

School Talk

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E.O.E.

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Honey Bee Husbandry – A Sweet Summer Class

By Kevin McFadden

Initially, raising honey bees was just a crazy fundraising strategy for the Eco-Team, a student organization at Skowhegan Area High School. The Skowhegan Conservation Commission provided funds to purchase two hives and other equipment. Over time, two hives became eight, and students took an increasingly active role in the beekeeping.

Student interest was so high that my friend and colleague Kate Drummond suggested offering a summer course all about honey bees. In conjunction with SCTC, we recruited for a credit-bearing course entitled “Honey Bee Husbandry,” in which students would learn about honey bees by working with them.



To my pleasant surprise, the class quickly reached maximum capacity, and one day in early July, I found myself surrounded by eleven eager students.



The first week was dedicated to making observations. The students watched bees in the field gathering nectar and pollen. Saw bees guarding their homes from intruders, fanning their wings to keep the hive cool and to cure honey, and passing nectar between the foragers and honey producers. They examined bees under microscopes and drew fascinating structures like stingers and pollen baskets. And they peered inside the hexagonal cells that bees use to store honey and to brood.

Week two was all about making connections. Students learned about the fascinating dynamics and biology of honey bees and how bee logic and human logic aren't always the same. They learned about pests and diseases, dance language, colony systems and cooperation, and beekeeper hive inspection. And yes, students extracted and bottled lots of honey—153 pounds to be exact!

Week three was all about application and manipulation. At this point, students earned the right to be called beekeepers. They took the lead inspecting colonies and making manipulations to ensure productivity and swarm prevention. They also learned about some more advanced beekeeping practices like queen rearing.

Continued on page 2

2 SCHOOL TALK

Continued from page 1

The class was visited by two special guests—Jen Lund, our state apiarist, and Mark Reifschneider, my beekeeping mentor. Jen described her role as a state apiarist and how she and her colleagues inspect sick colonies. She brought students out to our apiary and sampled for pests: to my relief, our hives were healthy. Mark shared the huge amount of information a seasoned beekeeper can glean just by watching the bees.

Providing this opportunity for students was a giant team effort. Many thanks to the Somerset Beekeepers' Association, David Dorr, Jane Libby, Bruce Mochamer, Terry Watson, Mike Jones, Kate Drummond, Tristen Hinkle, Frank Holt, and the many others who made this program possible.

The Eco-Team sells this honey to fund our many projects centered around human-induced global climate change, including sustaining our beekeeping program. If you would like to support our cause, please consider purchasing a one-pound jar for \$10. Email kmcfadden@msad54.org if you are interested. Thank you for your support!

Fall Festival at Bloomfield



On October 22, the Bloomfield Parent-Teacher Group coordinated a free Family Fall Festival for Bloomfield students and their families. The event featured outdoor games and a pumpkin patch where students could select a pumpkin to bring home for decorating.

There were also special visitors. Skowhegan Firefighter Rick Caldwell brought the ladder truck and then allowed students to explore the vehicle's inside and outside. Martin Woods Farm brought a cow, a miniature horse, two goats, baby ducks and a bunny for the children to learn about and pet.

Some children came with costumes, and all came with smiles as they played games with their families and friends, sat in a firetruck, and enjoyed time with the animals. The Bloomfield Parent-Teacher Group's third annual Family Fall Festival was a great success!

Fire Safety at Canaan Elementary

In October, Canaan Elementary students in Pre-School through Grade 6 participated in Fire Safety alongside the Canaan Fire and Rescue staff.

Classrooms incorporated fire safety topics across subjects. Many grade levels made it a week-long focus, with accompanying projects, research and activities. Students were able to discuss escape routes, potential fire hazards, and what to do in different emergencies.



Summer Programming at Mill Stream

The 2021 MSAD 54 summer school program was held for six weeks in July/August at the Mill Stream Elementary School.

An average of 83 students attended daily in grades Pre-K through 5. Breakfast, lunch, and snacks were provided through our food service program.

MSAD 54's summer school program focused on providing extra time and instruction to help students maintain and/or gain skills in reading, writing, and math. Our Pre-K students focused on school behaviors like listening, attending, and learning the routines of the classroom.

REACH After School Program: A Bright Light

The REACH After School Program, a 21st Century Community Learning Center, currently serves 170 K-8 students in the following schools: North Elementary, Bloomfield Elementary, Margaret Chase Smith School, and the Skowhegan Area Middle School.

Thanks to the addition of a late bus run, families can more easily access the programming offered Monday through Thursday from 2:30 to 4:30 p.m.

REACH's goal is to support and extend classroom learning after school hours through a variety of educational and engagement activities. Last year's student test scores prove that this joint school-community effort has had a measurable impact upon participating students. Some students benefit from the extra time to practice literacy, math, STEM, and social-emotional skills.

Community partnerships have provided students with engaging enrichment opportunities, including nutrition education through the University of Maine Cooperative Extension; fitness/wellness in conjunction with New Balance and Somerset Public Health; nature exploration and environmental education coordinated by Skowhegan Outdoors; and a pen pal program with residents of Cedar Ridge Nursing Home.

On October 28, REACH launched the "Lights on After School Community Event." REACH staff, along with officers from the Skowhegan Police Department, helped students design "lightbulbs," which are now on display in downtown Skowhegan; each lightbulb contains a testimonial from students, families and/or teachers on the after school program's positive impact.

This year's program was a great success. Of the students who attended 17 days or more in our regular education classrooms, 84% maintained or increased their reading achievement.

Overall, there were nine regular education classrooms and two special education classrooms. The special education program provided speech, physical, and occupational therapy for those students requiring extended school year services. In addition, the Title I program provided reading and math small group interventions to targeted students.

For many students programming continued throughout the day thanks to the REACH after school program.

We look forward to offering another exciting summer school program in 2022.

Flags at MCSS Honor Victims of September 11

On Friday, September 10, students placed flags to honor each person who passed away as a result of the September 11, 2001, terrorist attack or its after effects.

Larry Ross, a former enrichment teacher at MCSS, started the tradition in 2003. Even though Mr. Ross retired a few years ago, he continues to volunteer each year to carry on the tradition with the school. The flags are borrowed from Fort Rosecrans National Cemetery in California. To prepare for the day, teachers provided students with background information about 9/11. The lesson included a short reading and discussion.

In addition to providing an overview of the tragic event, teachers also focused on how people helped each other that day and how the country has since built memorials to honor the victims.





Also in October, over 30 families joined REACH and Skowhegan Outdoors for a pumpkin painting party at Coburn Park. For the third year in a row, Danny and Allison Ring generously donated pumpkins to our students. In return, REACH students will once again fundraise for the Make-A-Wish Foundation, a charity that The Ring Farm has long supported. Last year the students raised over \$160 for Make-A-Wish by hosting hat days.

REACH will continue to provide families with free, fun activities throughout the school year. Follow them on Facebook for news of upcoming events.

REACH is currently looking for volunteers and community sponsors to help support sewing, photography, and robotics programming. To learn more about how to enroll your child in REACH, or to become a volunteer or community sponsor, please contact the program director, Dawn Fickett, at dfickett@msad54.org.

New Mascot Visits School Board

At the MSAD 54 Board of Directors meeting on October 21, Skowhegan Area High School Principal Bruce Mochamer unveiled the new SAHS River Hawk mascot.

Kaley Brown, a teacher at the high school, volunteered to wear the mascot costume during the meeting. The River Hawk also made an appearance at the Skowhegan Area High School playoff football game on October 29.

The students, faculty, and staff of SAHS wish to extend a heartfelt thank you to the anonymous donor who helped bring the new River Hawk mascot to life.



Left to right: Emily Dunbar, Annah Perkins, Riley Fitzpatrick, (River Hawk—Jayla Gentry), Grace Fredrick, Emma Smith, Jaycie Christopher.

New CDL Program at SCTC



This year Somerset Career & Technical Center added a Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program. Students in the program will learn how to drive a tractor trailer and will have the opportunity to earn a Class A Commercial Driver's License.

Instructor Henry Fortin comes to us with years of experience, having previously taught CDL for Northeast Technical Institute. Given the huge need for truck drivers in the area and across the country, SCTC is very excited to be offering this opportunity to area students.

Scholarship Honors Longtime Adult Educator



From left: Lee York, Leif Bull, Marilyn Rogers-Bull

At 92 years of age, Marilyn Rogers-Bull continues to live a rich and productive life. Despite her busy calendar, Marilyn and her husband, Leif Bull, find time to spread the joy of painting. She began leading an adult education class in RSU 54 over 15 years ago, based on a vision she had while walking on a Florida beach.

She says, “I dreamed up the idea of having a class at Skowhegan Adult Education for those who love to paint as much as I do,” and she was very excited that the district readily accepted her proposal to establish a painting club.

Marilyn says that over the years she has made “some wonderful friends, many of whom can paint much better than I can.”

She has had a profound impact on club participants over the years, so much so that one fellow painter, Lee York, spearheaded an effort to establish a scholarship in Marilyn’s honor.

Several club members donated paintings that were compiled into a high-quality calendar, a calendar generously designed and printed by York himself. All proceeds benefited the Marilyn Rogers-Bull Scholarship fund.

As a result of the club’s efforts, two graduating high school seniors from the Class of 2022 who are pursuing further education in the arts and/or have demonstrated artistic talent will receive awards of \$1500 each.

Marilyn’s service, the generosity of her fellow painters, and the bountiful scholarship—all combine to make a true work of art.

New School Leaders at Margaret Chase and North Elementary



Christy Johnson, who formerly served on the school district’s Board of Directors, joins the MSAD 54 administrative team as principal of Margaret Chase Smith School and North Elementary School.

Johnson has over 22 years of experience in education, starting as a middle school/high school science teacher and later holding positions in both the private sector and higher education. Born and raised in Skowhegan, Johnson says, “I am thrilled and to be the new principal at North Elementary and Margaret Chase Schools. I can assure you that I share in this school community’s commitment to caring for your children each and every day while providing them the best learning environment.”

Also joining the MCSS/North Elementary leadership team is Erin Madore. An educator for over 23 years, Madore has worked in MSAD 54 since 2006, teaching Kindergarten, first grade and second grade. In addition, for the past five years she has also been the Director of Title I.

She says, “I am excited to embark on this new adventure as assistant principal at North Elementary and Margaret Chase Smith Schools. I look forward to working with the students and families of our schools.”

Pooled Testing- A Tool to Keep Students in School

MSAD 54 now offers parents an opportunity to have their children participate in a voluntary COVID-19 testing program. The Pooled Testing Program, a state-funded option for weekly testing of students and staff, benefits students in two main ways:

1. The PCR pooled test can detect the COVID-19 virus before symptoms begin and thus cuts down on the length of time a student will be in school with the virus. This early detection also diminishes the opportunity for spread and reduces the number of people who need to quarantine.
2. Individuals who take part in pooled testing do not need to quarantine if they are a close contact with a positive case at school or during a school event, as long as they do not have symptoms and they test every week.

MSAD 54 is excited to provide this option to families because we understand that it is extremely disruptive to have children quarantine. We are looking for ways to keep students in school, while still following guidelines and keeping everyone safe. As of November 15, we had 340 students and staff taking part in pooled testing. Within this group, sixty individuals did not need to quarantine as a result of being a close contact. Had it not been for pooled testing, however, they would have been required to quarantine.

Families who want to sign up their student(s) for pooled testing can get information from their child's principal or by referring to the information found at this link:

<https://bit.ly/3kvHUpL>.

MSAD 54 Consolidated Elementary School Building Project

MSAD 54's new elementary school project is well underway. The building process, which takes 5-7 years total, is at its mid-point. Analysis, site selection, and educational specifications are complete, and concept design has begun. The building—which will combine students from Bloomfield, Canaan (3-5), Margaret Chase Smith and North Elementary Schools—is projected to open in the Fall of 2025. Building project information and updates can be found on the district website: www.msad54.org

History

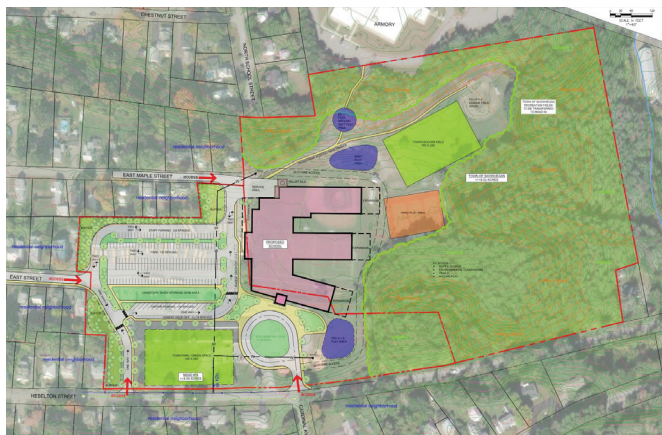
In 2018 the state finalized the Major Capital School Construction list, which identified 74 buildings from districts around the state most in need of capital improvements. MSAD 54 had five schools rated, including the second highest, North Elementary. In late 2019, MSAD 54 began the process of hiring an architectural/engineering firm, and eventually selected Stephen Blatt Architects, the firm that also built SAMS in 2006 and MSES in 2008. Blatt's first task was to weigh the pros and cons of renovation vs. new construction, while considering the potential consolidation of schools. This analysis also examined current and potential new school sites.

The firm determined that school consolidation was optimal for the district, including students from the following elementary schools: Bloomfield (grades 1-3), Canaan Elementary (grades 3-5), Margaret Chase Smith (grades 4-5), North Elementary School (grades PK-K). Because the district has supported early childhood programming (ages 0-3) through our partnership with KVCAP, this programming was also added to the project.

Site Selection

In June of this year the district overwhelmingly voted to construct the new school on the Margaret Chase Smith site, which was followed by the unanimous support of the State Board of Education

in July. This site will allow all existing schools to remain open until the completion of the project, and it is located in a beautiful in-town neighborhood that can be readily accessed by all of our communities. The Town of Skowhegan was a tremendous partner in the site selection and agreed to relocate town athletic fields to a site adjacent to the recreation department.



Educational Specifications

Over the past six months, the architects have met with staff and gathered insights and feedback about design and how the new building could best serve the needs of district students. Community input has also been a focus. Through ads in the paper and ongoing postings on the district website, the community has been kept abreast of progress. Stephen Blatt Architects have joined district administration to gather community feedback by hosting numerous public forums and in-person meetings, as well as a district-wide Zoom meeting.

Finally, a digital survey for additional parent and community input in the development of building programming and design was posted on the website and sent directly to families. The educational specifications—recently finalized by the Building Committee and full School Board—will be used to guide the design of the new school.

Concept Design

Informed by the educational specifications, staff input, and community feedback, a program of spaces has been developed and will continue to be refined during concept design. This program forms the “recipe” for the building and establishes the name and size of every space required in the new school. During this phase, conceptual floor plans are developed that will be shared for further staff and community feedback. This is an

iterative process that will eventually culminate in a comprehensive, three-dimensional, concept design for the new school.

Although the majority of the construction project will be funded by the state, it is likely that a portion will be locally funded. These determinations will be finalized by the building committee and full board, which must then be approved by the district voters in the spring of 2022.

Other Projects

In August district voters overwhelmingly supported a district referendum to use federal COVID-19 funds to provide increased space for social distancing and to provide air-quality enhancements in some of our schools. At the Skowhegan Area Middle School, which currently houses all 6th grade students from Skowhegan, we will construct an addition that will include five more classrooms and a 1200-square foot expansion of the cafeteria.

Once complete, this addition will allow the district to have all 6th grade students attend the Skowhegan Area Middle School in the Fall of 2022 or 2023. This new construction will not only provide much needed space for distancing and the same quality programming for all 6th grade students, but it will also free up additional space at the elementary schools for social distancing and expanded Pre-K services, including free full-day Pre-K district-wide.

Next Steps

In the months ahead, we will continue to encourage public participation and involvement by providing opportunities for community and stakeholder engagement in the design process. This is an exciting time in our district as we develop a new consolidated elementary school that will serve our children and community for generations to come. Ground-breaking is anticipated in 2023, with an expected project completion in 2025.

A full timeline of the State’s Major Capital Improvement Program can be found on our district website. If you haven’t already done so, we encourage you to share your feedback on the building project at:

<https://forms.gle/5Nu9wpRmFcs9VkWQ9>

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Hovey Honored by Skowhegan Regional Chamber of Commerce

By Dylan Engler

On October 28, the Skowhegan Chamber of Commerce recognized Renee Hovey as the 2021 Educational Leader of the Year.

David Dorr, the Director of the Somerset Career and Technical Center, introduced Hovey to the audience and apprised them of the great work she has been done to support students in our district, both in her role as Co-Director of Special Education and as a leader of the MSAD 54 Trauma Informed Committee.



Hovey's family and some close colleagues were in attendance to support her. Those who work alongside Renee know how deserving she is of this accolade, and anyone who knows Renee personally also understands that she loathes the spotlight and public attention.

In this case, however, she really deserves it, so please join me in congratulating Renee Hovey on her great accomplishment!