



School Talk

A Newsletter of RSU 54/MSAD 54

.E.O.E.



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Coming Soon: District-Wide Busing and After-Care for Pre-K students



In the fall of 2024, MSAD 54 will offer district-wide busing for all Pre-K students. By providing transportation, the district hopes to support universal Pre-K for all students as they begin school and move throughout their public education.

MSAD 54 has long championed high-quality Pre-K programming in schools through our longstanding partnership with KVCAP. The district's program, which has been highlighted by the state as a model program, includes full-day, five-day-per-week programming, a research-based curriculum, and model staffing ratios. In addition, when the new school opens in the fall of 2025, we will have an expanded early-childhood center.

In our Pre-K classrooms, experienced and highly qualified teaching teams use curriculum that supports the development of language, literacy, math, social-emotional, physical and other skills necessary for learning. Safe and supportive environments promote knowledge, interaction, and creativity through individual instruction and collaborative work with parents and families. Students who attend Pre-K programming are more likely to enter Kindergarten ready for success in school.

Applications are currently being accepted for children ages 3-5 for next school year, 2024-2025. Priority is given to children that are eligible for Kindergarten in the next school year (age 4-5).

For more information about programming or to complete an application please contact:

Noella DesPres, LSW, Family Services Supervisor, at (207) 314-8774, or visit the KVCAP website: <https://bit.ly/PreK54>

Engaging and Exciting Student Learning at Bloomfield



MSAD 54's Guiding Beliefs outline what children need to develop academically and socially. One cornerstone belief is that students will thrive in a school environment that is welcoming, orderly, accepting, and safe. Included in that orderly environment is a daily routine and schedule. Students learn the school and classroom routines in the fall so that teachers have a framework for reading, writing, word study, and math instruction. Teachers further engage and excite students by integrating science, social studies, and social-emotional learning (SEL). Below are a few examples that make each day unique and engaging for students.

In **first grade** the students experience a curriculum supported by the Maine Department of Education called "Focus on First," which integrates science and social studies topics into reading, writing and math. Each day the students participate in a routine called "Text Talk" that allows the students to explore different topics and vocabulary. A first-grade teacher, for example, engaged and excited the students by reading fictional and informational books about sea turtles. The students then took their knowledge and applied it to real-life issues, such as persuading people

to use paper bags instead of plastic bags to save the sea turtles. As a culminating activity, students used class time to build safe turtle habitats with blocks, write persuasive letters to audiences to support the turtles, role play in drama saving the turtles, or complete other projects that raised sea turtle awareness in our school community.

In **second grade** classroom teachers start the day with morning meetings and activities; this routine is a fun way to welcome and engage students first thing in the morning and helps to strengthen our community. Activities are chosen from sources such as the Responsive Classroom and The Regulated Classroom. One type of activity, called "Connectors," helps to build safe relationships within our classroom community. These include "Mirroring," "Back-to-Back Countdown," and "Gotcha."

Mrs. Bigelow incorporates daily SEL lessons based on the school theme of the month. These lessons encourage deeper conversations around a school-wide theme, such as responsibility, and provide additional practice with the skills. These conversations and lessons are a favorite part of our day. By taking the time to work on these skills together, students are more prepared to learn and take risks because they have built trust with their peers.

Some of the **third-grade** classes are developing and implementing a program called "Exploring in Third." Recently the students finished an eight-week unit on habitats where students worked with partners, small groups, and individually to explore various habitats and the animals that live in them. This program integrates reading, writing, science, and social studies to increase student engagement in learning. Science is integrated with other subjects by discussing adaptations of animals, how they are passed down through generations (inheritance), and how they help the animals to survive in the habitats they live in. Mrs. Swenson's class concluded their study of animals by creating a "zoo" and inviting families to visit school. The students built displays to show an animal in its habitat, wrote a report about their animal, and then prepared to publicly speak to an audience.

In short, our teachers engage and excite students by integrating subjects and making learning purposeful. Bloomfield staff put a lot of thought and energy into designing experiences for children and creating safe and inspiring learning communities.

Lake George Pass Program for Canaan Students Returns



Summer and all the fun activities it brings will be here before we know it. Last year, thanks to several donors, Canaan Elementary School students were able to apply for family passes for Lake George Regional Park. Due to high demand and positive feedback, a fund was set up at the local credit union so this program could continue.

This year families with children at Canaan Elementary School can once again apply for a family pass to the park at a reduced rate. If you would like to donate to this fund you can send a check to the Canaan Farmers Hall. For more information, please contact the Canaan Elementary School at (207) 474-3901.

3D Printing, Craft Fair, and More at MCSS

Fourth-grade students at Margaret Chase Smith School were enthralled by a guest speaker's captivating insights into the world of 3D printing. With expertise and enthusiasm, the speaker illuminated the intricate process behind creating three-dimensional objects, leaving students inspired and eager to explore the endless possibilities of this transformative technology. The interactive session sparked curiosity and ignited a passion for innovation, setting the stage for exciting journeys in STEM exploration. Fourth-grade students are also using 3D printing technology to create bookmarks for the North Elementary Kindergarten

students by interviewing the students, making the wands personalized, and then enjoying a bubble day with the students.



Fifth-grade students have been extremely busy! In November, they participated in the Mill Stream Craft Fair, making a great profit for the class. All materials sold were created by our students. Recently, our fifth-grade team has been working on getting ready for our first ever Knowledge Fair, which is combining a science fair and a wax museum. We were fortunate enough to receive a grant from the STEM Pilot Project that will help supply needed materials to conduct experiments and showcase our students' hard work. We also invited Northern Lights Planetarium to our school to present to students about a star's life cycle.

MSES Students Explore Future Paths with High School and College Students

As part of ongoing efforts by MSAD 54 to elevate student aspirations, Mill Stream Elementary School third, fourth, and fifth-grade students interviewed college and high school students.

The interviews were made possible by the Maine College Circle initiative, a district-wide effort focusing on enhancing early, equal access to education information, particularly higher education. The goal is to help rural Maine students forge pathways through education to careers and lifestyles they can take pride in.

On February 5, our fifth-grade students engaged in meaningful discussions with Emma Smith, a Skowhegan graduate and current student at the University of Maine in Orono. The session delved into

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various aspects of college life, addressing questions such as the challenges of college, the college dining experience, dormitory living conditions, and more. The following week, our third and fourth-grade students had the chance to connect with five Skowhegan Area High School students. The conversation covered a range of topics from dress code and lunch experiences to course selection and available electives.

The discussion about classes was a highlight, providing our students with a glimpse into the diverse academic offerings at the high school. They explored questions related to the frequency of math and literacy classes, the variety of elective options, and the overall dynamics of high school education.



These interactions were not only informative but also fostered a sense of aspiration and encouragement among our students. By connecting with older students who have navigated similar educational paths, our elementary students are better equipped to envision their futures and understand the opportunities that lie ahead.

MSAD 54's Elementary Summer School

MSAD 54's elementary summer school is a collaboration between the Title I program, the special education program, and the REACH After School Program. By combining resources, we can provide students with a unique summer experience that allows them to continue to receive important interventions in math and literacy and—as needed—occupational, physical and/or speech therapies.

At our elementary summer school, classrooms

have a teacher and an educational technician in each room allowing for more individual and small group work. Our programming is centered around a literacy curriculum called “Lit Camp” that combines social-emotional themes with literacy activities. Students are grouped based on current assessment scores and grade levels. Structured lessons are supplemented with games and activities designed to build fluency and confidence in literacy and math.



We also include weekly “Wonder Days” focused on social-emotional themes, science, and social studies. These hands-on activities include games, art and music, and outdoor play. We also bring in outside presentations like Wildlife Encounters, Northern Stars Planetarium, and the Mad Scientist for both our students and their families to enjoy.

The program typically runs during the month of July, four days a week for four hours a day in the morning. However, days can be extended through the REACH program, which offers further enrichment opportunities. Students who sign up for Camp REACH attend until 2:30 each day and fill their time with fun science experiments, robotics, cooking, gardening, and outdoor play. Camp REACH also offers two Friday field trips to places like the Maine Discovery Museum, the LC Bates Museum, and the Waterville Municipal Pool. Transportation is provided at central district locations. All students are served breakfast and lunch each day of the summer program, and snacks are also provided.

This spring, classroom teachers will contact parents when recommending students for summer school and send home additional information at that time. If you have any questions regarding the MSAD 54 summer school or Camp REACH programs, please contact your child's school or Dawn Fickett, Summer School Coordinator, at 207-474-3339, ext. 2254, or dfickett@msad54.org.

Exciting Initiatives at SAMS

As we approach the end of our first full year of serving sixth, seventh, and eighth-graders at Skowhegan Area Middle School, here are some highlights from the year, as well as a sneak peek at plans for 2024-2025.

Attendance

Through our “Showing Up Is Glowing Up” campaign, we encourage regular attendance. This initiative is reinforced by monthly celebration assemblies that generate some healthy competition among teams.

iPOWER

Our iPOWER has continued with various presentations designed to address issues that impact our students. Topics this year have included Living My Best Life, Substance Use/Abuse, Online Safety, and Civil Rights. As a foundation of iPOWER, we offer opportunities for parents to attend parent nights ahead of the presentations. This allows the presenters to answer parent questions and to provide strategies that parents can use with their children.

Extracurricular Involvement

The 2023-2024 school year has been a banner year for student participation for our 475 students. We have nearly 360 students participating in athletics, 105 in music, 100 in the REACH After School Program, and 36 in Student Council. It is amazing to see such a significant percentage of our student body engaged in extracurricular activities, which we know will lead to more academic success.

The Future

As we look ahead to 2024-2025, SAMS is moving to a grade-level structure for grades 6, 7, and 8. Although this is a departure from what many are used to, this structure will allow us to best serve the needs of our incoming students by generating more flexibility. After this transitional year, our seventh and eighth-grade students will stay with the same teachers for two years.

Thank you for your continued support of SAMS as we continue to put our best foot forward for students and families. Please follow us on Facebook at <https://bit.ly/SAMSfbpage>. If you have questions, please contact Principal Longyear at zlongyear@msad54.org or by calling 207-474-3339.

CMP Shares Safety Tips with Mill Stream Students



Bob Wassick, of Central Maine Power (CMP), recently brought the captivating Safety City program to our Mill Stream Elementary students, offering a hands-on exploration of safety around power lines, insights into electrical careers, and a deeper understanding of the importance of linemen/women in our communities.

CMP not only focused on safety but also opened the door to a world of career possibilities in the electrical field. Students learned about the diverse careers associated with electricity and gained a deeper appreciation for the skills and dedication required for these professions. The presentation underscored the crucial role of linemen and women at Central Maine Power. Students discovered the significance of these careers in ensuring a reliable and safe supply of electricity to our communities.

The presentation ignited an appreciation for the dedication and hard work that goes into keeping the lights on. The interactive nature of Safety City made learning enjoyable as students absorbed the critical message that no power line is safe to touch ever! This engaging experience was part of a broader guest speaker series at Mill Stream Elementary, leading up to the eagerly awaited science fair. Previously in the series, lab technicians from Redington Fairview General Hospital visited students and demonstrated how to determine blood types. Students were able to discover their own blood type during the presentation, enriching our students' understanding of science in the real world.

MSAD 54 School Board Reduces Local Impact to 3.95%

Facing rising costs in nearly all areas, the MSAD 54 School Board has made strategic budget reductions and utilized fund balance to limit the impact to local property taxpayers in the FY25 budget. Adopted in April, the board’s budget represents a net increase of 5.698%; costs were driven up primarily because of fixed increases in health insurance (11.22%), salaries and benefits, and inflationary costs (supplies, contracted services, fuel, etc.). Beginning two years ago the Board developed a long-term plan to limit the impact to local property taxpayers by utilizing increased fund balance to drive down the local impact to towns. This year’s budget will leverage just over \$1.2 million in additional fund balance to reduce the overall local impact to 3.95%.

Understanding the School Budget

School budgets must include certain costs, even if they are fixed or required and have no impact on local budgets. The Gross FY25 budget is up 16.84%, in large part because of these fixed costs shown below.

FY25 DRAFT Budget Increase Summary		
FY25 Budget:	\$48,886,208.00	
FY24 Budget:	\$41,840,472.00	
Budget Increase:	\$7,045,736.00	
New School Increase:	\$4,258,290.00	
Non-Debt Increase:	\$2,787,446.00	
CTE Budget Increase:	\$403,505.00	
Remaining Budget Amt:	\$2,383,941.00	up 5.698% *
* Budget increase when non-local spending (CTE, School) removed		
Health Insurance:	\$655,440.00	
Salaries & Benefits:	\$1,040,678.00	
	\$1,696,118.00	
Increase In Addition to Negotiated salaries and benefits:	\$687,823.00	

The New School, CTE & the Overall Increase

Because funding for the new school and Career and Technical Center (CTE) have no impact on local property taxes, the gross budget increase can be misleading. The FY25 budget includes \$4,258,290 in funding for the new school, all but \$99,562 of which is funded by the state. Fundraising has allowed the local-only portion (\$99,562) and future local impacts to be fully covered – resulting in no impact to taxpayers. Although the school has no impact to local taxes, it accounts for over 60% of the gross budget increase. Similarly, CTE costs, which are fully funded by the state, are up \$403,505. Although the overall budget is up \$7,045,736, the combined increases in the budget from the new school and CTE account for

\$4,661,795, which is a little under 70% of the overall budget increase. When you remove these costs, the budget is up \$2,383,941, or 5.698%

High Quality Education & Fiscal Responsibility

The Board’s FY25 budget supports high quality education Pre-K through grade 12 while limiting the impacts of rising costs to local taxpayers. To keep the local increase under 4%, the district made budget reductions in both supplies and positions. The FY25 budget includes 12 positional cuts from the regular budget. Separately, several previously covid-funded positions have been cut. Through these cuts and other cost-saving measures, we have consistently reduced the local impact. Over the past 6 years, the local budget is up just 2.142%.

School budgets are challenging, and as a community we all want to do what is best for our kids and towns. We believe this year’s budget — which will be presented at the budget meeting on May 22 at 7:00 p.m. and voted on at the June 11 election — represents a balanced and reasonable approach.

For additional budget information visit: <https://bit.ly/3WfqPEh>

New School Building Project Continues to Progress

As most residents know, the Margaret Chase Smith Community School is under construction and slated to open in the fall of 2025. This nearly \$76 million project has been a labor of love for all those involved since its inception over six years ago. Below are some highlights we are excited to share.

Funding: The district has been fortunate to partner with KVCAP and other dedicated community members who have diligently raised funds to support the project. In February the fundraising committee, headed by Sam Hight and coordinated by KVCAP, announced that a little over \$3 million had been raised by the project. In March the district was notified that their federal CDS grant request of \$1.94 million had been approved thanks to the support of Senator Collins, Senator King, and Congressman Golden; and as of late March, fundraising efforts surpassed the \$4.44 million approved by voters in June of 2022. We are humbled and deeply thankful to the numerous donors and supporters who have made this possible.

Next Steps: Construction will continue through the

fall of 2025. In addition, the MSAD 54 School Board hired Principal Myla Kreider in April so that she can participate in building committee meetings, advise on the selection of equipment and materials, and help facilitate the important transition for students and staff as they move into the new building.

To learn more about the project please visit our website, <https://www.msad54.org/building-project>, or contact the Superintendent's office at (207) 474-9508.

SAHS Theater Wins Regional Competition



Skowhegan Area High School theater took first place among Class A schools at the Maine Drama Festival's one-act play Central Maine regional competition, held at Skowhegan's Elizabeth M. Merrill Auditorium on March 8 and 9. Skowhegan presented *The 146 Point Flame*, by Matt Thompson. The play is based on the historic 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire in New York City.

Four Skowhegan students were named to the All-Festival Cast: Gabrielle Goding, Jaxson Longyear, Charlie Staples, and Susan Tremblay.

Skowhegan received three special commendations. Carolyn Snowman was recognized for original music achievement, the cast was named outstanding ensemble, and the cast was recognized for outstanding choreographed movement.

Skowhegan advanced to the state finals at Camden Hills Regional High School on March 22 and 23, where they were selected to represent Maine Class A schools at the New England Drama Festival, held in Attleboro, Massachusetts.

SCTC Early Education Program and Expansion

Maria Montessori, a physician, teacher, and innovator, once said, "Early Childhood Education is the key to the betterment of society." This quote reflects the commitment the Somerset Career and Technical Center (SCTC) has demonstrated by including Early Education & Teaching (EET) as a part of their program of studies for the past 13 years.

SCTC EET instructor, Jen France, has been with the program since the beginning. Each spring during enrollment, France's program has been full, with a waiting list. To increase the capacity and impact of the program, SCTC Director, Dave Dorr, in collaboration with France and MSAD 59 expanded the program for the 2023-2024 school year. The expansion program is led by Jean Pillsbury at Madison Elementary School. Between the two locations of SCTC, EET now serves 38 students, compared to 26 in the past.

The EET Program is a two-year course for students interested in a career working with children. Students learn about child development, psychology, curriculum design, and classroom management. Students receive 11 college credits, CPR/First Aid certificates, State of Maine Early Childhood Assistant certification, and enrollment in the Maine Roads to Quality professional registry.

Many graduates of the EET Program are now Central and Western Maine public school teachers, educational technicians, childcare center teachers/assistants, substitute teachers, social service providers, or speech therapists. These graduates serve children from infancy to middle school in Skowhegan, Madison, Bingham, Waterville, Pittsfield, Kingfield, and Farmington.

MSAD 54 Adult Education Pilots CDL Training



Four students recently completed a CDL Class A training through a partnership with Kennebec Valley Community College, the Somerset Career and Technical Center, and MSAD 54 Adult Education.

Thanks to funds from the Maine Jobs and Recovery Plan, the students' tuition and textbooks were 100% covered.

Vicki Kimball, pictured along with the students, is the primary instructor and also co-teaches a CDL class for high school students through SCTC.

If you are interested in free or low-cost workforce training, please visit maineadulted.org.

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Exciting Career Opportunities in MSAD 54

Are you passionate about making a positive impact in the lives of students and contributing to their educational journey? Consider joining the MSAD 54 team that values dedication, compassion, and the transformative power of education.

Why Work with Us?

Inspirational Role: You play a crucial role in supporting the educational experience of students. Your dedication helps shape a positive learning environment, fostering growth and success.

Make a Difference: Every day, you can make a meaningful difference in the lives of students. Your support can be the key to unlocking their potential and overcoming challenges.

Professional Growth: MSAD 54 is committed to the professional development of its staff. You will have access to training and learning opportunities that enhance your skills and contribute to your career advancement.

Collaborative Environment: Join a collaborative team of educators and professionals who value teamwork and recognize the importance of each individual's contribution. Your efforts will be appreciated and celebrated.

Rewarding Relationships: Build rewarding relationships with students and fellow staff members. Your role allows you to connect with individuals from various backgrounds and contribute to a supportive community.

Qualities We Look For:

- **Compassion and Empathy:** Demonstrate a genuine care for the well-being and success of students.
- **Being a Team Player:** Work collaboratively with educators and other staff members to create a positive and effective learning environment.
- **Adaptability:** Embrace the opportunity to work with diverse students and adapt to their unique needs.

How to Apply:

Visit <https://www.msad54.org/job-vacancies> or call (207) 474-9508 to explore opportunities and start your journey of empowering students and making a lasting impact. Your dedication matters, and we invite you to be a part of our mission to shape bright futures.