



School Talk



Fall Edition 2022

A Newsletter of RSU 54/MSAD 54

E.O.E.

Volume 29, No 1.

Campaign for New Elementary School Kicks Off!

By Erin Merrill

Campaign Committee Member and Director of Development at Educare Central Maine

On September 17, community members gathered at Bigelow Brewing in Skowhegan to kick off KVCAP’s “Building Better Beginnings” campaign, which will support the early childhood wing of the new elementary school.

The \$75.44 million construction project will break ground in 2023. The plan design includes a dedicated early childhood wing: a first for the State of Maine and the first of its kind for a Maine DOE new school construction!

The majority of funding for the new school, over 71 million, will come from the State of Maine; \$4.42 million will be provided locally. The campaign committee’s goal is to raise at least \$3 million, \$2.5 million of which will support general construction and thus reduce local property taxes. The remaining \$500,000 will be dedicated to the early childhood wing.

Speaking of KVCAP’s involvement in the project, CEO Suzanne Walsh said, “KVCAP has been providing services to families in the Skowhegan community for 57 years. We are proud to be part of this new school, in partnership with MSAD 54, and to have the opportunity to support more children during their first five years of learning as well as to support parents and families as they advance their own education, workforce, and housing goals.”

The expansion of the current early childhood services in MSAD 54 will add four classrooms and is projected to add 15 jobs to the region. The Early Learning Center will not only instill the importance of education in children at a young age, but it will also provide workforce development for parents, addressing the poverty cycle in Somerset County.



“The success of any community is built on the success of its children and families,” said Sam Hight, campaign chair, at the September 17th event. “By focusing on ages zero to five—the most important ages in brain development—this initiative builds the foundation for learning.” Hight is joined on the campaign committee by Gail Gibson, Chelsey Carrier, Eric Pronovost, Rich St. Pierre, Dr. Michael Lambke, Erin Merrill, Suzanne Walsh, Tracye Fortin, and Jon Moody.

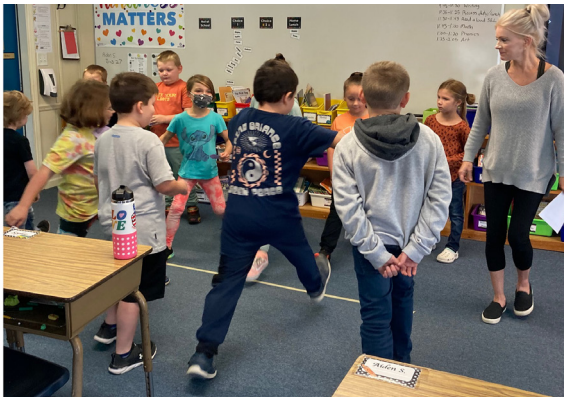
The Hight family announced at the event that they will be donating \$500,000 to the effort and that 100% of the campaign committee have joined them in making financial commitments. Since the launch of the campaign, more than 50 businesses and individuals have pledged more than \$2.1 million toward the \$3 million dollar goal. Some of those lead donors include Skowhegan Savings Bank, Quinn Hardware, Don and Kate Skilling/State Farm Insurance, Jeff and Kathy Damon, and Ware Butler.

The committee is pleased to share that in the first two months of the campaign, more than \$2 million has been raised – a true testament to the dedication and passion of Skowhegan area businesses and residents.

For more information, to get involved, and/or to donate, visit <https://www.kvcap.org/building-better-beginnings/> or contact Erin Merrill at erinm@kvcap.org or 207-859-1678.

The MSAD 54 Board of Directors invites community feedback to finalize the name of the new elementary building: <http://bit.ly/3gguTBy>. The Board expects to make a final naming decision in January 2023

Building a Safe and Supportive Community at Bloomfield



At Bloomfield Elementary, we strive to put the MSAD 54 District Vision and Guiding Beliefs into practice. We want “all individuals in our schools [to] feel safe, welcome and respected for who they are,” and we realize that “students learn best in a supportive school community where every student feels connected and part of their school.”

To this end, Bloomfield Elementary has endeavored to create and maintain many connections for students, including bus/walker greeters, morning walk & talk, and daily morning meetings.

In addition, we issue “Who Slips” to recognize students that demonstrate Respect, Responsibility, Kindness, and Safety. Monthly Whole School Meetings, Bloomfield Bunches Advisory Groups, and Multiage/Grade Community Scheduling are still more

practices and initiatives that ensure everyone in our school feels valued and important.

Aside from addressing the District’s Vision and Guiding Beliefs, activities such as these promote a sense of family, warmth, collaboration, and connection. These school culture characteristics help reduce bullying.

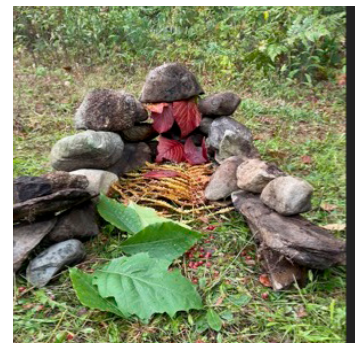
To the left is a picture of the first Bloomfield Bunches meetings that took place on Thursday, October 6, 2022. You can learn more about Bloomfield Bunches from the Spring issue of *School Talk* (see link on district homepage) or by emailing Principal Jean Pillsbury at jpillsbury@msad54.org.

A Strong Start at Canaan Elementary

At Canaan Elementary we are largely back to a normal routine, providing many opportunities that were on hiatus due to the pandemic. Students are learning new grade level expectations, meeting new classmates, and working on being good community members. This is all part of feeling safe, welcome, and respected.

Class activities have included publishing parties, using rockets to study math, and holding mini-choral concerts during lunch. In addition, the entire school held its first ever schoolwide assembly to recognize the September students of the month, as well as hosting Grandparents’ Day.

Finally, in fifth-grade art, Ms. Cates delivered a lesson—influenced by the work of Andy Goldsworthy—about nature sculptures. Students then worked in groups to design and create sculptures using natural media.



Pictured are sculptures of a dog and a waterfall. In the winter, the students will revisit nature sculptures using snow as a medium.

Mill Stream: Planting Seeds of Self-Sufficiency



Mill Stream Elementary is thrilled to announce that we received an \$1,100 grant through the Maine Agriculture in the Classroom initiative; the funds were used to purchase a tower garden.

First-grade teacher Samantha Veilleux and Principal Robert Rodrigue spent time this summer writing and submitting the application, which included—among other things—a project timeline, budget, impact, and anticipated outcomes.

Project Overview

Mill Stream Elementary School’s “Planting Seeds of Self Sufficiency” project is designed to provide life skills around planting, maintaining, and harvesting food from seed to table. Not only will managing the garden teach students about the agricultural process, but it will also be the genesis of an ongoing gardening program at Mill Stream Elementary.

Mrs. Veilleux’s first-grade students plant the seeds into rock wool pods and start the seeds in a mini tray greenhouse. Once the seedlings are big enough, students transfer the pods to the tower garden, which uses aeroponic technology: just water, grow lights, ph balancers, and, best of all, no dirt! This system will allow students to grow fresh herbs and vegetables year-round.

The program will strengthen gardening connections with other district schools and with the community. Students will also get to participate in taste tests of their crops throughout the school year. In June, we plan to transplant the crops into raised beds on MSES property.

Learning Outcomes

Because the program requires hands-on learning about the life cycle of plants, it dovetails nicely with the “1st for ME” curriculum pilot through the DOE. In particular, the initiative will enhance Unit 1, “Building Strong Communities,” and Unit 3, “Resources in Our Communities.” Students will also learn the direct benefits of growing healthy food options to promote healthy eating.



The Future

We plan to create a gardening committee at MSES and to establish more community connections. MSES is already participating in the Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program and the Snap-Ed Pick a Better Snack Program; this spring we will also join Maine Agriculture in the Classroom Read to ME and hope to connect with a master gardener through the University of Maine.

We welcome parents, community members, and local organizations/businesses to support our efforts. Please contact sveilleux@msad54.org if you have any interest in helping with this project or in the future expansion of our gardening program.

MCSS Honors the Victims of September 11

Every year, as the anniversary of September 11, 2001, draws near, the teachers at the Margaret Chase Smith School are busy imparting information about the events of a tragedy from a not-so-distant past – the terrorist attacks of 9-11.

After learning about 9-11 through age-appropriate books and videos, students participate in follow-up discussions.



We culminate this learning by continuing a tradition started by Larry Ross, a former enrichment teacher at MCSS School: we create a display of 2,977 flags on our school's front lawn, one for each of the 2,977 victims of 9-11. The memorial is in place for only a few days, which makes the sight that much more special. To honor and never forget the loss of so many innocent lives, we urge students to perform acts of kindness.

NOEL Classrooms Establish Positive Routines

North Elementary School in Skowhegan welcomes our youngest in-town learners for grades Pre-K and Kindergarten. We emphasize being safe, kind and respectful, and responsible. Below, we will highlight how each classroom has established its own routines, rules, and friendships for the 2022-23 school year.



Mrs. LaRock's classroom has three primary rules: Be Safe, Be Kind, and Do Your Best. These rules permeate all aspects of the day including read-alouds, play centers, recess, and literacy/math stations. Children have learned that school is a fun place to learn and be together when everyone is being safe, kind, and doing their best.



Mrs. Sawyer begins with a morning meeting to create/strengthen the classroom family, ending with a positive quote to think about throughout the day. Together, they read the daily quote, talk about what it means, and try to bring it to life in our school community.



Mrs. Bernard's motto is, "Our class is a family." Together, they created a chart with a picture of a home that represents the classroom and highlights the importance of kindness. She says, "Our family enjoys read-alouds on the carpet together."



Mrs. Estabrook and friends have had an amazing start to the school year. She says, "We have been working so hard to make school a fun, safe and caring place to learn and play. We are building relationships and learning how to be a team. I can't wait to see where this year takes us."



In Mrs. Duchesne’s classroom, they spend the first six weeks of school focusing on routines, expectations, prioritizing well-being, and hold daily morning meetings in order to build strong relationships. When students feel valued, respected, safe, and—most importantly—loved, they can safely explore and learn.



Miss Booker’s class also focused on routines and expectations throughout the first few weeks of school, discussing why expectations are important in the school community. She says, “Our class really enjoys drawing and writing. We have made many class books including one titled *Our Classroom’s Expectations*, in which each child illustrated their favorite classroom expectation.” This book is in the classroom library so that students can look at it during centers.

Increasing Learning Opportunities: Title One Staff and Differentiated Instruction

What is Schoolwide Title One?

Title I is a federal program designed “to provide all children a significant opportunity to receive a fair, equitable, and high-quality education, and to close educational achievement gaps.” Title I programs and services provide customized instruction and curricula that help students meet academic standards and take an active, engaged interest in what they learn and can do. As the oldest and largest federal education program, Title I programs build equity of opportunity for children whose struggles often keep them on the academic sidelines. Canaan Elementary, Bloomfield, Margaret Chase Smith, North Elementary, and

Millstream are all school-wide Title I schools. This means that all students benefit from the services and resources Title I provides.

What is Differentiated Instruction?

Differentiation means tailoring instruction to meet individual needs. Title I teachers in MSAD 54 group students according to the outcomes of assessments and provide differentiated instruction that tailors to their learning. Assessments start in Kindergarten by looking at alphabet knowledge and concepts in print/books; in later years, through Grade 5, they include writing, reading, comprehension, and fluency.

Programming and Interventions

- **Kindergarten:** Across the district, Title I staff assist in classrooms by managing Literacy Stations. The students are placed in small groups and sit with a teacher for phonemic awareness, alphabet practice, handwriting, writing about reading, reading books, and building knowledge about print.
- **1st grade:** Reading Recovery is a reading intervention designed to help first-grade children who are having difficulty learning to read. Children selected for Reading Recovery receive individualized reading and writing lessons with a certified Reading Recovery teacher. These lessons are in addition to regular classroom reading and writing instruction. The Reading Recovery lessons take place daily for 30 minutes and include the following components: rereading familiar books, reading the new book from the day before, word work, writing, and reading a brand-new book.
- **K-5 Small Group Instruction for Math and Literacy:** Students are selected to participate in small group literacy instruction and/or small group math instruction based on academic assessment data, Response to Intervention (RTI) meetings, and recommendations from their classroom teacher. Children meet in small groups of 2-4 with a member of the Title I staff for lessons specifically designed to meet their needs. Most groups meet for 30 minutes a day, 4-5 times a week.
- **2nd - 5th RISE:** Reading Inspires Students to Excel Scholastic RISE™ provides targeted, small group instruction in reading comprehension, word study and phonics, and guided writing that, combined together, will accelerate the students’ learning. Students are selected to participate based on common reading needs and meet with 3-4 teachers during a 45-60-minute rotation to support reading, rereading,

word study, phonics, and guided writing.



There are many opportunities to connect with Title I staff. FMI, please visit our website, which can be found under “District Services” on the MSAD 54 homepage.

Detective Royle Speaks to SAMS About Online Safety

On Thursday, October 13, 2022, Detective Joe Royle of the Maine State Police Computer Crime team conducted an online safety presentation to the entire Skowhegan Area Middle School. A total of 375 students and the great majority of our staff attended this presentation, which included what our students are exposed to online, how they can help stay safe while interacting online, and some practical tips for navigating social media.

Detective Royle also met with parents/guardians the day before to discuss the nature of his presentation, to educate them about what their children may see online, and to provide some tips that will help keep students safe.

The student presentation included data highlighting numbers of students accessing social media, the trends our students face when online, and the potential pitfalls and successes our students can find online. The talk was followed by a guided whole-school debrief and questionnaire designed to provide support to students who would like further discussion or information.

Detective Royle was the inaugural speaker for the SAMS iPOWER program. iPOWER is a staff-run program developed to help target some of the socio-emotional needs of our students.

We have additional presentations planned throughout the school year. Future information related to iPOWER will be directly communicated with homes and also posted on the SAMS website. If you have any questions, please reach out to Principal Zachary Longyear at (207) 474-3339 or at zlongyear@msad54.org.

SAHS Football Players Honor Staff Impact



On the Friday of homecoming, each varsity football player approached a staff member who has made an impact by supporting them or otherwise encouraging them as a student and/or athlete. To illustrate this impact, players asked the chosen staff member to wear their football jersey for the school day, during the rally, and at the home game that Friday evening, if they attended.

The student-athletes were excited about the idea, and staff were honored to be asked. When approaching staff, players described specifically how that staff person has been a positive influence.

Coach Ryan Libby said, “We felt it was a great way to allow players to reflect on the teachers, and other school staff, who work hard to support students in so many ways.”

Overall, the event was a success and one the team plans to continue next year.

SCTC Student Selected for DOE Student Cabinet



Congratulations to Ahnalese Higgins who was chosen to participate on the Maine Department of Education Student Cabinet.

Each year, the DOE selects one student from each county based on an application process. This group of students meets monthly with DOE representatives and other state leaders to discuss educational opportunities, improvements, and policy.

Ahna recently attended her first meeting in Augusta, where she met Maine’s Secretary of State Shenna Bellows and Steven Bailey, the executive

director of the Maine School Management Association.

During this meeting, students discussed both the strengths and needs of their schools and districts. Ahna's goal for MSAD 54 is to add a student representative to the school board. She has already scheduled a meeting with administration to discuss this process.

Thank you for being our voice and for representing MSAD 54, Ahna!

Mental Health Wellness Activities at MSLC

In honor of mental health awareness week, October 2-8, students at Marti Stevens Learning Center participated in several community-oriented activities.

The week began with planting several Hope Gardens as part of the national Yellow Tulip Project. This initiative works to eliminate the stigma around talking about mental health issues. Together with a representative from Redington Fairview General Hospital, students learned about the project, planted and repaired our front garden, and learned what resources are available for those who may be struggling.

We hosted a wellness day at the school later that week. Danielle Denis of Somerset Public Health began with a presentation about the brain and how it behaves under stress; Lisa Gund followed by demonstrating coping techniques people can use when anxiety has taken over the body.



Following this introduction, students participated in a variety of activities, including the high ropes course, roller blading, indoor mini golf, paint night, bucket drumming with Morrigan Knox McCleod, yoga with Mrs. Petra, puzzle time, coloring, and a quiet meditation session. With parents' permission, students were even able to get a free cut or style from volunteer stylist Emily French of Skowhegan's Meraki Salon.

Please remember, "You are not alone." If you need help or know someone who does, text the teen help line at 1-800-464-5767.

MSAD 54 Adult Education: Where Are They Now?

When students enroll in Adult Education, we emphasize that our programming is a gateway to opportunity. Our students take many different pathways. Some enter the workforce, others participate in short-term training, and—of course—many enroll in a two- or four-year college.



One of our recent graduates, Hayden Nadeau, enlisted in the National Guard. Pictured above, you can see how he looked when he spoke at our 2019 graduation ceremony, contrasted with a more recent photo of Hayden with his parents Debbie and Jonathan.

Hayden has spent over a year in the service and describes his Army infantry training as the "hardest thing I have done in my life so far." He said in the training he learned how to administer critical first aid and how to respond to difficult situations.

In addition, he works for a gold mining company in Alaska. Although it's a very demanding job in a harsh climate, the four-weeks-on and two-weeks-off schedule allows him to come back home to Maine frequently to see friends and family.

Hayden says that he is "forever grateful for the help, advice, and guidance" he received while working with MSAD 54 Adult Education. He attributes his success in the Guard and in his job to his strong work ethic. He believes strongly that "on the other side of the hard things in life are the best things life can give you."

Congratulations, Hayden, on your impressive accomplishments to date, and we look forward to hearing more in the years ahead.

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Tons of Summer Learning and Fun at Camp REACH

The Camp REACH program, a part of the REACH After School Program, offered a hugely successful summer program in partnership with Mill Stream Elementary and the Somerset Career and Technical Center.

During the month of July, 49 students who attended the Title I summer school at MSES also enjoyed a fun-filled afternoon camp experience packed with exciting STEAM (science, technology, engineering, and math) activities, field trips, and outdoor fun! Students explored robotics, chemistry, art, and thermodynamics with their daily STEAM programming, along with team Olympics, water fun and mountain biking outside.

In addition, these students toured the Maine Discovery Museum in Bangor, swam and hiked at Lake George, ate ice cream and played mini-golf at Gifford's, and enjoyed pizza and bowling at Central Maine Family Fun Center in Skowhegan.

A Camp REACH program for our middle school students, in partnership with SCTC, was also held at SAHS this past summer. Following summer school programming, 29 students enjoyed different afternoon camps over a four-week period.

In Adventure Camp, they tackled the high ropes challenge course, learned how to canoe and kayak on the Kennebec, went fly fishing at Lake George, and hiked up to Moxie Falls.

At the Carpentry Clinic, students were able to participate in the building of two storage sheds, while Cooking School taught our students a variety of culinary techniques and skills. The carpentry and cooking students joined forces for a fun day trip to Birch Point State Park.

In Robotics Camp, students built robots and competed in a "last-robot-standing" challenge. These activities were supplemented by a field trip to the Composite Center at the University of Maine.

Finally, Art Camp inspired outdoor art installations for our walking trails. Overall, our Camp REACH students enjoyed an enriching summer experience filled with a lot of learning, creating, laughing, and memory making.

