



School Talk

A Newsletter of RSN 54/MSAD 54

E.O.E.



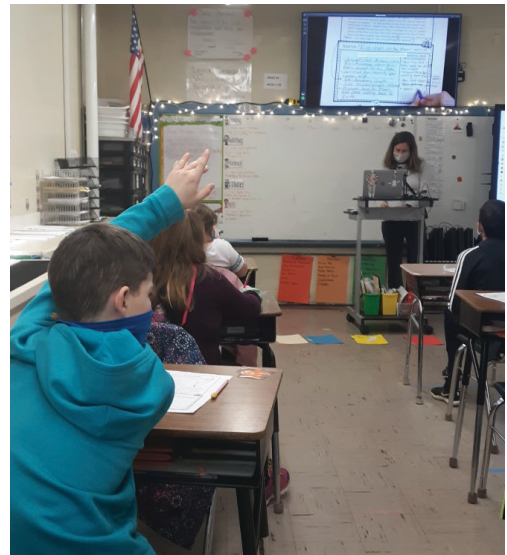
Winter Edition 2021

Volume 27, No.1

Successfully Adapting in an Unusual and Amazing Year

After months of preparation, MSAD 54 reopened our doors this fall with a plan that focused on keeping all of our students and staff safe while, at the same time, maximizing the time students would be in person learning in our school buildings. We worked within the requirements from the Department of Education and the Center for Disease Control (CDC), and we collaborated with our families to provide options for remote learning when needed.

Although this year does not look the same as the past and we have had challenges to surmount, we are excited and pleased to report great success. Most of our students have attended school in person with their teachers and peers. Currently, grades K-6 attend in person daily, and grades 7-12 attend in person every other day.



Many other school districts have relied on a hybrid schedule or a 4-day school week. We are proud to say that our students have been able to attend school in person more than most other students across the state. This has positively impacted our students academically and enhanced their social emotional well-being. We can thank our staff, students, families and community for making this happen!

K-6 Learning - In Person

Even though our classrooms have been transformed this year to include more space for distancing and have added plastic barriers to help keep everyone safe, the learning experiences look, in many ways, the same as they have in past years. Students learn in whole group lessons and also work in small groups or individually with their teachers.

Students have learned how to use the devices and platforms that will be necessary if they need to move to remote learning. Teachers have added online learning tools like Google Classroom, Seesaw, IXL, Reading A-Z and other digital platforms to their classrooms. These tools enrich the learning environment when students are in school and allow for learning to continue when students are in a remote learning setting.

K-6 Remote Learning

In our elementary grades, a different group of teachers instruct our remote learners. Although this approach is different from in-person learning, the key to effectiveness is the same: relationships. Teachers collaborate with families to support the learning of their children. When a supportive, team approach is used, students benefit.

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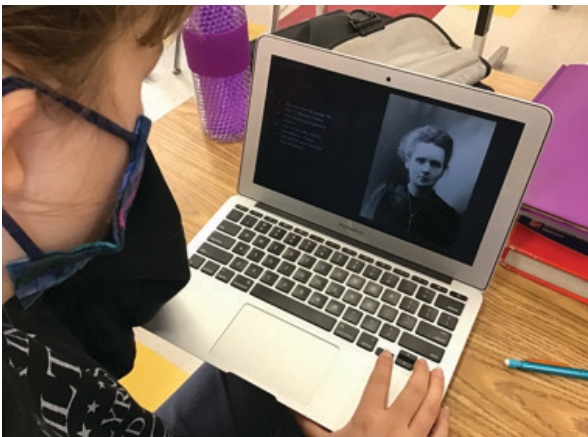
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Students attend multiple learning experiences each day through Zoom, which is an online virtual classroom. They receive instruction from their teachers and practice their learning through the use of a digital device. Teachers send home packets of materials and books to students each month for the upcoming units of study. This allows some of the work students are doing to be hands on. Families work with the teachers and their children to complete the assignments and attend Zoom classes throughout the day.

7-12 Learning

In our 7-12 classrooms, we have had to use a hybrid approach to ensure adequate social distancing in our middle and high schools. Hybrid consists of half the students attending in person and the other half attending remotely. Then, the next day they switch—a necessary approach to meet mandatory CDC safety requirements. Students who are remote are able to attend class through Zoom and/or engage in lessons through a digital platform such as Google Classroom or Schoology. Assignments are submitted electronically or handed into teachers on their in-person day.

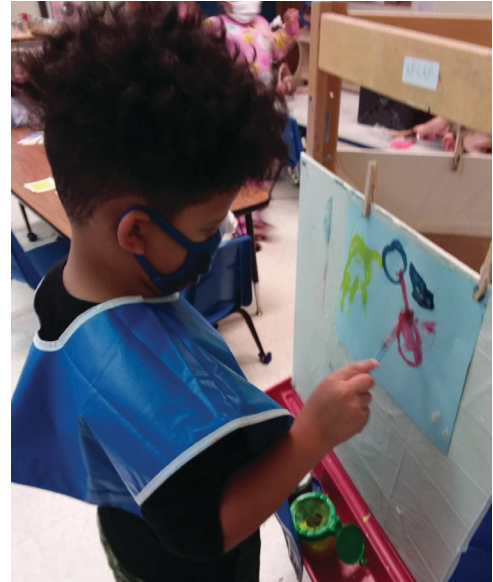
All of these approaches required an update in our digital devices and tools, which we were able to do using federal funds that were dedicated for coronavirus relief. These funds have made it possible for us to support our students and families, without impacting the local budget.



In the pages that follow, you will read many specific stories that highlight the accomplishments of our students, staff and community. We are proud that education in RSU 54 has continued to flourish despite the challenges posed by COVID-19.

Pre-K Success

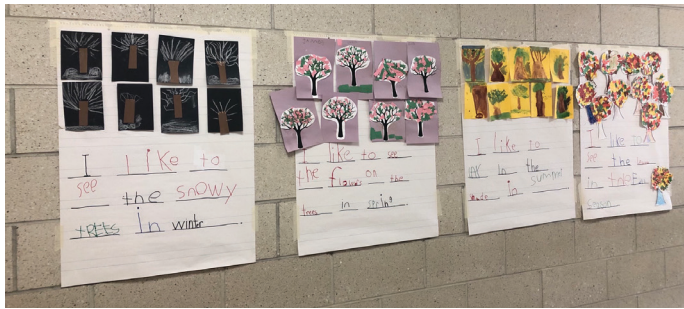
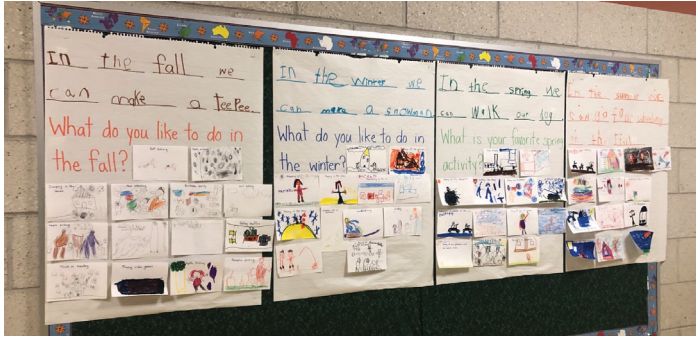
MSAD 54 Preschool programs continue to successfully have children in their classroom! The Preschool staff has been working hard to develop programming, environments and approaches that support children and staff to be safe and healthy.



Children have been thrilled to engage with peers, learn about their new school and even have a visit in our outdoor classroom from the fire department to learn about fire safety. Through the activities, children are gaining knowledge in all areas of development!

Recent Events at Mill Stream

Our staff members have been hard at work since the start of the school year to have Mill Stream feel as much like Mill Stream as it has in the past. This is evident when you walk our halls and hear teachers teaching both in-person students and remotely. Here are some examples of what you would see if you could walk our halls.



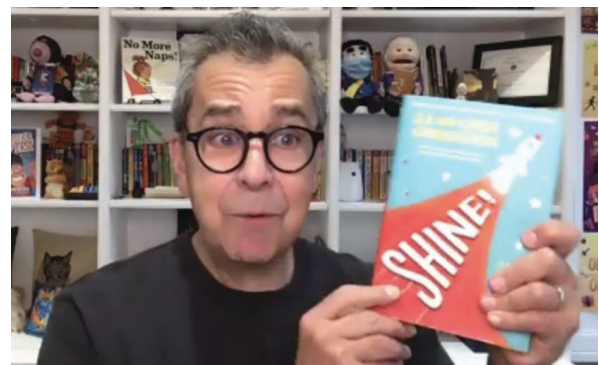
Mary Swindells, our grade 5/6 resource room teacher, incorporates cooking within her teaching every year. This is a passion of hers that she enjoys sharing with her students. The cooking activities traditionally take place within Mill Stream's project room.

This year, she is unable to access this space with all students at one time. She is being creative by looking for recipes that can be completed individually within the students' spaces.

The first cooking class this year was centered around the making of English muffin pizzas. A favorite of so many!



Best-selling author, Chris Grabenstein, joined the remote 6th graders for a live Zoom visit to talk about how much fun it can be to learn. During his visit, he described the processes of taking a drop of an idea and letting the ripple of other ideas flow to create a masterpiece. He also shared ways for students to collaborate when they find themselves physically distanced. The students in Mrs. Marden's 6th grade classroom have been reading *Grabenstein's, Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library*, and are looking forward to reading other books by this motivational author.



Hand-on Learning at Bloomfield



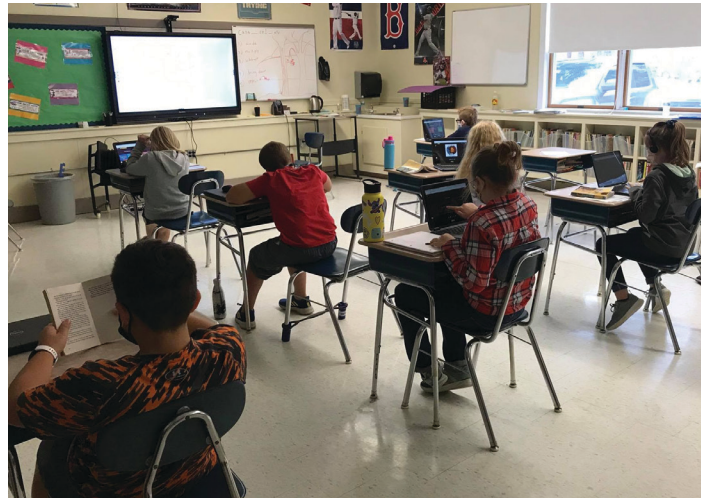
Mrs. Brown's first grade class learned about the life cycle of apples which culminated in making fresh handmade apple sauce.



Staying Safe at Canaan

Classes in Canaan like others in our district, have students and staff wearing masks unless they are eating and are at least six feet apart. Lines on the floor in our hallways help with flow and remind students to keep proper social distancing.

Cafeteria tables are no longer used here; they have been replaced by desks and chairs so we can keep students at least six feet apart. Our drinking



fountains have been replaced by water bottle filling stations, and each student has their own water bottle.

CES Teachers and Staff Members have Plexiglas installed on and near their desks to provide extra safety in the classroom. We continue to work hard, and school goals revolve around the safety of students.

News from the Enrichment Resources Program

During the first trimester 4th and 5th grade Humanities students engaged in The Great Pioneer STEM Challenge. The unit consists of five engineering challenges related to a pioneer survival story. The students are given a limited number of resources to complete the challenges. Though this seems more like a math related unit, it is conducted with our humanities classes because we feel the most important standards to address relate to interdependence, collaboration and communication.

In past years, the students from each school at each grade level (4-6) competed as teams, working to be the top scorers by grade level, school or both. This year, because we cannot share materials, have to remain physically distant and have remote learners at every grade level, each student is completing the challenges individually. The students still collaborate and

give each other suggestions and feedback to be successful. The individual scores are averaged for each group to provide a team score for the competition.

The five challenges for The Great Pioneer STEM include: a water filter, a cabin that can withstand a wind storm (hair dryer), a lookout tower that can hold a weight (extra points awarded for height above 12”), a solar water heater, and a rock mover (glass beads) that involves the creation of a pulley system.

This year we had quite the variety of tower heights with the tallest holding the weight at an accomplished 34 inches! Below is a photo from one of our 7 groups.



SAMS Students Explore Passions During “The Genius Hour”

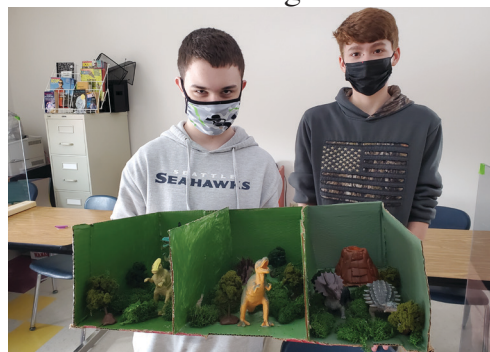
Inspired by a proposal from their team leader, Bethany Cormier, the Skowhegan Area Middle School’s Somerset Community has begun to offer a program of learning known as Genius Hour for their students.

The Genius Hour is a movement originally created by corporations that allows employees 20% of their time to explore a personal passion project. The same idea has been embraced by educators in classrooms across the country to give students time to explore topics they would like to learn about.

The Somerset team has devoted Friday as their Genius Hour Day. Since coming back to school in September, students have been provided with instruction and time to work on initial projects that focus on purpose, format, and presentation. The team has also integrated the philosophies of 21st Century learning into their models, which include the Habits of Mind and the importance of recognizing the role of Growth Mindset as a lifelong learner.

Students are being guided through the process but are encouraged to own the direction and focus of their choice topics. As the year progresses, students will take full reign as they begin to research and tackle topics that may have real-world applications. Seeking ways to solve problems around them, be it in school or in the community, is the long-range goal of the Somerset Genius Hour. However, the project has also had a positive effect upon the teacher/student relationship.

Somerset’s Social Studies teacher Jason Herrick explains, “I enjoy using genius hour to get to know the students better. Since we only give the students a general theme to work with, the specific topic is up to them. This lets us learn about students’ interests, hobbies, or things they enjoy...Being passionate for a hobby or an interest can create lifelong learners.”



To date, the team has received generally positive feedback from students. Eighth-grader Kaden Salisbury has enjoyed the project very much. He says, “I have had fun doing Genius Hour. I'm glad we started doing it, because it is a time for me to work quietly and talk to my friends. We can do what we want if it's appropriate. I feel like we should keep doing Genius Hour to keep kids’ minds doing

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something fun.”

For more information, please visit the Somerset team’s Google Site located under “Classroom Communities” on the SAMS homepage

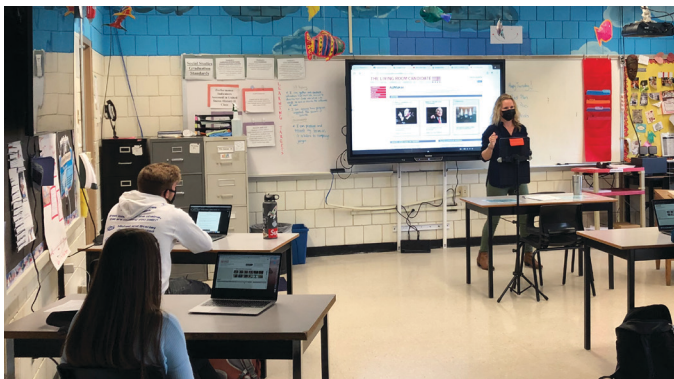
High School Social Studies in the Age of COVID-19

Thanks to the wonders of technology, the in-person and remote students in Mrs. Gibson’s U.S. History and Government classes are able to learn together.

Remote students attend using Zoom and—with the help of an additional TV in the classroom—are able to engage with those who are physically present. Whether in person or remote, all learners are able to work together in small groups on projects, increasing their level of engagement.

All students are also able to view Mrs. Gibson’s traditional whiteboard as well as a Promethean Board (a large, interactive, “smart” whiteboard) for class presentations, notes, and a list of the day’s learning targets.

Finally, students both in and out of the classroom are able to access every assignment through the use of Google Classroom. This



management system allows students easy access to notes, assignments, class updates, and schedules.

These new tools and approaches help ensure that all students continue to have access to a quality educational experience.

SAHS Winter Athletics



After six weeks of no athletic activity that began when Somerset County was designated as yellow in late October, SAHS sports resumed in December when our county changed back to a green designation.

On December 11, our basketball, alpine ski, bowling, and indoor track programs began to participate in team skills and conditioning workouts while following all rules and safety protocols mandated by the MPA and the Maine state agencies.

Wearing a mask during participation in many of these activities is a challenge, but our coaches and athletes are just happy to return to activity and clearly understand the need for increased safety precautions at this time.



On January 4, all teams mentioned above were allowed to start doing team-based practices as they would have done in past years, with the addition of safety protocols prescribed by

the state. These same teams began competing against other schools who are in our regional schedule pods on January 15; to date, this competition against opposing schools has gone incredibly well, both in terms of team and athlete success and our ability to follow precautionary measures.



On January 12, the wrestling team began their team-based conditioning and weight lifting program in hopes of getting ready for their postponed regular season that is currently scheduled to begin on February 22. At this time, the unified basketball program is awaiting determinations from the state as to whether their postponed season will begin on February 22 or will be delayed further.

Due to many factors, our competition cheering program opted out of participating during the winter season, though they were hoping to cheer during a rescheduled football season in the late spring. Sadly, the MPA officially cancelled football in late January, so cheering will not have a season this year.

We are proud that we have been able to continue athletics at SAHS this year. Despite the ups and downs and the many necessary adaptations, students have appreciated the opportunity to practice and compete.

Adult Ed Is Moving Ahead

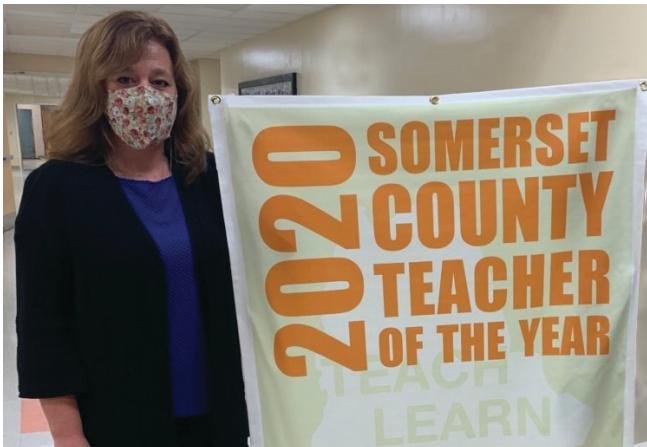
In Adult Education, we are adapting to the unique conditions posed by the pandemic and have embraced online learning as a way to reach students. Our HiSET Coordinator, Heather Toth—who has worked in MSAD 54 for over 15 years—can be seen below using Zoom to facilitate one of our orientation classes. She and our other teachers have used Zoom, Google Meets, Google Classroom, HiSET Academy, and other online platforms as a way to keep learning alive, even when being together in person is not possible.



Their efforts are paying off. Pictured below is Gaige H., the first Adult Education student to earn his diploma this school year. Gaige told us that his infant son motivated him. He said, “I want him to realize that if I can do this, he has no excuse.” Gaige grew tired of fast-food jobs and is looking forward to a new career working as a Personal Support Specialist now that he has earned his high school credential. The night he passed his last test, he exclaimed, “I can’t wait to call my mom and grandma!”



SCTC Instructor Named Somerset County Teacher of the Year



Mrs. Jen France, the Early Childhood Education Instructor at the Somerset Career & Technical Center, was recently awarded the Somerset County Teacher of the Year.

Mrs. France—who earned her Bachelor’s in Early Childhood Education and a Master’s in Educational Leadership from UMF—is not only a Nationally Board Certified teacher at SCTC, she is also a faculty member of the Maine Educator’s Consortium and an Adjunct Professor at Kennebec Valley Community College.

Students in Mrs. France’s Early Childhood class feel respected and valued, while always being challenged to do their best. Students say that Mrs. France doesn’t tell them that an answer is wrong; instead, she will ask them to explain and justify why they chose a particular answer. Her teaching style promotes collaborative discussions and fosters critical thinking among her students as they work to find the best solution to a problem.

Because the Early Childhood classroom is located in North Elementary School, students

spend part of the day studying, teaching and learning; the other part is spent putting their studies into practice by working directly in a Kindergarten class, day care center, or nursery school. In addition, thanks to SCTC’s Early College program, Mrs. France’s students graduate with as many as 7 to 9 credits toward a college degree.

Mrs. France is an equally dynamic leader outside of the classroom. She guides students as they participate on the Student Leadership Team or as officers for SkillsUSA. In fact, some of her students have earned gold at the state SkillsUSA competition and earned medals at the national level. The SkillsUSA Chapter recently began a food pantry at the school with the help of the local Rotary Club.



Director David Dorr best sums up the profound impact Mrs. Jen France has on her students and the school: “I am blessed to have such a dynamic, energetic, and compassionate person as part of the team at SCTC. She makes us all better.”

MSAD 54 Leadership Team

Since 2016, the MSAD 54 Leadership Team—comprised of teachers and administrators PK-12 from across the district—has helped ensure that we consistently move toward our goals.

Building off the work they did in 2016 which resulted in the development of the MSAD 54 Guiding Beliefs (<https://bit.ly/54beliefs>), this year the team is working to refine a district Mission

and Vision. Our guiding beliefs, which we used in the development of our fall outline of a safe return to school (<http://bit.ly/54plan>), are principles that guide our work in schools. These principles constitute the foundation of the Leadership Team's work to write the district mission and vision statement.

To inform the work and to ensure all voices are heard, the committee will be soliciting feedback from our students and the community later this year. Information about our work will be updated on the district public page (<https://www.msad54.org/public>) later this winter.

Busing Students Safely



As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, student transportation looks a little different from years' past. Safety of students and staff has been the number one priority for the MSAD 54 Transportation Department. Many protocols have been put into place, including hand sanitizing dispensers so that students can sanitize when boarding and departing the bus. In addition, disposable masks have been made available, and each student has preferential seating for their safety. Last but not least, all buses are sanitized after each run.

Despite all of these changes, one thing remains the same. Our drivers greet students with, "Good morning," and send them off with, "Have a great day!"



An Update from Our District Nursing Staff

The nurses in MSAD 54 have worked tirelessly and diligently to keep students and staff safe, and they have also helped ensure that all receive accurate and timely communication about COVID cases and potential contacts.



As students, families and staff enter the final months of the school year the nurses ask that all remember that travelers coming to or returning to Maine must follow the Governor's Executive Order regarding testing or quarantine. The order states that, before returning to work or school, those who travel to states other than New Hampshire or Vermont, must either receive a recent negative test for COVID-19 or quarantine for 14 days upon arrival in Maine.

In addition, all individuals should continue to wear face coverings and follow physical distancing guidelines, even if they have recovered from COVID-19 or have received the vaccine. Many are understandably eager to get a COVID vaccination as soon as possible. For information about doses administered to date and the phases of vaccine administration please visit: <https://www.maine.gov/covid19/vaccines>.

Thank you to the entire MSAD 54 community for your understanding and commitment to safety during this unusual and trying school year.

State Will Fund New School Construction

Yes, MSAD 54 has a building project well underway. In 2018 the state finalized the Major Capital School Construction list, which identified 74 buildings from districts around the state in need of capital improvements. MSAD 54 had five schools on the list, including the second most in need of replacement: North Elementary.



Because MSAD 54 made the list, the project will be funded by the state and not by our local taxpayers. This is a tremendous opportunity for the district because as long as the school is built according to DOE standards, there will be little to no additional local cost.

The district will incur local costs only if we choose to add additional space or opt for other improvements/programs not recommended by the DOE. However, should we decide to add local modifications, we would have the advantage of being bonded at the low state rate over the life of the project and thus would pay significantly less interest. Additionally, a new school will avoid the future capital costs/upkeep of some of our older buildings.

History

In 2019 the state reached out to MSAD 54 to begin the process of selecting an architectural/engineering firm for our project. A chosen firm is tasked with completing a comprehensive analysis that considers the following factors: the costs of renovating an existing school vs. those of new construction, the potential for consolidating schools and other expenses, and the identification of potential school construction sites.

The firm Steven Blatt Architects was selected in March. Early in the process, Blatt Architects informed the district that the North Elementary site could not be used for a new school; it is simply too small and outdated. Additionally, although the full report is not yet complete, their analysis indicates that the consolidation of all or some of our current elementary schools on the state building list—Bloomfield, Canaan, Margaret Chase Smith and North Elementary—would make sense financially.

Site Search

With new construction a potential option, MSAD 54 was approved to engage in a comprehensive site search. This search included the analysis of our current properties as well as additional properties in the Town of Skowhegan.

Naturally, we began with our district campus at 196 West Front Street. The analysis soon revealed that the back portion of our campus, even with an adjacent parcel of land to the south, was far too wet for a new school.

The district then worked with the Town of

Skowhegan, leveraging the work from their public safety building search over the past few years, to explore parcels of land that meet school building criteria (parcels of 30+ acres with public sewer, water, etc.). From there, Blatt architects and engineers worked with the MSAD 54 building committee to refine site criteria to analyze potential sites.

On February 3, the Building Committee supported the firm's recommendation to focus on two potential sites for a school: 1) a site on the Middle Road relatively close to town, and 2) an expanded Margaret Chase Smith School site (requiring work with the town to include the town fields, tennis courts, etc.).

Next Steps

Blatt Architects will be working with the Building Committee and Town of Skowhegan to finalize a review of the two potential school construction sites, including a final site recommendation. Then, the firm will work with the state to finalize the analysis mentioned above. The MSAD 54 building committee and school board will hold public informational sessions to provide information and answer questions.

A public hearing will be held in early spring regarding site selection and will include a straw-poll vote on the recommended site. Depending on the site location, the Town of Skowhegan will potentially bring consideration of a site to a town meeting. Lastly, likely in June, the Maine State Board of Education will weigh-in.

As site selection winds down, the "concept design" process will begin. This phase includes opportunities for all stakeholders to be involved: staff, students, parents, and other community members. Concept design includes student programming and building organization (grade levels, etc.), as well as other stylistic ideas. Construction is tentatively set to begin in 2023.

This deliberate process is designed to provide for ample input from all stakeholders, with the goal of producing a product that will serve our students and MSAD 54 communities educationally and economically for decades to come.

We will keep everyone updated on an ongoing basis as the building project continues to progress.

MSAD 54

Substitute Teachers

**Elementary, Middle
& High School**
Pay Range: \$80-90/Day

Substitute Ed Techs
**Elementary, Middle
& High School**
Pay: \$12.15/hour

Current CHRC/fingerprinting required

Application can be found on our website
<https://www.msad54.org/sites/default/files/applicationform-substitute.pdf>

Full application packets available at
MSAD 54 Superintendent of Schools Office
196 West Front St.
Skowhegan, ME 04976
207-474-9508

MSAD 54 DISTRICT-WIDE VACANCIES

Substitute Bus Drivers Substitute Custodians

Current CHRC/fingerprinting required

If interested, please submit:

- 1. Cover letter**
- 2. Resume**
- 3. Application**

<https://www.msad54.org/sites/default/files/App-NonTeaching.pdf>

To: David Leavitt
RSU 54/MSAD 54
196 W. Front St.
Skowhegan, ME 04976

RSU 54/MSAD 54
61 Academy Circle
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Food Service Workers STUDENTS
Volunteers FAMILIES Custodians
Parents **THANK** Van Drivers
ADMINS **YOU!**
TEACHERS Guardians
Support Staff Tech Support
Educational Technicians
Delivery Workers Faculty Counselors
School Nurses BUS DRIVERS