



Spring Edition 2023

School Talk

A Newsletter of RSU 54/MSAD 54

E.O.E.



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New School Project Continues to Move Forward



It has been over five years since MSAD 54 applied for state funding consideration and three years since North Elementary was named #2 on the state's list, which began the process of building a new elementary school in Skowhegan. In June of 2022 voters from Canaan, Cornville, Mercer, Norridgewock, Skowhegan and Smithfield overwhelmingly approved the \$75,338,985 project, including up to \$4,440,572 in local-only costs. Below are some important updates.

Project Name: On February 2, the MSAD 54 Board of Directors voted to support the overwhelming first choice of the public: The Margaret Chase Smith Community School. The Board chose to support this name as it represented 72% of the votes cast from 2,333 responses.

Project Funding: As indicated above, over 94% of the project is funded directly by the state, with 5.9% being funded locally. Thanks to the amazing support of our community fundraising efforts, which began this past fall, the funding committee has already raised over \$2.3 million. If the original funding goal is met, local project costs will be reduced by \$2.5 million, with \$500,000 going to support programming costs. Anyone wishing to donate and be a part of the campaign can visit the following website: <https://www.kvcap.org/building-better-beginnings/>

Construction & Timeline: The District anticipates breaking ground on the project this summer with an anticipated building opening in the fall of 2025.

Updated plans can be found on the district website: <https://www.msad54.org/building-project>

Fostering Community Relationships at Canaan Elementary

We all know that building relationships and community is an important part of school. This year Canaan Elementary students have fostered community relationships through two different activities.

Students in Mrs. Theriault's sixth-grade class at Canaan learned about the history of Veterans Day, which included reading and discussing the poem, "In Flanders Fields," by Lt. Colonel John McCrae.

Students then wrote letters to veterans and soldiers to thank them for their service.

Some wrote to grandfathers and family friends, while others addressed letters to Togus in Augusta or to the Support our Troops charity. One student even chose to write to Mrs. T's brother, who is an Air Force Veteran. Several students received responses from veterans, in which they shared a little more of their stories.

More recently, students in all grades made Valentine's Day cards for the residents at Redington Memorial Home, Cedar Ridge Center, and Woodlawn Rehabilitation & Nursing Center. Cards were delivered to each of the centers and distributed to the residents on February 14. In the months ahead, we look forward to continuing to build relationships within the community.

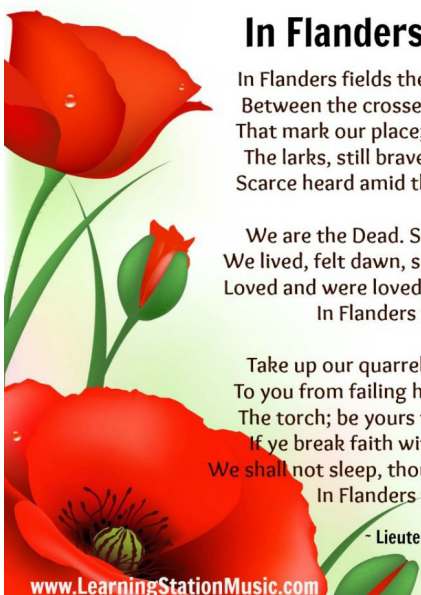
In Flanders Fields

In Flanders fields the poppies blow
Between the crosses, row on row,
That mark our place; and in the sky
The larks, still bravely singing, fly
Scarce heard amid the guns below.

We are the Dead. Short days ago
We lived, felt dawn, saw sunset glow,
Loved and were loved, and now we lie
In Flanders fields.

Take up our quarrel with the foe:
To you from failing hands we throw
The torch; be yours to hold it high.
If ye break faith with us who die
We shall not sleep, though poppies grow
In Flanders fields.

- Lieutenant Colonel John McCrae



3D Printing at Margaret Chase



The fourth-grade students in Mrs. Seymour's, Mrs. Greenlaw's, and Mrs. Herrick's classes have been learning how to create their own 3D prints. The teachers began the year by having students complete the how-to tutorials within a 3D print creation program called Tinkercad.

Once they had the basics under their belt, students created their first 3D print: a personalized bookmark that they made from scratch. When students noticed that some of the lettering was hollowed out, we challenged them to come up with a way to prevent this. After one student figured out and shared a remedy, all students then printed a second bookmark.

Since this first project, students have also created their own cookie cutter and have imported a frog from *thingiverse.com* that they then altered in some way.

In the coming weeks, the fourth graders will be interviewing Kindergarten students from North El. Once they get to know the students, they will then create personalized bubble wands that the Kindergarteners will be able to use during their Bubble Fest on the first day of spring.



2023-2024 Pre-K and Kindergarten Registration

Pre-K and Kindergarten registration is now open!
Please use the link below to access additional
information about registering your child.

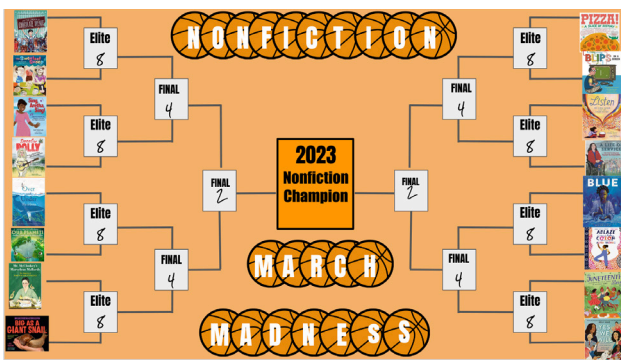
<https://bit.ly/432XWw0>

Nonfiction March Madness at Mill Stream

Mill Stream kicked off its “Nonfiction March Madness” bracket on February 28! Sixteen newly released nonfiction picture books were carefully selected for the bracket. Classrooms were assigned to one side of the bracket; after each class reads four pairs of books (eight books total), they will then vote to determine which book is their favorite from each pairing.

Some of the chosen texts include: *The Sweetest Scoop: Ben & Jerry’s Ice Cream Revolution* by Lisa Robinson; *Sing Aretha Sing* by Hanif Abdurraquib; and *Yes, We Will: Asian Americans Who Shaped This Country* by Kelly Yang. For a complete list, feel free to contact the school.

Classroom votes from both sides of the bracket will be tallied to find the elite eight. Classrooms will switch sides of the brackets to read four new books and vote to find the final four. Another round of voting will determine the top two, and the Nonfiction March Madness champion will be revealed in early April. Stay tuned to see which book will be crowned the Nonfiction March Madness Champion by MSES students!



North Elementary and the K for ME Curriculum



North Elementary School in Skowhegan welcomes our youngest in-town learners for grades Pre-K and Kindergarten. We currently have five Pre-K and six Kindergarten classrooms. During the 2022-23 school year, both the Pre-K and Kindergarten started using new curricula. In Kindergarten we adopted the curriculum entitled “K for ME.”

As described by the Maine Department of Education, K for ME is “an interdisciplinary, whole child focused instructional program...adapted from Boston Public Schools...K for ME supports Kindergarten students’ learning and development in literacy and language, science and engineering, social studies, the arts, and social-emotional realms. The program integrates research-based instructional practices aligned to Maine’s Learning Results while it builds children’s agency as learners and citizens.” <https://www.maine.gov/doe/learning/earlychildhood/K4ME>

The K for ME Curriculum is built around four different units of study. The four units are: Our Community, Animals and Habitat, Construction, and Our Earth. The daily schedule includes read-alouds, shared reading, writing, math, phonics, and centers. This schedule is enriched by the unit’s themes, and students build their knowledge throughout the day.

For example, when students study owls, they will write about owls. After studying communities, students at the dramatic play center will role play eating in a restaurant or getting a cut at the barbershop. Weekly read-alouds and shared readings of poems foster deeper understanding of

content and develop vocabulary. The picture included with this article shows Kindergarten students engaging in part of the K for ME curriculum.

NWEA Test K-5 in MSAD 54

An Update from the Title I Program



NWEA has been an assessment tool used in MSAD 54 for many years. The data is helpful, but it may be challenging to understand what the numbers and percentiles mean in terms of how your children are doing in their math and literacy learning. The purpose of this article is to inform and provide a resource to better understand NWEA.

What is the NWEA test? *(from the NWEA website)*

Children learn better—and faster—when teachers have a clear picture of what students know and how they are growing academically. The NWEA test adapts to your child as they take the test. If your child answers a question correctly, the next question is more challenging. If they answer incorrectly, the next one is easier. This type of assessment challenges top performers without overwhelming students whose skills are below grade level.

What does NWEA Measure? *(from the NWEA website)*

NWEA uses a RIT scale (a range from 100-350) to accurately measure what students know, regardless of their grade level. It also measures growth over time, allowing you to track your child's progress throughout the school year and across multiple years.

What does a RIT score measure? *(from the NWEA website)*

RIT scores have the same meaning across grade levels. If a fourth-grade student and an eighth-grade

student have the same RIT score in reading, then they are testing at the same level in that subject. This stable scale allows teachers to accurately measure each student's academic growth throughout the school year and over time. You can use your child's RIT score to help them meet their goals.

The teachers in MSAD 54 do a wonderful job setting goals with students, developing test taking strategies, and celebrating growth on the NWEA assessment. Between assessments, students work toward their growth goals and grade-level RIT scores by practicing their skills during classroom mini-lessons, by participating in small group instruction for math and reading, and by using specific programs on i-Pads or other devices. Students who need additional interventions may work in small Title I Math or Reading Groups.



If you would like to know more, please contact your child's teacher, school administrator, or look online at the NWEA Family Toolkit where you can learn more about test results, look at question samples, as well as see how the test adapts to each individual child and how it shows growth over time.

www.nwea.org/the-map-suite/common-questions-families

Parent and Family Engagement at Bloomfield Elementary

One of MSAD 54's Guiding Beliefs is that "Learning is a shared responsibility and requires a commitment among the student, teacher, parent and community." At Bloomfield Elementary School, we strive to make this belief a reality.

The work begins over the summer when many teachers reach out to families to introduce themselves and welcome them into their classroom community. Next, an ice cream social two



nights before school begins provides families, and especially students, an opportunity to meet their teachers, see their classroom, and share a treat with their loved ones.

Many teachers send home weekly, biweekly, or monthly letters; and some even personalize letters for each student. The majority also use an app called “Seesaw” to receive and send daily messages to parents.

Each day, office assistants Cindy Bell and Joanne Dubois phone the homes of students who are absent but whose families didn’t contact the school. Principal Pillsbury and School Social Worker Hannah Dangler also call 10-12 families daily.

In November, a Parent-Teacher Conference is held with a member of each student’s family. Our typical turnout for conferences is 90% and, in many cases, 100%. In addition, our special education staff hold countless student-focus meetings with parents; they provide options for remote or in-person attendance to keep the participation high.

Arts and Academic Night on Thursday, March 30, is yet another family event that is chock-full of art, music, work samples, activities, and book giveaways.

On top of all this, the Bloomfield Parent-Teacher Group meets monthly. Led this year by Andra Dickey—with lots of support from past leaders and volunteers like Chelsey Carrier, Cyndi Chillington,

and Michelle Ayotte—the parent-teacher group has spearheaded numerous free family events such as movie nights, paint nights, community skating, Color Run, and an annual Fall Festival, to name just a few.

As the picture from a recent family paint night shows, parents and community are an integral part of our school family.

REACH Afterschool Program: Dynamic Programming and Leadership



Robotics

REACH is offering a full robotics program at all three sites. Thanks to an additional 21st Century Community Learning Center supplemental grant, we purchased 26 Lego Educate robotics kits of varying levels that allow all K-8 students to create working robots. Allowing students to be introduced to robotics at an early age increases creativity, critical thinking, and more.

Ms. Hilton, our K-2 robotics instructor, has seen even our youngest learners engage with the robotics kits in a meaningful way. “They are always excited to see what they have completed,” she says. “Robotics is helping every learner grow their brain, engage with their peers, and take away skills they will use for a lifetime. I am proud to be a part of it!”

Clubs at SAMS and MCSS

Our sewing club at SAMS is in its second year with students tackling bigger sewing projects such as quilts and pajamas for our local nursing homes. Our MCSS sewing club led a community service project, after L.L. Bean provided two dozen winter coats that

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needed patches sewn over old logos. Our students were able to make each coat look as good as new and then donated all of them to the Clothing Closet.



Our cooking clubs at both sites prepared yummy desserts for the United Centenary Methodist Church's free community meal, and Outdoor Clubs—run at both sites by Skowhegan Outdoors—have taken advantage of the many outdoor recreation opportunities on and off campus. Other clubs run at SAMS this year include theater, disc golf, yoga, art, and the Civil Rights Team.

Leadership

Our REACH leadership team has been recognized at the national level. Jackie Wallace, our site coordinator at MCSS, was selected to become an ambassador, or Mizzen Maker, by The Mott Foundation. Mizzen by Mott is an online toolkit of quality afterschool enrichment lessons and activities. Jackie and her staff have piloted their “Jazz at Lincoln Center” curriculum, a STEAM-based curriculum for grades 4 and 5.

Our program director, Dawn Fickett, was selected to serve as an ambassador for the National Afterschool Alliance. She is one of just 16 leaders in the country chosen for the honor this year. During their one-year terms, ambassadors continue their work with local afterschool programs, while also working with community leaders and policy makers to increase support for the afterschool and summer learning programs families rely on.

We are thrilled with the work our REACH Afterschool program is doing to provide our students with quality educational opportunities and to create a safe and nurturing environment. If you are interested in helping to sponsor or volunteer for one our programs, please contact Dawn Fickett: dfickett@msad54.org.

iPOWER Work Continues at SAMS

The Skowhegan Area Middle School iPOWER (Public Outreach with Educational Responsibilities) team has been working hard to continue bringing support to our greater SAMS family as we all work through the concerns facing our students.

On March 1, 2023, we hosted Josh Kennison in the SAHS auditorium as a rescheduled opportunity for our students to hear his message on disability awareness. Mr. Kennison is an athlete who was born without hands, feet, or a tongue. He speaks about his experiences growing up with a physical disability and persevering through a number of challenges to become a coach, mentor, and a 100m paralympic medalist in the 2013 World Paralympic Championships. Information on Mr. Kennison can be found here: <https://www.paralympic.org/joshua-kennison>

Also in March, our health teacher Mrs. Bussell hosted guest speakers for our 6th and 7th graders focusing on stress management and coping mechanisms, including conversations about what is healthy and unhealthy when managing stress.

The iPOWER team sent weekly messages about stress management to students and staff throughout the month of March. Through guided conversations, SAMS students and staff reviewed ways to manage stress and define healthy coping strategies. These conversations had a scripted element, which included a list of available resources, to ensure all students received the same message and that all staff were able to support students with managing stress.

Lastly, on March 28, representatives from the National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) were at SAMS to speak to our students throughout the day about mental health and specific mental health supports. A letter was sent out to SAMS parents at the beginning of March with more information and details.

If you have any questions about iPOWER, please feel free to contact Principal Zachary Longyear at (207) 474-3339 or zlongyear@msad54.org.

New Student Clubs at SAHS

“Your Mind Matters” is a student-led initiative to raise awareness surrounding mental health. In February students created hearts with positive sayings to hang around the school, and they delivered conversation hearts with a message to all students and staff at SAHS, SCTC, and Marti Stevens.



Board Game Club has met weekly this year. Students have enjoyed playing new games and some of the classics. The laughter and time spent together is priceless.

Student-Created Show Premieres on WXNZ

By Maddy Thorndike & Kaitlyn Johndro



In December our French IV teacher Mr. Gin came to us with an exciting project. We were given the opportunity to create a radio show that would be broadcast on HooSkow Radio WXNZ Skowhegan.

Because we wanted to create a Francophone music show, we took some class time to research and decide which artist and music we wanted to feature, ultimately deciding upon the pop singer, Angele, whose music we had previously heard in French class.

Angele is a 27-year-old Belgian singer, songwriter, pianist, record producer, and actress. She is extremely popular in both France and Belgium. You may know Angele from a duet she recorded with Dua Lipa entitled “Fever,” which is one of the songs we included in our show.

We wrote the script for the show opening, song introductions, and show closing; in addition, we

had to include all the legal station identifications. Altogether, we spent three classes recording and editing our show. It was a fun experience rehearsing, recording, and re-recording our script several times: a process that honed our skills using the GarageBand software program. One of our challenges during the recording was to speak naturally to each other, at a normal pace, and show the appropriate emotions. After lots of laughs, we successfully recorded the show.

We submitted our pre-recorded show to the program manager of WXNZ. He was happy with French Beats and gave us very positive feedback. After the debut broadcast of our show on February 12, we received lots of praise from people in the community.

Please listen for rebroadcasts of French Beats on 98.1 WXNZ. We greatly enjoyed the experience and hope to record future episodes.

SCTC Partnerships That Benefit Our Community

SCTC received a grant of \$40,000 from Good Shepherd Food Bank to retrofit an existing garage into a food pantry.

With the funds awarded, the Residential Construction Program is insulating and siding the inside of the garage; Electrical Construction is wiring the lights and the outlets; and we will use additional funds to install a heat pump, purchase a refrigerator and freezer, and add shelving.

The food pantry at SCTC gives out the second largest amount of food in Somerset County. With this expansion, we hope to be able to provide meals to more families of students in the district.



In addition, Residential Construction and Outdoor Leadership partnered with CMP to build osprey nests. The nests will be mounted on poles away from the powerlines. The programs initially built 20 boxes and another 10 are in the works.

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The Queen of Cardio: 39 Years and Counting

Lois Davis has served the communities of MSAD 54 as an aerobics instructor in our Adult Education program for a staggering 39 years.

In an unlikely beginning, Lois started as a participant who was recruited to be the teacher when the class instructor abruptly left town. Lois says she felt unprepared to lead the group, so she traveled to



Massachusetts to take a crash course of her own to gain some skills and confidence.

On her first night as an instructor, Lois says one of the students looked at her and asked, “Who is the new teacher? I hope it’s not you.” Apparently, this person got over her initial doubts because she stayed in Lois’s class for the next five years.

Many students have been with Lois pretty much since the beginning, including Suzie Longley and Dorothy Small. Dorothy, pictured with Lois above, says that what started as an opportunity to exercise quickly became much more. She says, “Lois has a way of pulling everyone into a circle of friendship and caring that goes beyond instructing the class. She is always cooking up and planning things to do: shopping, dining out, movies, trips to the coast, get-togethers at her home and more... [The] friendships I have made [in aerobics] have become a very important part of my life.”

Another longtime student, Susan Allmendinger, says, “Lois has always been our motivating Energizer bunny... An interesting tidbit about Lois is that she puts a hot ball in her mouth before we start our aerobic section. We all say we’d probably choke on it, but she says it helps keep her mouth from getting dry!”

For her part, Lois is very humble about the impact she has had. She cherishes the many memories and friends she’s made over the years, saying, “The class does more for me than them.”