



Message from the Superintendent



Dear Parents, Students, and Community Members,



It is an understatement to say that 2020 has been a challenging and extremely unusual year for all of us. I hesitate to add unprecedented, but since Thursday evening of March 12, when schools were mandated to close on Monday, March 16, everything in the world of education has been

turned upside down. As you know, we were closed for the remainder of the 2019-20 school year and all students were forced to learn virtually or were given paper learning packets. While working to overcome the numerous obstacles that were suddenly thrown our way to finish the school year including feeding students, graduating seniors, and finding ways to educate 2,350 students without having them in the buildings, we also spent the next six months preparing for the 2020-21 school year. We did this even though we were not given a roadmap from the state until June 30. We held several virtual meetings with our teachers, staff, and community to prepare for the upcoming school year. It was clear the vast majority of our parents favored in-person instruction for their children and we were committed to providing that option. However, like our neighboring schools, we also created a virtual option for those families that felt more comfortable keeping their children home. It is difficult enough to administer and teach students in one school setting, but now we had to develop and approve plans to run a virtual school as well as prepare to provide quality in-person instruction.

This edition of School Talk is scheduled for publication on Friday, December 11. I am writing this article on Tuesday, November 24, and I have no idea what the next 17 days will mean for our teachers, staff members, students, parents, and families. Will our high school students be allowed to return for in-person instruction on Wednesday, December 9? Will the rest of our students be forced into a remote learning option? As of this date, we have 6 positive cases in the district with 1 staff member and 5 students. However, we have 101 individuals who are in quarantine including 8 teachers. Many schools have been forced into remote learning because they are unable to fully staff their school district with teachers, bus drivers, cooks, and custodians. Teachers and students are much more successful with routines and schedules. This past year we have remained nimble and fluid as each day brought new challenges. Through these uncertain times, we are doing much more with fewer people, and it is easy to slip into a state of negativity and wish away 2020 and hope for a better 2021.

However, as I reflect back on 2020, I am reminded that this has truly been a year to be grateful as well. I know our community is proud of its school district. Almost all of our administrators and the vast majority of our teachers and staff choose to live in the North Branch District, and those who do not reside in North Branch, are part of the large amount of families who choose North Branch Schools through School of Choice. We understand that every decision we make not only affects your children and families, but our

children and our families as well. It is that "All In" mentality that matters and is a major reason that together we have been successful in educating all of our children thus far this year.

I would like to close by sharing with you some of the many reasons in North Branch Schools we choose to be thankful and grateful this past year:

PEOPLE:

- **Teachers and Support Staff:** I am constantly reminded of the main reason parents send their children to North Branch Schools and that is because of our teachers and support staff. Our teachers are dedicated and highly skilled professionals who truly care about each and every child. We have over 600 students who are School of Choice in North Branch Schools. Their families support our school district and frequent our local businesses. The parents and students are 100% Broncos and we are grateful they choose us!
- **North Branch Community:** Thank you for ALWAYS supporting North Branch Area Schools. You have always supported us financially and this past November you approved the Non-Homestead Tax which restored the 18 mill tax levy which was reduced to 17.8224 mills due to the increases in the taxable value of property in our school district. This tax did not raise property taxes to your primary residence. The State aid formula for funding public schools assumes districts will assess an 18 mill property tax levy to receive the full foundation allowance permitted by the state. Again, thank you for your continued support of North Branch Schools.

STUDENT OPPORTUNITIES:

- Accelerated Learning Opportunities K-12 with the Compass Program, AP Classes, STEM Academy, Online Learning, and Dual Enrollment programs;
- Comprehensive Special Education Programs including our VIP program at the HS;
- All-Star Reading Night, Math Night, 18th Annual Old Fashioned Family Christmas, Space Camp, Washington D.C. Trip, and Award winning Music and Theater Programs;
- State Competitive Athletic Programs available with NO student fees;
- Numerous clubs and student organizations such as BPA, Robotics and Quiz Bowl;
- State Recognized excellence with our Quest High School Alternative Education Program;
- A Board of Education commitment to provide the low class sizes in our elementary with an emphasis on K-2 class sizes averaging less than 23 per class.

FINANCIALLY STABLE SCHOOL DISTRICT:

- Our district spends its resources wisely and utilizes annual Board of Education approved 5-year plans to guide us financially. We have increased our fund equity from 5.9% in 2014 to 16% at the end of the 2019/2020 school year. We have done this while investing over 3 million dollars in facility, curriculum, technology and transportation improvements;

- Our Community Track Committee first met several years ago and identified the need for a new track. Roughly 15 members of this committee attended several meetings to help design the most cost effective way of replacing our present 6 lane track which was 26 years old and in disrepair. We were either going to save for a new track or have to condemn the 6 lane track. This past August, an 8 lane track and a new scoreboard was installed at the athletic complex. We are able to do this by identifying needs and saving over a period of years before moving forward with this project. In addition, we had a few anonymous donors and our Athletic Booster Club step forward to donate funds for the new scoreboard. We are grateful!
- We recently purchased 7 new propane busses for the district. We were able to do so because we applied for and received a grant reimbursing the district \$266,767.20 of the total cost of the buses or about 40% of the overall purchase price.
- We were able to renovate our high school auditorium this past summer with a brand new sound and lighting system. Everyone is looking forward to attending the first live performance put on by our amazing drama program.
- Last spring, we completed expansion of our elementary parking lot. With a significant increase in parents driving their children to school this year, I am grateful this project was completed before school started in the fall.
- We are well on our way to paying off the voter approved bonds in our district. In 2016, we were projected to make our final debt payment in 2041. The ending date has been accelerated by 3 years to 2038 which is a conservative estimate. We do our very best to maintain the excellent facilities and learning environment our community has provided for our children.

In closing, I am grateful for the patience and support of families and students. I think back to the first day of school when we had a mile long line of cars waiting to pick up students from the elementary. Almost every single parent offered words of encouragement to our staff as they feverishly worked to connect parents with children. I heard over and over "we are grateful you are open, thank you, and you will figure it out." That first day set the tone for this entire school year. We were so thankful for your attitude of gratitude that day and it inspired us to be better.

I am most thankful that I understand the reason we celebrate during the holiday season. I am appreciative that I live in a community where family and friends are a priority and people come together to lend a helping hand to those who need a little extra assistance especially during this time of the year. I hope you are able to spend quality time with your loved ones over the holidays. Our last day of school before the holiday break is Friday, December 18 and we will return to school on Monday, January 4, 2021.

With Gratitude,
Jim Fish, North Branch Superintendent



NBAS Drama Club *Amazes the Audience*



The cast and crew of Super Scary wowed the audience with the hilarious content. On Saturday, October 24th, the NBHS Drama Club put on a Virtual Fall play that was steamed through a partnership with "Broadway on Demand."

Working and rehearsing under less than ideal restrictions due to COVID, our students did an amazing job of pulling off this Halloween spoof!

Thanks to the talented cast and to all the adults who made it happen! A huge shout out to Mr. Sorensen without whom this would never have come to fruition. His complete dedication is what makes our Drama Department thrive! And the HUGEST thank you and kudos to the cast and crew of the NBHS Drama Club! You rocked the house!!! Thanks to anyone else we may have forgotten for helping make NBHS such an amazing school to grow in!

Snow Plow *Artists*



Snow Plow Artists pictured above, left to right: Kari Brown, Emily Foster and Ahna Freeman.

For the second straight year, the Lapeer County Road Commission has requested local High School Art students to paint one of their big plow blades.

Last year, NBHS students recreated "The Starry Night" by Vincent van Gogh. This year, our young artists recreated Edvard Munch's "The Scream".

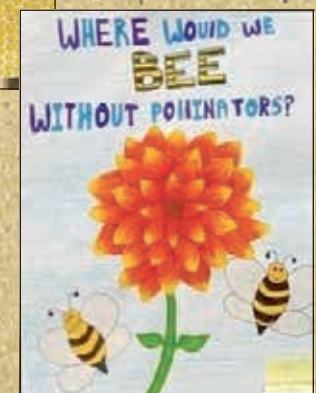


NBHS Artists *Win Poster Contest*



Congratulations to Alexandra Majeski, Gabrielle Redmond and Mikaela Larry! They competed in the Lapeer County Conservation District's annual poster contest and won! Our students competed in two different categories; 7th-9th grade and 10th-12th grade, so we had six opportunities to win and NBHS students took home three places! Alexandra Majeski's poster is now competing at the State level!

Awesome job ladies!



- ★ 7th-9th grade category:
Alexandra Majeski • FIRST place winner!
- ★ 10th-12th grade category:
Gabrielle Redmond • SECOND place winner!
- ★ 10th-12th grade category:
Mikaela Larry • THIRD place winner!



Quest Graduation *Inspires*



Despite having limited attendance for social distancing, and 3 venue changes in the 48 hours leading up to the ceremony, Quest graduation was an enormous success!

Thank you to North Branch Wesleyan Church who provided their football field and stands at a moments notice!

Our student speakers, **Jalen Lewis** and **Nycol Deming**, gave amazing speeches!



Let's See How Far We've Come



Quest staff had the wonderful opportunity to catch up with 2013 graduate **McKenzie Schodowski** when she came to speak at the 2020 graduation.

McKenzie has worked hard since graduation and is a President's Club Vendor Credit Specialist at Quicken Loans! Thank you for making the trek back to your roots, sharing your successes, and your kind words for our retiring secretary Sue Schneider!



Quest Senior Ryver Kotzke Awarded Sentinel Position in FFA

Quest senior Ryver Kotzke was recently awarded an officer's position as sentinel in the Lapeer County FFA.

As a sentinel, Ryver assists the FFA president in running meetings, and makes sure fellow members and classmates feel welcome to participate.

Ryver had this to say, "It's an honor to serve the FFA. I want a future in the veterinary sciences, and this opportunity will give me experience that will help with my future and with leadership and communication skills."



Enroll Today at Award Winning Quest High School!

Students interested in enrolling at Quest High School or obtaining more information about the programs offered at Quest can learn more about us on our facebook page at:

www.facebook.com/NBQuesthighschool/

To enroll at Quest contact Program Coordinator Corey Rosser by email at

crosser@nbbrncos.net

or by phone at 810-688-7581.

Quest & JMG Partner *to ensure career readiness!*

Quest High School partners with the Family Literacy Center of Lapeer in a couple of ways. One of our partnerships with FLC is through the Jobs for Michigan Graduates program (JMG).

JMG has helped Quest ensure that all of our graduates are not only job ready when they graduate, but career ready! In addition to hosting career fairs, JMG teacher Ashley Fanson also books members of the community in various career fields to discuss future options for our students. Those careers range from auto body, to landscaping, the reality.

Thanks Ms. Fanson for all you do!



Follow Quest High School on Facebook



<https://www.facebook.com/NBQuesthighschool/>



The Ruth Fox Constitutional Convention



8th graders in Mr. James' U.S. history class learned the value of compromise as they debated some of the major issues our country faced as it was just getting started. Each student selected a Founding Father to represent during a mock Constitutional Convention. It was very entertaining to see the students channeling their inner George Washington or James Madison! Each participant had to debate and vote as their chosen Founding Father would have.

Though the debate was rich, the real value of this exciting lesson was in the understanding that our country was built on compromise. Even though the Founding Fathers disagreed in some cases, their belief in freedom and democracy above all else ensured that our young country would survive.

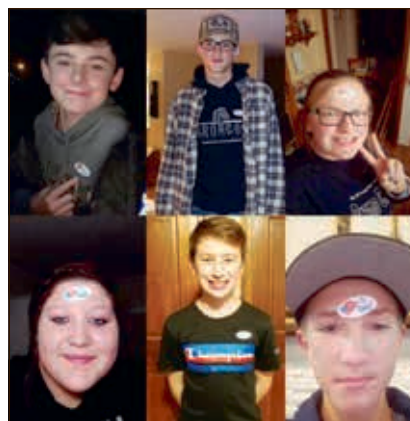
Some of our amazing students even dressed the part! Thanks to all of those who went above and beyond.



With 2020 being a Presidential Election year, Mr. James organized a school wide election which allowed our students to vote for the President, as well as their favorite subject. This mock election aligns with Social Studies standards across grades 5-8 and allowed our students to get their first glimpse of what many consider to be our most important civic duty. This year, adults weren't the only ones who were happy to show off their "I Voted" stickers.

RFMS 2020

Mock Presidential Election



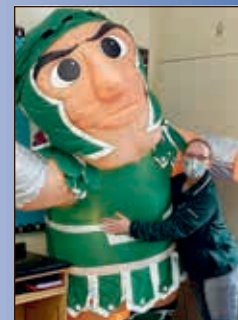
To take the realism of the process a step further, students had to provide a form of identification (lunch card) to prove their identity to receive a ballot, and were allowed to vote privately and anonymously. Following the ballot casting, Mr. James and Mrs. Stradinger's MTSS students tallied and tabulated the school totals to determine a winner. Raw voting data was also shared with the 8th grade math classes,

to allow them to integrate their findings into future lessons. Thanks to all of the students who participated.



PENNY WARS

This year the Ruth Fox Middle School once again participated in Penny Wars the week of the Michigan vs. Michigan State football game. Students put money into the corresponding jar to support their favorite team. Unlike the actual game, Michigan was once again victorious in the RFMS Annual Penny Wars over MSU. Over \$700 was raised in just 3 days, of which every penny will be used to support Ruth Fox students and their families who are in need throughout the year, including this upcoming holiday season.





Bronco Pride Masks

Staff and students alike have been very positive about the new mask requirements this school year. The new regulations have required students and staff to adapt how they teach and how they learn, but both groups have been doing a great job.

To go along with the district provided masks, the RFMS



School Store designed and is selling North Branch Bronco masks. These have been very popular among our students and community. Also, the RFMS teachers even created a t-shirt for the staff to wear, letting the students know that though they may not be able to see our faces, you still can't mask our Bronco pride.

Thanks to everyone for doing their part during these difficult times.



RFMS Core Values

Ruth Fox Middle School has adopted a Character Education program called Re-Connect (Re:Co), from the Core Essential Values. The Re:Co curriculum is geared towards Middle School students and provides visuals, announcements, activities, and lessons that support the value of the month. For example, with the holiday season, the value for December is Generosity.

To help reinforce the monthly Re:Co values throughout the year, the Ruth Fox PBIS Committee is ALL-IN by having posters being placed in the hallways and classrooms, the Re:Co parent update included in the building newsletters, having the Re:Co value being part of the morning announcements, and incorporating lessons into MTSS time.

Another great initiative is starting a Bronco Busted program. As students are caught with actions that support the Re:Co values, they receive a Bronco Busted ticket to be entered into monthly school wide drawings. We look forward to "busting" all of our great BRONCOS!



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LATEST UPDATES AND INFO

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@RUTHFOXMIDDLE



5th and 6th grade students at Ruth Fox created and sent postcards to local veterans, in honor of Veteran's Day to continue its deep appreciation of the service of all Veterans.

Rock Cycle

Our 6th Grade Ruth Fox students study the rock cycle and the flow of energy that drives this process.

To help students understand how this works, they were able to simulate the rock cycle in a fun science experiment. Students brought crayons in from home and began by creating sediment shavings. These shavings were then cemented together, simulating the process for creating sedimentary rocks. This created a simple sedimentary crayon rock. This rock was then subjected to heat and pressure, to create a metamorphic crayon rock. Finally, the crayon rock was subjected to a melting and cooling process to create an igneous crayon rock.

Students were able to walk away with not only their cool creations but also a deeper understanding of the rock cycle while having fun all the while.





Halloween Fun at NBE



North Branch Elementary successfully celebrated Halloween this year. Teachers and teams planned a variety of events, parties, and activities for our students. Though some of our traditions were noticeably missing – especially the ever-popular parade for parents, our celebrations were a success.

Students and teachers created new traditions: Halloween trivia battles, themed math puzzles, special snacks, and even an appearance from the cast of Finding Nemo.

Special thanks to all of the families who helped send in supplies, treats, and special goodies to make this a special day at North Branch Elementary.

NBE Pick-Up Times

BK/K - FRONT @ 2:50

1st - FRONT @ 3:10

2nd, 3rd & 4th - BACK @ 3:10

**Siblings will be released for pick-up at the time/place assigned to the YOUNGEST sibling.*



On October 22nd the NBAS Transportation Department lead a moving memorial to the late Fred Pasternak. Fred was an integral part of our district, supporting many departments over the years and serving selflessly for nearly four decades. This memorial was a great opportunity for some of our smallest FABS learners to see, first hand, the impact one person can have on a community.

Fred impacted numerous lives here in North Branch and his legacy will live on for generations to come. **Thank you for your service, Fred.**



NBE Books 4 Kids Program

Our partners at Literacy and Beyond, as well as the Lapeer United Way, have followed through on their Books 4 Kids program that was brought to a screeching halt last year.

Earlier in the school year all of our 1st-3rd grade students got the opportunity to expand their home library by book shopping and taking home several new books. It was a fantastic day and our students couldn't wait to read their new books!

Research supports that the best way to become a better reader is to practice. Having more books at home makes practicing easier, and helps our youngest broncos become lifelong readers.



Congratulations Barb Terauds!

In November, North Branch Elementary teacher, Barb Terauds, received the following email:

"On behalf of the Board of Directors of SHAPE-MI, I am pleased to inform you that your TriFound Grant application has been approved for funding. The Tri-Found Healthy Education Advocacy Program (H.E.L.P.) is designed to promote healthy, active lifestyles among school children in Michigan by supporting the teachers and schools who seek to provide high quality physical education programs. Ten (10) one thousand dollars awards have been made available for the 2020-21 school year through the generosity of Gary and Jill Harris, owners of TriFound based in Kalamazoo, Michigan. Congratulations! SHAPE-MI and TriFound are proud to provide support for your program."

We are thrilled that Barb was selected for such a grant, and cannot wait to see how these funds will help Barb provide new learning opportunities for our students. Thank you to all of our NBE teachers who are continually seeking opportunities to better the experiences we are able to provide our students.



Providing your child with nutritious, quality meals is our priority.

We are looking for substitute cooks and cashiers. Please contact (810) 688-2226.

North Branch Area Schools Food Service Department will continue to serve nutritious meals through this school year. All children ages 18 and under may receive meals at no cost, whether attending in-person or learning from a distance. This includes both breakfast and lunch. In this time of uncertainty, it is even more important to stay as healthy as possible. It is good to know that kids can still rely on safe and nutritious meals from school – no money needed! School meals are being provided at no charge to all students this school year.

APPLICATIONS

Families of students who have not turned in a completed free and reduced meal application since the 2019/2020 school year need to fill out a new application because their food service status has changed to a full pay status. However, this school year children who have full pay, reduced, and free meal status will continue to receive free meals throughout the school year through June 2021. If a new application is not received within the first month of the new 2021/2022 school year, those students with free and reduced-price school meals will roll over to full pay status.

Even though all meals are available at no cost during this school year (2020/2021), we still need families to complete the free and reduced meal application. This information is directly tied to other educational funding for North Branch Area Schools to support our students. Applications are available on the school's website at <http://www.nbbrncos.net> (Departments > Food Service > Food Service Documents) as well as through Skyward Family Access (email loginhelp@nbbrncos.net if you need your login information). Families can also call (810) 688-2226 to have a copy of the application sent

to them electronically or through the U.S. Postal Service. There is no need to come to school to complete or turn in the application. Stay safe – we can accept a mailed, faxed (810) 688-8321 or e-mailed application just as easily! Even though meals are free to all students, returning these applications is important too. So, don't delay – fill out that application today!

VIRTUAL MEALS

Families of children attending NBAS Virtual are encouraged to sign their children up for breakfast and lunch (up to 5 breakfasts and 5 lunches) each week by visiting www.nbbrncos.net, Schools tab, then NBAS Virtual Learning Program. Scroll down the page until you see "School Meal Information."

SPECIAL MEALS AND/OR ACCOMMODATIONS

If a doctor has determined that your child has a special food sensitivity/allergy that would prevent the child from eating the Regular school meal, the school will make ANY SUBSTITUTION PRESCRIBED BY A LICENSED PHYSICIAN. The physician's statement, including prescribed diet and/or substitution, MUST be submitted to the Food Service Department before any special diet can be given to your child. The Michigan Department of Education's Request for Special Dietary Needs Accommodations Form is available through the Food Service Department and available online at www.nbbrncos.net, located under the Food Service Documents tab, and needs to be filled out by a licensed physician. This provision is State mandated.

NBAS FOOD SERVICE POLICY

- Students are not allowed to charge more than 2 lunches (negative balance of more than \$10.00)

- A PB & J/Cheese sandwich with a fruit and a white milk will be offered at a charge of \$0.75 each occurrence, to the student who has a negative balance of \$10.00 or more.
- Ala Carte items are CASH ONLY or students MUST have funds on their Food Service Account. Charges are never allowed for Ala Carte items.
- If a student's balance is negative more than \$10.00, the student may still purchase lunch with cash, but they may NOT purchase Ala Carte items.
- A full lunch consists of 3 of 5 items offered, (though 5 items may be taken); main entrée, fruit, vegetable, bread, and milk.
- Purchasing milk alone is \$0.50 cents regardless of lunch account type.
- Adults and Staff are encouraged to have funds on their Food Service Accounts or pay at point of service. No charging is allowed.
- Adjustments will only be made by the Food Service Department.

MEALTIMES

	High School	RF/MS	Elementary
Breakfast	6:50am-7:15am	6:50am-7:15am	8:05am-8:38am
Lunch	10:37am-12:12pm	10:30am-11:55pm	11:00am-1:25pm

Thank you for your participation in the breakfast and lunch program at North Branch Area Schools. Please contact North Branch Schools Food Service Department at (810) 688-2226 to speak with Louise Nellenbach, Food Service Supervisor or Billie Dhooche, Secretary, about any questions or concerns. You may also visit our website under "departments" on the District Home Page for more information.



Congratulations

Congratulations to our Cross Country athletes that qualified to run at the State Championships! This is the first time since 1978 we've had THREE state qualifiers!

Evan Schapman
Haileigh Bissett
Karlie Schlaud

The race took place on Friday, November 6th at Michigan International Speedway in Brooklyn, MI!

