



School Talk

A Newsletter of RSV 54/MSA 54

E.O.E.



Volume 30, No 4

Canaan Elementary Students Step Up with 100-Mile Walking Club

At Canaan Elementary School, students are putting on their boots, hats, mittens and warm winter jackets to take strides toward a healthier lifestyle. The newly launched 100-Mile Walking Club encourages physical fitness, teamwork, and perseverance, as it challenges young walkers to complete 100 miles during the remainder of the school year.

Monday through Thursday students walk laps in the field before the school day begins. Open to all students, participants include kindergarten to fifth graders, ensuring that everyone can join in no matter their age or athletic ability.

“We wanted to create an opportunity for students to be active and set a personal goal they could work toward,” said Mrs. Whittemore, a sentiment echoed by Mrs. Bellerose and the first-grade teachers who organized this initiative.

The walking club has quickly become a favorite activity, with students proudly tracking their progress on papers in their classrooms. Milestone markers, such as reaching 10, 25, 50, and 75 miles, are celebrated with t-shirts, small prizes, or special recognition during our monthly Student of the Month assemblies. In January, 33 students were recognized with reaching the 25-mile mark since the program started the first week of December.

“We’re proud of the effort every student is putting in,” said Mrs. Bellerose. “It’s amazing to see how this simple challenge has helped foster a sense of community and encouraged healthy habits.”



Bloomfield First Graders Enjoy a Fun-Filled Day at the Children's Fair



In January, first-grade students at Bloomfield stepped outside their classroom into an exciting learning experience at the high school. Hosted by Jennifer Mayberry's Early Education class of freshmen and sophomores, the Children's Fair was an interactive and engaging event that brought young learners and high school students together for a memorable day of fun and education.

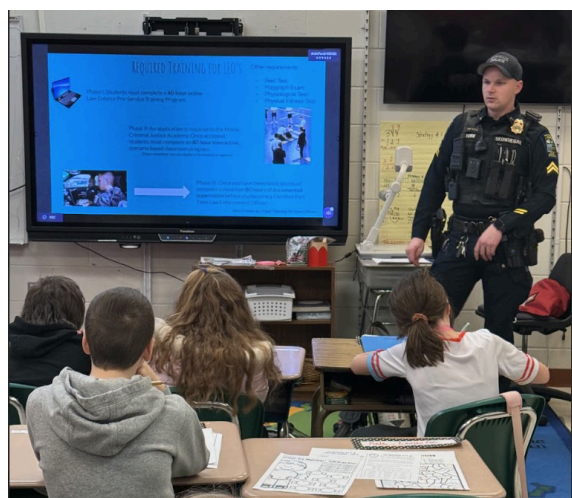
Each first-grade class walked to the high school, where they were greeted by Ms. Mayberry's students, who had thoughtfully designed and set up 17 different activity stations. Every station featured a unique hands-on activity connected to a read-aloud book. As the first graders participated in their crafts, games, and creative projects, the high school students read the corresponding stories, making the experience both entertaining and educational.

Activities included Bingo, creating with salt dough, fashioning paper crafts, drawing, and painting. To make the event even more special, the high school students provided a snack and juice midway through the session and sent each young visitor home with a small prize.

The first graders were absolutely thrilled with the

experience, and their teachers were equally enthusiastic and grateful for this opportunity to enhance learning in such a creative and collaborative way.

Career Fair Success at Mill Stream Elementary School



On January 21, MSES hosted a highly engaging Career Fair for grades 3-5. This event provided a unique opportunity for our students to explore a variety of career pathways.

Throughout the day, students engaged in interactive sessions with community professionals who shared their personal career experiences and insights. This exposure not only sparked curiosity but also inspired our students to dream big and consider the many possibilities for their futures.



We extend our sincere gratitude to all the presenters who generously shared their time and expertise. Their willingness to connect with our students and offer guidance testifies to the strong community ties that enrich our educational

environment. We also recognize and appreciate the dedicated efforts of our staff, whose meticulous planning and organization ensured the event ran smoothly and effectively.

The impact of the Career Fair was evident as students left with renewed curiosity and bright aspirations. Their positive energy and engaged discussions reaffirm our commitment to providing educational experiences that extend beyond the classroom and prepare them for the future.
#CareerFair #MSES #InspiringFutures

“Core Values” Focus at Elementary Schools



Each month North Elementary, Bloomfield and Margaret Chase Smith Schools celebrate students and their amazing ability to demonstrate our schools' core values: compassion, self-control, generosity, service, resilience, uniqueness, cooperation, hope, and initiative

Through school-wide assemblies and classroom activities, students learn the meaning and application of a different value each month. All schools use supporting materials including an animal to represent the value, a giant poster, an informational video, and a music video with song and dance moves. Teachers in all three schools weave the themes into their daily routines, and all schools award “Hawk Slips” to students who demonstrate the current and past core values. Below are some further details about how each school integrates these values into their school communities.

North Elementary kindergarteners meet monthly to introduce that month's core value. Learning about

the animal creates a strong connection for our young learners, and we discuss ways we may see a student showing the value. To end our monthly assembly, we reward last month's Core Value Student of the Month. Each student of the month received a medal, takes a picture with their teacher, and has a pizza party with Mrs. Madore that includes a special dessert! Also, the classroom with the most Hawk Slips gets an extra recess hosted by Mrs. Madore. Our guidance counselor, Mrs. Goggin, highlights the core value in her lessons, and staff regularly remind students of the core values and how they can

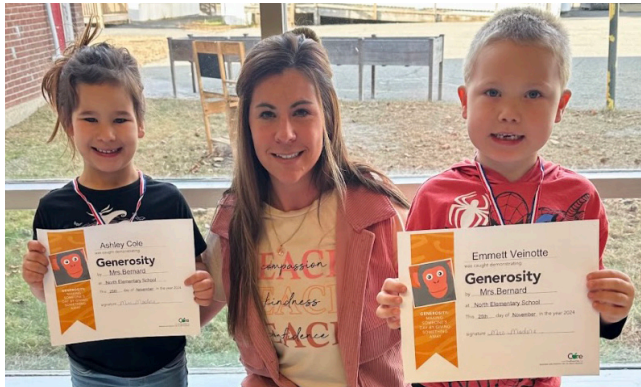


demonstrate them.

The students at **Bloomfield** meet monthly in two blended community groups to learn about the new core value. Together we dance to the new video and song, and we celebrate the students who exhibited the core value of the month with a certificate and bag of popcorn. Students love coming to the assembly to celebrate together. Our lobby is decorated with the core value posters as well as pictures of the Core Value Students of the Month on our bulletin board. Ms. Labbe, the school counselor, sprinkles the core values into her classroom visits as well; and students “caught” exhibiting positive behaviors earn Hawkslips, which can be used to shop at the school store. Recognizing students for the positive behaviors and routinely reviewing the core values themes helps build friendships at BES and creates a positive experience for students.

At **Margaret Chase Smith School**, students gather monthly to celebrate the previous month's Core Value Student of the Month and Move More Kids winners. During the assembly, students are introduced to the new value through a presentation that includes a music video, interactive discussions with peers, reading aloud, and other engaging activities. Core

Continued from Page 3



value student winners are recognized with a medal, certificate, Student of the Month pencil, and a choice of a 3D-printed item. Additionally, our guidance counselor, Mrs. Goggin, incorporates the core value into her lessons, while staff reinforce it throughout the month. As part of our ongoing commitment to positive behavior, students demonstrating core values can earn Hawkslips, which enter them into a weekly prize drawing—a fun way to celebrate their efforts in

Kindergarten Teachers Using “Jolly Phonics”



Most kindergarten teachers are using Jolly Phonics as part of their literacy program this year. Jolly Phonics is a fun, multisensory approach that focuses on teaching children the sounds of letters and letter combinations, rather than just their names. By learning these sounds, children can begin to decode

(read) and encode (spell) words more easily. The program uses a combination of visual, auditory, and kinesthetic techniques, such as games and songs, to help children grasp these concepts in an engaging way.

Key Features

1. Letter Sounds: We start by teaching 42 sounds that letters make. These sounds are linked to stories, songs, and actions, which make learning fun and memorable.
2. Blending: Once children know the sounds, they learn to blend them together to read words, helping them build reading confidence.
3. Segmenting: Children learn to break words down into their individual sounds, which is essential for spelling.
4. Tricky Words: Children are introduced to “tricky words” that don’t follow regular phonetic rules. These are taught alongside the sounds to help with reading fluency.

Jolly Phonics has proven to be a highly effective method for helping our children become confident readers and writers. We are excited about the progress students are making this year.

Jolly Grammar, Punctuation and Spelling is also being used in several first and second-grade classrooms, and they too are seeing great results.

SAHS Seniors “Adopt” an Elementary Classroom

In December, Skowhegan Area High School seniors made a heartwarming return to their adopted third and fourth-grade classrooms, much to the excitement of the younger students who had been eagerly awaiting their visit. Students worked together on winter crafts and discussed the differences and similarities between high school and elementary school life, providing an opportunity for seniors to forge a meaningful connection with the younger students as they shared their experiences and offered advice. The seniors will visit again in February for a more formal task: being interviewed



by the elementary students to gather information for their Maine College Circle Aspirations Scholarship essays.

Prioritizing Student Attendance at SAMS

During the 2023-2024 school year, Skowhegan Area Middle School analyzed trends in attendance and unexcused absences. This work led to the creation of a team, which includes the SAMS school nurse and a guidance counselor, that meets weekly to review attendance and considers the medical, social, and mental health factors that may contribute to absenteeism.

To identify patterns and encourage attendance, we started this school year by sending home letters to families of students who had missed three days of school. The letters were sent home, regardless of the reason for the absences, to ensure a consistent message from the school to home.

The initial letters helped to identify students at risk for high absenteeism, which would negatively impact their grades and learning. From there, we held many meetings to identify barriers to regular school attendance and then provided support to families of students who reported anxiety or physical illness. In some cases, transportation needs were identified and addressed.

These initial letters opened the conversation about attendance and its importance. As a result of our efforts, we have drastically decreased our truancy numbers and improved daily attendance.

We highlight these positive improvements at our monthly assemblies by recognizing those with

perfect attendance, identifying “Attendance Rising Stars,” and applauding the team with the overall best attendance.

Great Things Happening at SAHS

Skowhegan Area High School has a lot to be proud of. Be it rigorous academics, a state champion speech team, or competitive athletic teams in every season, great things always seem to be happening.

Some of what we are most proud of, however, may be a little less visible. Over the last two years, SAHS has been offering every student deep and meaningful educational opportunities, both inside and outside of the classroom. Currently, we are organizing for our third-annual Freshmen Community Service Day, our second Sophomore Job Shadow Day, and our first Junior College Visit Day. These exciting days will allow students to give back to our communities and explore possibilities for after graduation.



In January, we started the “River Hawk Homework Hangout.” The Hangout is a place where our students can complete homework assignments with their friends; receive tutoring support in social studies, science, math, and English; or receive help with credit recovery. The River Hawk Homework Hangout meets from 2:30-4:30 p.m. on Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday afternoons. Regional bus transportation is provided for students.

Continued from Page 5

None of these amazing opportunities would be possible without the support of our incredible faculty and staff, our amazing students, and our area businesses, as well as the partnerships we have forged with Gear Up Maine and Aspire River Hawks.

SCTC: Empowering Students for Success



Did you know that the graduation rate for Somerset Career & Technical Center (SCTC) students is 97%? Or that over 70% earn college credit while at SCTC? Many finish at least one semester of college and some have earned a certificate from KVCC before graduation. Graduates report that SCTC was integral in preparing them for what's next.

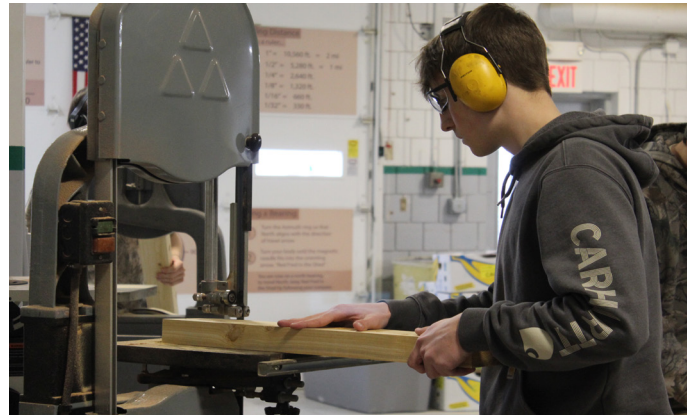


What's your passion?

Want to become a white-water rafting guide, a long-haul trucker, or a wedding cake decorator? We have you covered. Into game design, carpentry, or accounting? We have those too: 17 different programs in all. The diverse range provides opportunities for every student, no matter their skill level or interest. Check out our website at www.sctc4me.com to see our full list of programs

Get a head start on college

SCTC has a grant that will cover all costs for Early College courses. You can take them either online or on campus. Many SCTC programs offer college credits allowing students to earn college credits while still in high school.



Apprenticeships

SCTC provides students an opportunity to gain experience in their field of interest while earning credit toward graduation and getting paid.

Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs)

SCTC offers experiences that go beyond the classroom, providing hands-on, community-based career exploration. These personalized learning experiences connect academic instruction with real-world applications.

At SCTC, we are dedicated to preparing students for bright futures. For more information, contact us today at 474-2151

Teachers As Lifelong Learners



Nineteen elementary teachers are participating in a math class facilitated by the district's academic coaches. The first four classes were designed to support teachers as they continue to implement Illustrative Math, our district's chosen K-5 math program. The final six classes focus on understanding and using best practices for mathematics teaching and learning. The classes are designed to mirror the structure of an elementary math classroom, with opportunities to experience the teaching practices that they themselves will be using. This work supports the district vision of providing a framework for creating a positive math community.



If your child will be 5 years old before October 15, 2025, please call your town's school to sign up for a kindergarten registration appointment.

<i>Canaan Elementary</i>	474-3901
<i>Mill Stream Elementary</i>	634-3121
<i>North Elementary</i>	474-2907

We look forward to meeting you and your child at one of our area kindergarten registrations.

Registrations at each school will be on:

Mill Stream Elementary
Monday, May 5 & Tuesday, May 6

North Elementary
Wednesday, May 7 & Thursday, May 8

Canaan Elementary
Friday, May 9

You will need to contact your child's anticipated school to sign up for a registration appointment.

All kindergarten students need a completed registration packet brought to their registration appointment. Please pick up your registration packet at the school in the town you reside in (*Canaan, Mill Stream, and North El.*) Any student who is not in our KVCAP Pre K program will need a proof of residency, a birth certificate, and immunization records at their registration appointment. If your child is not up to date on immunizations, please contact their physician.

Free MSAD 54 Preschool – bus transportation provided – for children age 4 by October 15
Registration for KVCAP's Pre K Program:
<http://bit.ly/KVCAP>

Gloria's Not Giving Up



Gloria West is a testament to hard work and determination. She began working with MSAD 54 Adult Education three years ago and has been making steady progress toward her diploma by faithfully attending class every Monday and Wednesday, as well as working online outside of school hours. To date she has passed four of the five HiSET (formerly GED) tests and is now working on her math. Once she passes the math test, she will earn her equivalency diploma.

Gloria admits that the process has been challenging. She had to leave high school in the early 90's to help care for her sick parents. Consequently, she missed a lot of material and says she "felt very rusty" at first.



When she earns her HiSET diploma, Gloria plans to complete CNA training and/or enroll in college. She is interested in sciences and the medical field.

Gloria is very grateful for the support of her adult education teachers and the staff at her home who have provided transportation to and from class.

RSU 54/MSAD 54
61 Academy Circle
Skowhegan, Maine 04976

U.S. Postage Paid
Non-Profit
Permit #30
Skowhegan, Maine
04976
ECR-WSS

Postal Customer

Overview of Your MSAD 54 Budget

With the shifting landscape at both the State and Federal Government, it is important to understand how our school budget and school funding works.

Our Values: The MSAD 54 School Board works incredibly hard to provide high quality educational experiences for our students, while maintaining a fiscally conservative approach to budgeting that has limited the impact to local property taxpayers over time.

Our Budget: State, Local, Federal, and other funds (grants, etc.) all contribute. These areas represent four legs of a stool. If the height of any of the legs of that stool changes, the stool begins to wobble.

State Valuation: Our district's local funding formula is 100% based on state valuation, which means the shifts seen by towns are entirely attributable to the increase or decrease in a town's wealth as determined by the State of Maine.

Fixed Costs: This year's budget includes several fixed costs from the state level. The increases from the Maine Paid Family and Medical Leave law, retirement plans, and the mandated minimum pay for hourly support staff, among others, add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Employee Costs/New School: Employee costs make up 85.66% of MSAD 54's budget after backing out the 100% state funded bonds for the Mill Stream and the Margaret Chase Smith Community School (MCSCS). Thanks to a tremendous local fundraising effort, the district budget for the MCSCS construction project includes \$0 of local costs; in fact, the project has helped reduce costs in the budget through the consolidation of our schools.

FY26 Draft Status Quo Budget: The FY26 draft budget is up 2.346% locally and includes significant across-the-board cuts. The School Board has worked very hard to keep costs down over the years; over the last 7 years the local average impact is 2.171% annually, both lower than inflation and tax increases from other areas.

The Impact of the School Budget over time:

FY26 Budget		w/out Building Proj/CTE
Overall % Inc:	5.225%	2.115%
Local % Inc:	2.346%	2.346%

Seven Year Budget Average		w/out Building Proj/CTE
Overall % Increase:	5.270%	2.547%
7 yr (Draft) Local % Increase:	2.171%	2.171%

Note: Building Project and CTE are 100% state funded, and removed to the right for example purposes only to show those increases do not impact local property taxes in either the FY24, FY25 or FY26 budgets.

FY26 Note: The FY26 Budget includes \$1,520,452 in State Funds dedicated to the New School (\$867,937) and CTE (\$652,515) which are each 100% state funded and have no local impact. The budget is up 2.346% otherwise.