

School Board Report
Mary Birks, School Board President
May 22, 2017

School Visits

In a continuation of my March report, I'd like to thank the JMS, LES and WES for hosting visits in March, and FES for a visit in May. We saw so much, I need to just pick out some highlights of each visit to share.

Principal Szeszterniak's tour of JMS was full of enthusiastic students and teachers. We visited the writing lab, where students were weaving text evidence seamlessly into writing; onto Conceptual Physics, where a debate was taking place along with a back channel discussion using chat room in google classroom; students were turning creative projects related to the Holocaust ID cards from the Holocaust Museum. We stopped in to listen to a Paideia Seminar, which fully engaged students in higher level thinking and discussion; 7th Grade Math was using Quizlet for Team Quizzes, and 7th grade Science students were exploring types of cells using microscopes. We also were given a sneak peek of the props and costumes and staging created for The Lion King musical. The students were working on Hydroponic plant growth, something I also saw at the STEAM showcase, and we heard from Family and Consumer Science about the Entrepreneurial Learning Unit where students developed their own corporations. Pride was apparent in 7th grade English for their Genius hour project and presentation as well as the whole school collaboration for the musical. Our students strive to be philanthropic, and we heard about the 7th Grade Essay contest to determine the charity where proceeds will be donated from Student-Faculty Basketball Game. More philanthropy included International Night, where many teachers contribute their time. Proceeds from the evening's event were donated to Cali Orphanage in Haiti.

Onto Lincoln Elementary School, where Principal Kitsko showcased the PA Farm Bureau Mobile Ag Lab. There we saw third grade students involved in a hands-on lesson called the "*The Mighty Smooth Bean*," learning about the power of a soybean as they "planted" a soybean in plaster of Paris. FLES was also alive and well at Lincoln! Second grade students were completing a short written assessment in Spanish to check on their understanding of various clothes names. We visited classrooms where primary level students were working on their animal research writings, using their own research notes to guide their writing process.

Other classrooms were working on writing fictional narratives with a superhero theme, and older students were starting a hands-on lesson to analyze and compare various unknown substances, by performing various tests to identify the substances.

There were students engaged in team discussions about a variety of classroom technology, using an array of dynamic furniture - standing desks with stools, Hokki stools, stability balls, and dynamic seat cushions, which gives students access to seating arrangements that best meet their learning needs. We popped in on a class viewing a short streaming video from Discovery Education online, focused on how we transfer germs between people. This kid friendly (and pretty funny) video was used to cover some foundational concepts before the students spent time in the PA Farm Bureau Mobile Ag Lab later in the day. Science lessons also included students finishing a unit on calculating the volume of a rectangular prism. As a culminating activity, students used available technology to complete a design task using *Tinkercad*. The students were in the beginning stages of determining the dimensions for personal desk pencil/pen holders that will ultimately be printed on the school 3D printer.

Principal Nelson at Washington Elementary School started our tour off with an introduction to students in all four, second grade classrooms who had created "March Madness" style brackets with 16 books that were chosen based on cross-curriculum content and standards. An example of district/municipal collaboration, this activity was created between the librarians at the Mount Lebanon Public Library and the WES Second Grade Faculty. Visiting the Applied Behavior Analysis Classroom emphasized the ongoing need for intensive, multi-day training needed for faculty and staff who work in the classroom, and truly love the work they do! Our students were very busy, working hard as one lead teacher and multiple PCAs implement the ABA curriculum with fidelity. We saw other WES students researching countries in South America and creating their own "passports" for travel; heard trumpet students rehearsing a new piece of music for their upcoming Band Concert; and walked through the PTA sponsored Book Fair, which culminated with a "Snuggle Up and Read" evening activity during which nearly 20 faculty chose their favorite books to read to the students.

The 3rd grade wax museum was up and running at FES on the day Dr. Irvin and Principal Ramsey hosted my visit. What a treat it was to hear these amazing students take on the appearance and personalities of Ben Franklin, Amelia Earhart, Misty Copeland, Prince, Elvis, Coco Chanel, Julia Child, Roberto Clemente, and so much more. They were poised and repeated their memorized information to every attendee who 'pushed their button.' After listening to each student, Mr. Ramsey led a short tour of Foster, and it certainly is a vibrant place for learning!

Our schools are filled with energized students ready to learn and teachers empowered to be creative and innovative in ways that keep students interested and engaged. Thank you again to all of the principals, faculty, staff and students for permitting me to take a short peek into your daily work.

Extra Mile Award

This month's Extra Mile Award winners are two faculty members from the high school. They are high school math teacher and secondary mathematics department chair, Mr. Michael Locke and high school counselor, Mrs. Shelly Saba. Both were nominated by high school English teacher Mrs. Trish Shine and the high school principals Mr. Brian McFeeley, Ms. Natasha Dirda, Ms. Carlie McGinty and Mr. Joel Thompson for their excellent work in laying the foundation and developing the high school's freshmen orientation and transition program called "Link Crew". The yearlong Link Crew program includes an exciting 1/2 day orientation before the school year begins followed up by monthly meetings during the year led by trained Link Crew upperclassmen, with other freshmen only activities offered at other times during the year including a football tailgate, Cocoa and Cram semester exam study session, and an inflatable game night, just to name a few.

Mrs. Saba and Mr. Locke have been instrumental in initiating and strengthening the Link Crew program (including all of the things just mentioned) at the high school. Nominator Mrs. Shine noted that she personally thinks that the program has improved the soul of our school. Freshmen feel more connected, kinder, and more willing to lend a hand to those in need; Link Crew Leaders of other grades seem noticeably more invested in creating a positive, productive culture in the school.

The investment of time and energy that has gone into growing such a stellar program has been immeasurable. Mr. Locke and Mrs. Saba have provided many hours of volunteer service to make the Link Crew program a resounding success. Neither of them expect any financial compensation as they are honored to be a part of an effective program that helps so many of our school's children.

Aside from this, they are both dynamic and highly energetic people. Their enthusiasm is infectious for both students and colleagues. Mr. Locke and Mrs. Saba are truly an asset to our high school and district.

Budget

Tonight the Board will be asked to consider a \$96.6 million budget which preserves the programs which this community expects and our children deserve. There is no need for a millage increase this year, since we were able to balance this budget with significant cost savings in a couple of areas. We structured contracts for lower cost utilities, bringing our budget in this area to its lowest level in recent years; we bid out our transportation contract and found significant savings through a change in providers; and we took advantage of restructuring our first high school bonds bringing total savings to our community of \$7.6 million. Using \$900,000 of these savings, we were able to eliminate the need for a tax increase. In addition to using the savings to lower budgets over the next four years, we will now have an additional \$3.8 million to fund capital projects over the next few years. This was an enormous win for our community and I am proud to be part of the team that made this budget and the bond savings possible for our community.