages the School Nutrition Program here. It is his job to know all the ins and outs of the federal food program that feeds district school children from September to May.

The reimbursement from the state has been the same flat rate for over 17 years. "It is \$.03 per child," said Harris. Theoretically the program is self-supporting through the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) farm subsidies offered to schools. "But the farm subsidies have decreased, so my food list choices have decreased," said Harris. This year he receives a commodity budget of \$48,837 for the 2005/2006 school year.

The School Nutrition Program is

monies come to the school systems through the federal food program. "Lots of funding is tied to the free and reduced lunch program," said Harris. "The School Nutrition Program is a lynch-pin for a large amount of the funding and grants the district receives." That makes it essential that accurate records are kept.

Years ago teachers counted heads and told food services personnel orally how many students ate "hot

The smooth operation of a food services program in a large, rural school district takes a lot of organization. "The biggest thing is the logistics," said Harris. "If we started here (at the administrative offices) and made a loop it would be 65-66 miles." There are ten schools where food is served but six



Photo taken by Dan Swain

Val True celebrated 40 years as a SAHS food services worker this past September.

are within five miles. A school that has a production kitchen prepares all its food. A school that has a satellite kitchen receives food from

Bus Duty: Getting Students to School

Transportation director Gary Stafford has worked in the district

the elementary students. Although the student population has stayed

students that were enrolled in the Summer Program.



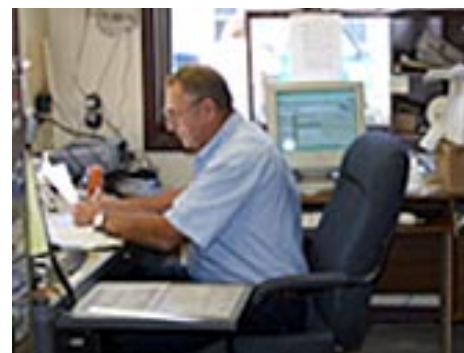
Fleet of buses at the MSAD #54 garage behind the Margaret Chase Smith School.

almost 30 years. He started out as a bus driver and moved into working on the buses as a mechanic. In those days there was one run which meant students were delivered to and from school all together. In 1987, when Stafford became the transportation director, double busing was instituted. This means, morning and night, the high school and middle school pupils are transported in one run and then the bus drivers do it again to pick up

regular bus drivers and seven substitutes. There are also about 40 buses on the road, where there used to be 20. "Buses are way better now," said Stafford. "The only thing the same is that they're still yellow and black." The average run for a single driver is approximately 25 to 35 miles. Substitute drivers take children on field trips and sports events, which amounted to more than 1000 bus trips last year. This year three drivers also bused

about the same, the runs have grown. "We travel about 3000 miles a day," said Stafford. "We go to the New Sharon line on the west and to the Pittsfield line on the east."

All the buses are on diesel now but, as it is for everyone else, the price of fuel is a big concern for a transportation director. "The hardest thing to estimate is the gas prices," said Stafford. Even though a large



Transportation director Gary Stafford works at his office at the bus garage.

consumer such as MSAD # 54 is able to pre-purchase fuel at a lower rate, it is difficult to stay within the budget. "The scariest part is that everything is over the road in

See "*Bus Duty*" on page 7

MSAD #54 Students Attend Summer Olympics

Seven students from MSAD #54 went to the Summer Special Olympics this past June because of the efforts of three district employees. Becket House special education teacher Timothy Wess, district-wide physical therapist Christal Siren, and Bloomfield occupational therapist Marjorie Batten got



MSAD #54 students who attended the Summer Special Olympics gather for a photo.

together last spring with the hopes of renewing interest in the district's involvement with the nation-wide competition for special students. "This is the first time since anyone can remember that the Skowhegan school district has sponsored Special Olympics," said Wess, the official spokesperson for the group.

See "*Olympics*" on page 7

EDUCATION SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS = EXTRA SPECIAL PEOPLE

At right: SAMS custodian Kim Rickards repairs a water fountain.



Below: Head cook Peggy Riley, left, and Ann Bailey, right, work in Canaan's production kitchen.



Left: NCGS secretary Kathleen Edwards smiles for the camera.



Right: Administrative secretaries and accounting department personnel pose in the superintendent's office.

From left to right standing: Marti Douglas, Tina LaPorte, Linda Longley, Brenda Murray, Karen Daggett. Sitting: Laura Pineo, Ann Barriault.



Below: North Elementary custodian Charlie Campbell mops the cafeteria.



Left: District delivery person Will Wilkinson stands by his delivery van.

IN MEMORIAM



ROBERT CROTEAU

1940 - 2005

SAHS Custodian

29 years service at MSAD #54

Notes From The Editor

Below, we announce the new MELMAC grant developed by SAHS guidance director Linda Houle and SAHS principal Gilbert Eaton. We will report more on the implementation of the grant in later issues. Because of an abundance of visual and written information, we have used much of "Notes from the Editor" to finish articles that began on other pages.

SAHS Receives Guidance Grant

Skowhegan Area High School recently was awarded a Maine Educational Loan Marketing Corporation (MELMAC) grant to expand the College Access Program developed by the SAHS guidance department. The grant monies will help guidance personnel increase programs to raise the aspirations of more and more students in the hopes that they will attend college after high school. Students will be encouraged to take harder courses and think about getting either a two-year or a four-year degree. A

"College Day," is planned when faculty members will wear tee shirts from the colleges they attended. Arrangements are underway to take sophomores on visits to nearby college campuses. SAHS is working with Kennebec Valley Community College, University of Maine at Farmington, and the University of Maine at Augusta to arrange for students to have a longer period of time on campus than usual. The goal is to help students get a real feeling for what a college experience has to offer them.

"Lunches" continued from page 4 a production kitchen. There are seven production kitchens and three satellite kitchens. Mercer, Smithfield and Bloomfield schools have satellite kitchens but cook smaller food items like french fries and vegetables to ensure freshness. "There is only one meal mandate and that is lunch," said Harris. All other programs, breakfast or kindergarten milk in the afternoon classes, for example, are at the discretion of the district.

"Supporting" continued from page 2 come up," Murray said. The secretaries triage (or prioritize) situations daily. "I couldn't do this job without my co-workers," she said.

"A Great Team" continued from page 3 newly-poured slab and the dry wall. "We wanted to preserve our assets and preserve our historic building," said supervisor Mitchell. "It's been a win-win situation all around."

Meanwhile the team keeps on top of their work orders and is appreciative of its own renovated, two-year-old maintenance space. They've equipped it with a microwave, a toaster oven and a refrigerator. Many days they have lunch together. In summer they have extra help from employees who are winter-time bus drivers and cooks. As Sincyr said for each one of them, "We all get along and we have fun."

"Olympics" continued from page 5 The team went to the regionals last May in Madison and then on to the Summer Olympics at University of Maine in Orono a few weeks later.

The students participated in several competitions including the 25 and 50 meter assisted walk/run; the 100 and 200 meter run; the long jump and softball. Wess got uniforms for his students by arranging a donation from Skowhegan Area Middle School. The SAMS track team bought new uniforms and had their old ones left over. Wess was happy to take them. "They fit very well actually," said Wess.

The students come from the elementary grades as well as the high school and middle school. They have plans to compete in Nordic skiing in January in the Winter Special Olympics at Sugarloaf USA.

"Bus Duty" continued from page 5 Maine," said Stafford.

When you manage a department that logs upwards to 500,000 miles per year, you worry about details like that.

School Talk



Photo taken by Dan Swain

*SAHS food services worker Barbara Clukey makes pizza.
(See story on page 4)*

Postscripts from the Superintendent's Office

Support Services is the theme for the 2005 fall issue of School Talk. We introduce articles showcasing the important work education support professionals perform. On page 3 we feature maintenance workers and their team effort across the district. Page 4 profiles the food services program and page 5 explains the transportation system. We have many photos of service personnel, including secretaries, custodians, food service workers and a delivery person. We also have an article about MSAD #54 students who attended the Summer Special Olympics. On page 7 we mention the new MELMAC grant awarded to Skowhegan Area High School.

As always if you have questions or comments, please send them to Andrew McAuliff, Executive Editor, MSAD #54, Office of the Superintendent, 196 West Front Street, Skowhegan, Maine 04976. Or you can email amcauliff@msad54.org or call 474-9508.

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