

IN

# Fox Chapel Area



## FOX CHAPEL AREA Community Sing Concert

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SUMMER 2017  
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# FOX CHAPEL AREA

## School News



### Fox Chapel Area School District

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



Dear Friends,

Collaboration. Teamwork. Perseverance. As I read the stories in this issue, I observed that our students are learning incredible things as they plan, design, and collaborate on projects in science, social studies, art, and technology. But as teachers and students stated, it takes collaboration, teamwork, perseverance, and tenacity to get past a problem and find a solution. One student discovered first-hand when building her “junkbot” for an Earth Day project at Kerr, “If it doesn’t work, keep trying.” The ultimate project completion very well may be even better than the original plan!

Persistence and teamwork has resulted in a plan to build a new Kerr Elementary School on the current school property. District officials have been working on a plan to upgrade Kerr to bring it to the same standards as our other three elementary schools.

The oldest building in the district, Kerr has undergone a number of renovations and construction projects over the years to serve the changing needs of its students. The multiple additions and renovations served as a good solution at the time. However, over the past several months it has become clear that it will be more cost effective to construct a brand-new building. A new school will not only address current needs, but will provide the potential for exciting learning programs and spaces for our students. It will also ensure that our students’ education will not be disrupted during an extensive renovation project. The School Board has approved a plan to build a new Kerr, with construction slated to begin in the spring of 2018. Please see the full story on page 15.

The district also faces other major ongoing challenges, as does every school district in the commonwealth. Our state legislators have been aware of these challenges for many years, and these include, in particular, the method of how funding revenues are generated for school districts and the state pension system. Although the recent proposal to replace the local property tax with an increase in a statewide income tax and sales tax is no longer being considered, the pressures to reform funding sources to pay for the education of our children will continue to be front and center. Solving these issues will take commitment, perseverance, and continued collaboration on the part of the state and school districts.

Our own Fox Chapel Area District Forum, an organization of parents and community members who are interested in the welfare of our students and the future of public education in our district, has identified several areas of concern that they want the community to be aware of. They have already hosted two meetings this year to discuss these pertinent issues. In addition to funding for education, the District Forum also addressed one of the most difficult challenges that public education faces today – the pension funding. In the 2017-2018 school budget, Fox Chapel Area must contribute \$14,762,367 to PSERS, up from \$13,486,962 this school year. The district took \$2 million from committed fund balance reserves this school year to pay for this debt, and anticipates taking another \$500,000 this coming school year. Other issues brought up at these meetings included the problems with current standardized testing and charter and cyber schools. This school year, the district has had to pay more than \$700,000 to six charter schools. Tuitions for charter schools, which must be paid by the local school districts, are based not on the budgets of the charter schools, but on the cost per pupil from the school district in which they live!

When I first came to this school district, I was impressed by the educational excellence that meets the high expectations of its residents. It is this high expectation and involvement of the community that continues to drive us to provide the best education possible for our students. I hope that our residents will continue to be aware of and involved in issues that impact public education. Once again, I thank you for your collaboration and your continued support.

Sincerely,

Gene Freeman, Ed.D.



## HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 2017-2018 PROPOSED FINAL BUDGET

The 2017-2018 Fox Chapel Area School District proposed final budget calls for budgetary expenditures of \$97,300,359. The increase in expenditures over the previous year's final budget is projected at \$1,917,356 or two percent. The proposed final millage rate for 2017-2018 is 19.3429 mills. This will be an increase of 0.3607 mills, or a 1.9 percent increase in the millage rate. The allowable increase under Act 1, the Taxpayer Relief Act, for 2017-2018 is 2.5 percent. It is estimated that this increase will generate an additional \$1.1 million to fund the district. One mill will equal approximately \$3.4 million.

The School Board approved the 2017-2018 proposed final budget at its regular business meeting May 8, 2017. The Board will discuss the proposed final budget June 5 and June 12 during its meetings. The Board is expected to pass a final 2017-2018 budget at its meeting on June 12. Residents are invited to attend the Board meetings on June 5 in the O'Hara Elementary School auditorium and June 12 in the high school large group instruction room. Both meetings begin at 7 p.m.

The 2017-2018 proposed final budget reflects the following:

- The overall budget by line item shows a decrease in expected expenditures, however, that is skewed by the increase in salary and benefits. Salary line items are expected to increase 3.6 percent from last year's budget. This is because there is no reduction of professional staff anticipated. The prior year had retirements factored into the budget projection.
- Premium rate costs for medical, dental, and vision insurance will each increase by 1.9 percent, and overall coverage costs are projected to increase by 4.2 percent. This is the first year that dental and vision rates have increased since the 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 school years, respectively.
- The school district's contribution rate paid to the Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) will increase from 30.03 percent to 32.57 percent. The school district will be contributing \$14,762,367 to PSERS in 2017-2018, compared to \$13,486,962 in 2016-2017 – a 9.46 percent increase in cost to the district. The PSERS trustees determine the contribution rate increase annually. A total of \$2 million was drawn down from the district's PSERS-committed fund balance in 2016-2017, and an additional \$500,000 is planned to be drawn down in the 2017-2018 school year to cover these increased costs.
- New textbook adoptions in both English Language Arts and science are planned for 2017-2018 which results in approximately an additional \$900,000 in one-time costs.
- Tuition for charter schools and other outside agencies continue to rise. The estimated increase for these expenditures is \$173,604 or 7.9 percent.

The 2017-2018 proposed final budget is endorsed by the district's Resource Planning Committee, a group of residents with financial and management backgrounds that provides additional expertise to the School Board on financial matters.

### ***PSERS and Future Challenges***

The district will continue to face difficult budget years in the near future. It is estimated that under the current rate structure proposed for funding the state retirement system (PSERS), the district will pay out nearly \$61 million over the next five years. These unprecedented increases – combined with the limitations on increasing tax rates imposed under Act 1 – have necessitated the district to prepare for shortfalls in the budget.

The district currently has committed fund balance reserves of \$10 million to cover the anticipated PSERS increases. The district utilized \$2 million of these funds in 2016-2017 to "bridge" the gap in funding for PSERS and will continue to use committed fund balance reserves until the tax rates can keep pace and fund these costs. The district plans to utilize \$500,000 from this same fund in 2017-2018 and each subsequent year to continue to "bridge" the gap. The district continues to reduce payroll costs through attrition and by implementing new instructional and administrative strategies to make the district more efficient and cost effective.

### **TAXPAYER ESTIMATED REAL ESTATE TAX LIABILITY**

The median home in the Fox Chapel Area School District in 2017 is assessed at \$210,000. The chart below depicts the estimated tax liability based on the school district millage rate of 19.3429 for the 2017 tax year using a home assessed at \$100,000; \$210,000 (median home); and \$400,000. The homestead exclusion is calculated in the change in tax liability.

		Median Home	
2016 Assessed Value	\$100,000.00	\$210,000.00	\$400,000.00
2016 Homestead Exclusion	(\$9,878.00)	(\$9,878.00)	(\$9,878.00)
2016 Net Assessed Value	\$90,122.00	\$200,122.00	\$390,122.00
2016 Millage Rate	18.9822	18.9822	18.9822
2016 Tax Liability	\$1,710.71	\$3,798.76	\$7,405.37
2017 Assessed Value	\$100,000.00	\$210,000.00	\$400,000.00
2017 Homestead Exclusion*	(\$9,787.00)	(\$9,787.00)	(\$9,787.00)
2017 Net Assessed Value*	\$90,213.00	\$200,213.00	\$390,213.00
2017 Millage Rate	19.3429	19.3429	19.3429
2017 Tax Liability*	\$1,744.98	\$3,872.70	\$7,547.85
Annual Increase	\$34.27	\$73.94	\$142.48
% Increase	2.00%	1.95%	1.92%
Monthly Increase	\$2.86	\$6.16	\$11.87

\*This number is based upon the estimated distribution of gaming funds provided by the Pennsylvania Department of Education on May 2, 2017.

- 1.) These amounts can be reduced by two percent if paid in full during the discount period.
- 2.) Senior citizens may qualify for a property tax rebate program available through the state.
- 3.) The market value/assessed value will be reduced by \$9,787 for those homeowners in the Fox Chapel Area School District with an approved homestead exclusion.



In addition, the district is preparing for future capital improvements and maintains a reserve to help fund these capital projects. The district issued bonds during 2013 and will have fully utilized those funds by the end of the 2016-2017 school year for the renovations at the high school, as well as to pay for a portion of the renovations at the middle school. The district issued bonds in May 2017 for capital improvement projects in process and in the planning stages at Dorseyville Middle School and the O'Hara, Fairview, and Kerr elementary buildings. The Board and administration are anticipating savings due to the low market interest rates on this new bond issue.

By implementing sound financial strategies to manage expenditures and anticipate revenue shortfalls, the district's future financial health continues to be stronger than many in the commonwealth. However, the district continues to plan for future shortfalls through long-range budget forecasts.

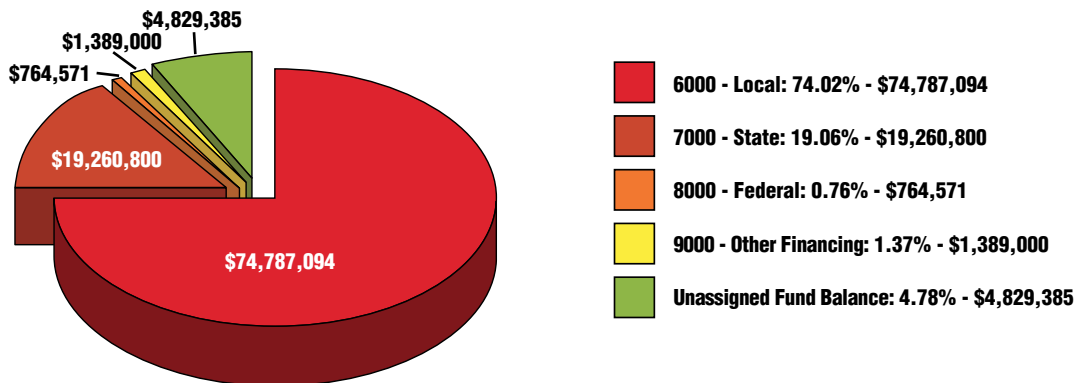
#### **Gaming Funds Distribution\***

On May 2, 2017, the Pennsylvania Department of Education provided the Fox Chapel Area School District with the amount of the district's share of gaming funds available for distribution. The proposed final budget includes a distribution of \$1,480,832. The method of distributing these funds, as prescribed by Act 1, the Taxpayer Relief Act, will be via the implementation of the homestead exclusion. Under this provision, any property in the school district that was approved by Allegheny County as a homestead will have the lesser of its taxable value, or an estimated \$9,787 of its taxable value, excluded for the purpose of calculating current school district real estate taxes for the 2017 tax year. The owners of the 7,837 properties in the district that qualified for the homestead exclusion will receive the equivalent of a \$188.95 reduction in their property taxes. Property owners who currently do not have an approved homestead exclusion will have the opportunity to apply again when the district sends out letters to those homeowners in December 2017.

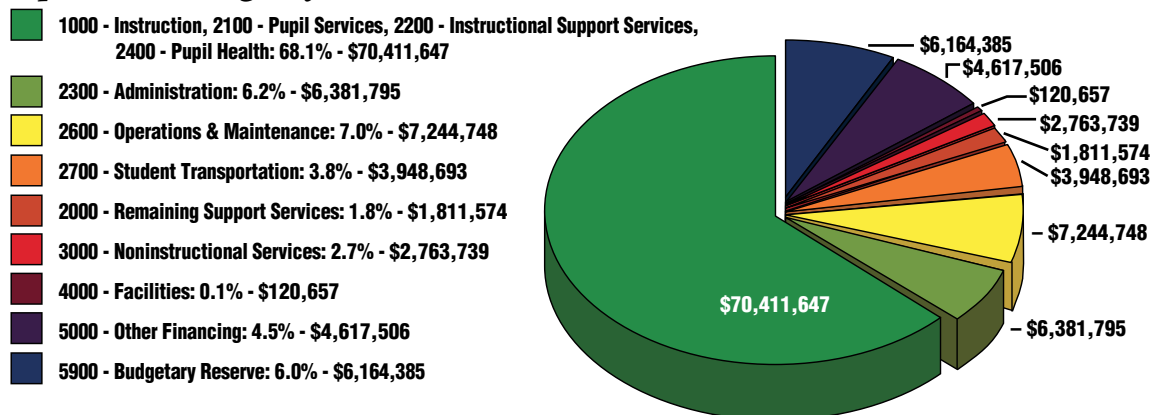
*\*Allegheny County has certified that there are 7,837 properties in the Fox Chapel Area School District that qualify for the homestead exclusion. If that number is adjusted by the county to include more or less properties, it could affect the amount of the final reduction.*

## 2017-2018 PROPOSED FINAL BUDGET REVENUES & EXPENDITURES

### **Revenues/Unassigned Fund Balance**



### **Expenditures/Budgetary Reserve**



## PROPOSED FINAL BUDGET INSIGHT



### REGULAR INSTRUCTION 1100

2017-2018.....	\$47,645,545
2016-2017.....	\$43,961,561
Increase of .....	\$3,683,984
% of change .....	8.38%
Cost per student.....	\$11,796
% of budget .....	48.97%

#### ***Includes:***

Regular instructional program salaries and fringe benefits for teachers in addition to textbooks, district program contracts, supplies, and equipment.

#### ***Comments:***

1. Includes salary and fringe benefit increases for professional staff members, as well as increased costs of retiree payouts due to retirements.
2. Includes a one-time cost for new textbook adoptions.
3. Includes a reduction in Allegheny Intermediate Unit services.



### SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS 1200

2017-2018.....	\$11,781,017
2016-2017.....	\$12,116,064
Decrease of .....	(-\$335,047)
% of change.....	(-2.77%)
Cost per student.....	\$2,917
% of budget.....	12.11%

#### ***Includes:***

Salaries and fringe benefits for special education and gifted teachers and paraprofessionals. Services are mandated for life skills and learning, emotional, autistic, hearing, vision, orthopedic, and speech/language support, as well as gifted education. Also includes occupational and physical therapies, specialized materials, technology, purchased services, and tuition.

#### ***Comments:***

1. The cost for services requested from the Allegheny Intermediate Unit is increasing by \$86,600 based on anticipated needs of students.



### ADDITIONAL INSTRUCTION 1300, 1400 & 1500

2017-2018.....	\$1,690,384
2016-2017.....	\$1,669,881
Increase of .....	\$20,503
% of change.....	1.23%
Cost per student.....	\$419
% of budget.....	1.74%

#### ***Includes:***

Vo-tech, homebound, Title I services, summer and Saturday classes, and support to nonpublic schools through federal grants.

#### ***Comments:***

1. The increase is due to A.W. Beattie Career Center 2017-2018 costs.
2. Costs fluctuate annually based on the number of students who require services.



### PUPIL PERSONNEL 2100

2017-2018.....	\$3,760,426
2016-2017.....	\$3,820,003
Decrease of .....	(-\$59,577)
% of change.....	(-1.56%)
Cost per student.....	\$931
% of budget.....	3.86%

#### ***Includes:***

Salaries and fringe benefits for school counselors, district psychologists, a share of the administrative staff in charge of the program, and support staff. Supplies, services, and equipment to operate the program are also included.

#### ***Comments:***

1. Includes decreased budgeted amounts for outside educational programs/professional services.



### INSTRUCTIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES 2200

2017-2018.....	\$4,600,036
2016-2017.....	\$4,921,942
Decrease of .....	(-\$321,906)
% of change.....	(-6.54%)
Cost per student.....	\$1,139
% of budget.....	4.73%

**Includes:**

Salaries and fringe benefits for school librarians, curriculum coordinators, and support staff. Supplies, equipment, and purchased services for curriculum development, audio visual, library, educational television, technology, and computer-assisted instruction, as well as funds to support safety and security are also included.

**Comments:**

1. Continued purchase of technology equipment, software, and supplies as well as replacement costs for classroom and staff equipment that is obsolete.
2. Curriculum and staff development travel and professional services costs have been reduced.



### ADMINISTRATION 2300

2017-2018.....	\$6,381,795
2016-2017.....	\$6,688,221
Decrease of .....	(-\$306,426)
% of change.....	(-4.58%)
Cost per student.....	\$1,580
% of budget.....	6.56%

**Includes:**

Salaries and fringe benefits for district office staff, school principals, and clerical support staff. Expenditures for tax collection and legal services are also included.

**Comments:**

1. Includes cost of supplies and software related to the administrative offices, and additional staff development for administrative staff.
2. Includes costs for advertising and printing services.
3. Increase in cost for support substitutes and playground/cafeteria aides.



### PUPIL HEALTH 2400

2017-2018.....	\$934,239
2016-2017.....	\$907,131
Increase of.....	\$27,108
% of change.....	2.99%
Cost per student.....	\$231
% of budget.....	0.96%

**Includes:**

Salaries and fringe benefits for the nursing staff and a clerk. Also includes the fees for doctor and dental exams and nursing services the district must provide for private and parochial schools. Supplies and equipment to operate the program are also included.

**Comments:**

1. Includes the increase of salary and benefit costs.
2. Includes reduced spending toward travel and general supplies.



### BUSINESS/DATA SERVICES 2500 & 2800

2017-2018.....	\$1,694,424
2016-2017.....	\$2,025,146
Decrease of .....	(-\$330,722)
% of change .....	(-16.33%)
Cost per student.....	\$420
% of budget .....	1.74%

**Includes:**

Salaries and fringe benefits of business/data office staff along with supplies, expenses, and purchased services to conduct the business and data processing functions of the district. Also includes expenditures for video, voice, data networking equipment, and districtwide duplicating equipment, as well as district printing and copying charges.

**Comments:**

1. Decrease is due to the removal of costs associated with the initial setup and training costs for a financial and human resources software management system which was initiated in 2016-2017.
2. Decrease due to staffing changes and reductions in costs.



### OPERATIONS & MAINTENANCE 2600

2017-2018.....	\$7,244,748
2016-2017.....	\$7,304,063
Decrease of .....	(-\$59,315)
% of change.....	(-0.81%)
Cost per student.....	\$1,794
% of budget.....	7.45%

**Includes:**

Salaries and fringe benefits for the custodial and maintenance staff plus utility costs, custodial supplies, and equipment. Services needed to maintain the district's physical plant are included, plus salaries and fringe benefits for those responsible for the coordination of the operation and maintenance of the district's facilities.

**Comments:**

1. There is an increase in utility costs for electricity.
2. There is a decrease for supplies required to maintain buildings and grounds.



## STUDENT TRANSPORTATION 2700

2017-2018.....	\$3,948,693
2016-2017.....	\$4,205,842
Decrease of.....	(\$257,149)
% of change.....	(-6.11%)
Cost per student.....	\$978
% of budget.....	4.06%

### ***Includes:***

The transportation contract with the bus contractor for all of the district's regular transportation including private, parochial, and special needs schools. Also includes transportation for state-mandated early intervention programs for prekindergarten-age children (this transportation is also provided throughout the summer months, as well as during the school year).

### ***Comments:***

1. This budget reflects a decrease in costs due to staffing changes.



## OTHER ADMINISTRATIVE SERVICES 2900

2017-2018.....	\$117,150
2016-2017.....	\$132,817
Decrease of.....	(\$15,667)
% of change.....	(-11.80%)
Cost per student.....	\$29
% of budget.....	0.12%

### ***Includes:***

The district's share of the Allegheny Intermediate Unit (AIU) administrative budget and funds for districtwide safety services.

### ***Comments:***

1. The decrease is based on estimated costs for safety committee expenditures and costs for AIU services.



## NONINSTRUCTIONAL SERVICES 3000

2017-2018.....	\$2,763,739
2016-2017.....	\$2,621,541
Increase of.....	\$142,198
% of change.....	5.42%
Cost per student.....	\$684
% of budget.....	2.84%

### ***Includes:***

Salaries and supplies for student activities and athletic programs, in addition to transportation and event management for these programs.

### ***Comments:***

1. The costs of supplemental contracts and officials' fees are increasing.
2. The costs for supplies, transportation services, new uniforms, and field/facility maintenance for interscholastic events are increasing.



## FACILITIES 4000

2017-2018.....	\$120,657
2016-2017.....	\$251,700
Decrease of.....	(\$131,043)
% of change.....	(-52.06%)
Cost per student.....	\$30
% of budget.....	0.12%

### ***Includes:***

Funds for site and building improvements.

### ***Comments:***

1. Costs include painting, athletic facilities improvements, emergency lighting installation, and ceiling tile replacements.
2. Because of the recent and current construction projects, most building improvement costs are included with the construction fund and not within the general fund.



## OTHER FINANCING 5000

2017-2018.....	\$4,617,506
2016-2017.....	\$4,757,091
Decrease of.....	(\$139,585)
% of change.....	(-2.93%)
Cost per student.....	\$1,143
% of budget.....	4.75%

### ***Includes:***

Debt service (mortgage) payments on building renovations, refunds of tax payments received in previous years, and financing for capital leases on computer equipment.

### ***Comments:***

1. The budget has been decreased for prior year tax refunds.
2. Last year's budget included a one-time transfer of funds to the athletic capital fund that is not being done this year.

*Salary and fringe benefit costs are increased for all district personnel in all budget categories.*

*The 2016-2017 budget figures reflect the adjusted budget as a result of transfers that occurred throughout the school year.*

*The 2017-2018 budget figures reflect amounts closer to prior year averages which allows for a more accurate number.*



# DISTRICT TO BUILD A NEW KERR SCHOOL

*Work to Start in Spring 2018*

The Fox Chapel Area School Board voted on May 8 to begin preparations to build a new Kerr Elementary School on the current Kerr School property. Following careful and thoughtful consideration and research, the administration and Board determined that Kerr is becoming inadequate, both structurally and programmatically, to continue to serve the diverse needs of its students. The new construction will provide critical updates that will bring Kerr to the same standards as the other district elementary schools. The cost for construction of a new Kerr is estimated between \$19-\$21 million. The School Board authorized a new bond issue to fund construction and renovation work at its May 2017 meeting for projects in process and in the planning stages at Kerr, as well as at Dorseyville Middle School and Fairview and O'Hara elementaries. The district administration held a community meeting prior to the School Board bond issue vote to discuss the plans for a new Kerr.

**Brief History:** Built in the late 1920s, Kerr is the oldest school in the district and the building has undergone several construction and renovation projects since it opened. A study of district facilities that began a few years ago identified a number of major deficiencies and the need for upgrades in the nearly 90-year-old building.

Areas of the school in definite need of attention include the roof, the HVAC system, the small cafeteria, the narrow school corridors, the antiquated electrical wiring and plumbing, and the limited access from one side of the building to the other on the first floor. Additionally, a new entrance would enhance safety and security.

**Renovations Considered:** The district considered renovating Kerr, but determined that due to the age of the building, that would only serve as a short-term fix as the need for ongoing improvements and additional renovations would continue to emerge. A major renovation to address the current inadequacies of the existing Kerr School would cost between \$9-\$11 million in the short term, with continuous piecemeal renovations and improvements actually costing the district more money in the long run. A new building will not only address current deficiencies, but would include new spaces to enhance the overall learning environment of Kerr. Plus, students would not be displaced during the construction process. Additionally, there is no plan to redistrict the boundaries of the elementary schools. The district may also be eligible for PlanCon funds that would result in some reimbursement of construction costs from the state.

The project will tentatively go out to bid by late winter of 2018, with construction beginning that spring. Completion is targeted

for the summer of 2019, and Kerr students should be able to begin the 2019-2020 school year in their brand-new school.

**New Programs Being Considered:** One of the highlights of the new school will be the inclusion of a collaboratory cluster. This space will allow for a large, central area where students will come together to work on projects, conduct research, collaborate, and plan. Included in the collaboratory cluster will be a makerspace, a SMALLab, and a computer science and robotics lab classroom, as well as the library. The space could also be available for use by students in other schools in the district.

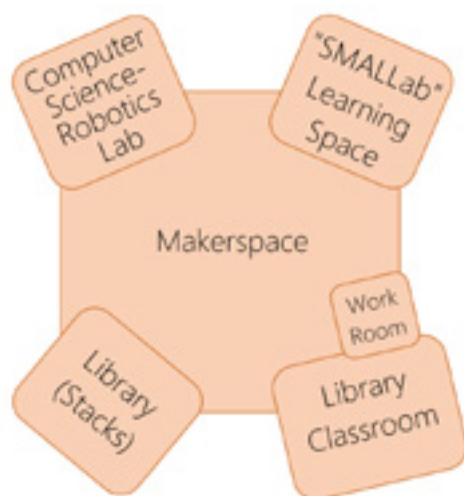
Another highlight of the new construction is the possibility of a language immersion program. This program would allow students to be taught in both English and Spanish for the

entire school day. Research has shown that students who engage in a dual-immersion program outperform their peers in standardized assessments as well as in other measures. During its first year, Kerr will host one class of students in grade one in the immersion program and students from all four elementary schools will be offered the opportunity to enroll. If more students apply than can be accommodated, a lottery system could be used to choose program participants. The next year, the immersion program will expand to include a grade two class, and will continue until there is one class for each grade level, one through five.

Other features of the new Kerr may include space for a pre-kindergarten program to help students better prepare for school, as well as more

open areas outside of the building that would be designated for instructional purposes. Finally, the school will include the capability to use more advanced technologies to enhance student learning.

**Other School Renovations:** Building a new Kerr Elementary School will be the final in a string of recent and upcoming renovations to the schools. Extensive renovations at the high school were completed in 2016 and included the addition of a new natatorium and a new front entrance to the building, as well as a major renovation and upgrade of the commons area, library, cafeteria, and auditorium. The roof at Dorseyville Middle School has already been replaced and other major work will be completed by the end of this summer including a new makerspace, a new main office, HVAC system and gym upgrades, and a new driveway. Upgrades to Fairview and O'Hara elementary schools include a new roof at both buildings, as well as HVAC system and hallway upgrades and new office areas. Additional upgrades at O'Hara will include a makerspace and three special education rooms and a renovation of the library.



The Kerr Elementary School collaboratory cluster will include a central makerspace surrounded by a SMALLab, a computer science and robotics lab classroom, as well as the library.



Composer and song leader Nick Page rehearsed with the 170-member all-elementary chorus prior to the Community Sing Concert.

## SONG LEADER SHARES JOY OF MUSIC

### ***2012 Gala Funds Made March Visit Possible***

“Do ya shine? Really shine!” Nationally-known, Boston-based song leader and composer Nick Page, playing on his ukulele, led students in a joyful opening song during his March 30 and 31 visit to the school district. He traveled to all four elementary schools before bringing the community together for a concert that featured a 170-singer, all-elementary chorus.

Mr. Page, who has been involved in music and singing all of his life, said that his family would gather to sing together every Saturday night. He believes that students have an inborn love of singing and that music makes them “come alive.” He celebrates the music of many cultures and spreads his musical message by visiting schools and communities across the country. “My goal is for students to let the light in and let the light out. Music is good for us because it lets us let it out – feelings, emotions, joy,” Mr. Page said.

“Nick Page brought so much joy with his music-making and his gift of song leading,” said Kerr elementary music teacher and elementary music chairperson Christy Ehman, who accompanied him to each of the schools and also helped out as needed on piano and as a song leader.

According to Mrs. Ehman, when Mr. Page arrived on the first day, “We started at Hartwood where I got my first glimpse of Mr. Page at work

with the students. I was very impressed with how right away he expected nothing but the best from them and encouraged them to ‘shine.’ At Kerr he asked several teachers to come up and help lead one of the songs to get the students even more excited.” She added that Mr. Page had written a violin part for substitute music teacher Johanna Chastek, literally, the night before, and she got up and played it during the assembly at Fairview. Mrs. Chastek repeated the performance at the Community Sing Concert that evening when the students sang, Mr. Page’s original composition “Fairest Lady.”



Mr. Page’s music and teaching incorporates singing, stories, movement, and dance.

Photo Courtesy Hill’s Studio





Photo Courtesy Hill's Studio

During the day, Mr. Page visited all four elementary schools and led whole-school assemblies. Here, he leads the entire O'Hara Elementary School student body in song.



At Kerr Elementary, Mr. Page asked several teachers to help lead one of the songs. Students also played Orff Instruments.

Mr. Page worked with the fourth and fifth grade choruses at each school for about an hour before their classmates from kindergarten-grade five gathered with them. Although the students knew some of Mr. Page's songs, he brought a level of fun and spontaneity to each of his performances with the students.

Following the Community Sing Concert, O'Hara fifth grade chorus member Emily Torbert exclaimed, "It was really exciting. We knew what we were going to do, but we didn't know how it would happen! It was really spontaneous."

The songs Mr. Page brought to the district have universal appeal. In addition to "Do You Shine?" the students sang "Hamba Nathi," "Come to the table and share our bread," Mr. Page explained the meaning of the song to the fourth and fifth graders at O'Hara as he taught the students the hand motions to make the invitation.

At the evening performance, once again, Mr. Page acted as song leader as he led the all-elementary school fourth and fifth grade chorus. One of the songs they sang, "Train Song," was an arrangement commissioned by the Fox Chapel Area School District music department specifically for Mr. Page's visit. He explained that "Train Song" actually combines two songs that come from opposite sides of the world, but share the same message of sadness when loved ones leave on a train, and the happiness experienced when the loved ones return. The students raised their hands, danced, and played on Orff instruments as they followed Mr. Page's lead. They also sang Mr. Page's song "Fairest Lady." For the finale, Mr. Page invited all children from the audience to come up on stage to join in as they sang "This Land is Your Land."

Kerr fourth grader Pierce Osterholm said he especially enjoyed singing with the all-elementary school chorus and that he liked working with Mr. Page. "He had a good sense of humor. It was a fun experience and I liked performing on stage with the other schools' choirs."

Mrs. Ehman commented, "Many of the students that I spoke to said that they enjoyed singing with all of the other elementary schools on the stage, so maybe we need to think about doing that more often."

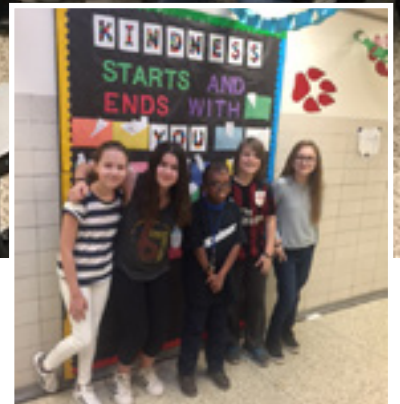
Although Fox Chapel Area elementary students sing, play instruments, improvise, dance, and create in their regular music classes, Mrs. Ehman said, "Mr. Page did all of those things with some new material that the students really enjoyed. The whole auditorium was energized and I know the students will remember this special performance and visit for a long time."

The Community Sing Concert, the commissioning of "Train Song," and Mr. Page's visit to the elementary schools were all made possible from funds raised at the district's 2012 Community Gala event.



During the community sing concert finale, Mr. Page invited all of the children in the audience to come up on the stage to join the all-elementary school chorus in song.





## SIXTH GRADER SPREADS JOY THROUGH #KINDNESS PROJECT

An act of kindness can be like a ray of sunshine. Dorseyville Middle School sixth grader Simon Shiferaw wanted everyone in his school community to experience the joy that an act of random kindness can bring, so he developed his Genius Hour project to make that happen.

Through Simon's efforts, March 21 was designated as #kindness day at DMS. At the beginning of the day, teachers showed a video where Simon explained his plan and urged everyone in the school to perform kind acts for one another. Every student received a #kindness bracelet, and teachers and a few students wore #kindness T-shirts. The rest of the student body wore blue shirts in honor of Simon's #kindness day. Throughout the entire day (and the next several weeks),

students and staff carried out their own random acts of kindness and a bulletin board near the school counseling office featured suggestions of kind acts. By the end of the day, #rak4simon (random acts of kindness for Simon) could be found on both Twitter and Facebook.

Seventh grader Gabby Uku said she loved that Simon was so willing to share his kindness project with

the whole school in order to make it a better place. "It just astounds me. Every day Simon comes to school with a smile on his face and he's one of the sweetest sixth graders that I ever met! He'd do anything for anyone and he's sweet and kind to everybody," Gabby said.

Simon even took his kindness project on the road to Hartwood Elementary School (his former school), where students enthusiastically received his message and carried out their own kindness initiative.

Dorseyville Middle School counselor Kristin Pollick expressed that she hopes Simon's project carries on. "I am so proud of Simon! It grew faster than we ever expected," she said. "We hope everyone keeps passing it on and doing as many random acts of kindness so that Simon's idea keeps spreading."

Gabby added, "It was nice to see that Simon's project made an impact on the school."

As a thank you to all of the DMS students, Simon awarded them with a popcorn treat at the end of March. Then, as a special thank you to Simon, Gabby made a special poster and had many classmates sign it. "Simon made such an amazing impact on our school and this was the least I could do to show our appreciation," she said.

Genius Hour, scheduled on most Fridays at DMS, is a program that enables students to develop and work on independent projects that they are interested in and feel passionate about. Many of the students work on fundraisers and service projects to benefit others.





# TRASH OR ART – IT ALL DEPENDS ON HOW YOU LOOK AT IT

It's true that one person's trash is another person's treasure. Kerr fifth graders found they could repurpose used cardboard, plastic bottles, and other recyclables to create unique works of art. When they combined the recycled-material art project with their knowledge of computer programming and coding, they created robotic-driven "junkbot" works of art. Fittingly, their finished creations were on display at an art show in celebration of Earth Day on April 20.



One of the creators of "Pizza-Pie-a!" demonstrates how the pepperoni moves and the crust lights up on the junkbot creation. The two students came up with the idea, "because we were hungry and we wanted pizza."

Computer teacher Stan Strzempek said that he and art teachers Becky Sonnenberg and Melanie Tunney collaborated to combine art and computer programming lessons. The assignment took about three weeks to complete and students worked in teams and used their knowledge to build and code Hummingbird Robots that could be incorporated into the design of their art projects – creating junkbots.

"Many of the students raided their recycling bins at home for building supplies," Mr. Strzempek said. "They used everything from milk jugs to old CDs." He added, "Their final projects were amazing."

Inspired by the computer-animated film, "Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs," Maria Costantino and Julia Baker created a dancing strawberry. The two friends explained that they used a pizza box and Lunchables and candy containers to create their work of art. Julia said a lesson they learned from the project was, "If it doesn't work, keep trying." Maria said they also learned about computer



Kerr Elementary School students were invited to visit the fifth grader's Earth Day junkbot art show.

coding to create the light and movement and added, "But most of all, we learned about teamwork." Both girls noted that they are still friends – even after all of the trial and error. "It tested our friendship," they said laughing.

Andrew Wagner, who worked with Devin Charles to create a pizza with rotating pepperoni slices, said they also liked the Hummingbirds. "I like how you can make all kinds of things with only a few pieces," Andrew stated.

Mr. Strzempek commented, "While the students may have learned about art, programming, and robotics, there were definitely some underlying themes happening in the background. This project promoted creativity, collaboration, and problem solving – three important skillsets students need to be successful at school, at home, and in their community."



The creators of "Happy Dog" used a water bottle for the dog's tail and programmed their Hummingbird so that the tail wagged in a circular motion and the dog's eyes lit up.



A student shows how she and her partner incorporated the Hummingbird into their "Paris Meows" project. The Eiffel tower lit up and the cat in the basket moved back-and-forth.

Inspired by Eileen Healy's interest in travel and Sophia Wise's love for cats, the girls built an Eiffel Tower and a cat that moved in a basket made from a paper-clip box. They said they enjoyed the positive responses of their schoolmates who commented on how cute the cat was. "To see people appreciate it was really nice," Sophia said.

The entire Kerr student body was invited to view the junkbot art show. Everyone seemed to be impressed with the colors, the lights, and how each junkbot moved. Fourth grader Ava Andrascik said, "I think they're really cool. They're all unique and different." But she said what really impressed her was, "You usually think of engineers doing this. When you think of fifth graders doing this, it's pretty amazing!"



## STUDENTS WIN MEDALS IN NATIONAL ART COMPETITION

Four Fox Chapel Area High School students were recently named winners in The National Scholastic Art Awards of 2017. Senior Bryanna Urso received a Gold Medal for her photograph, “Water Droplets,” and sophomore Sofia Porter Bacon won a Gold Medal for her digital art, “How Aliens Return the Cows They Abducted.” Additionally, senior Elaina Graca won a Silver Medal for her photograph, “Tia Ica,” and sophomore Paige Johnson won a Silver Medal for her jewelry, “Gothic Bracelet.” Bryanna and Sofia and their Fox Chapel Area teachers, Amy Wickman and Christine Smith, have been invited to attend a ceremony at the world-famous Carnegie Hall in New York City on June 8.

The Scholastic Art & Writing Awards program continues to be the nation’s longest-running, most prestigious educational initiative supporting student achievement in the visual and literary arts. This year, more than 330,000 works of art and writing were submitted by students in grades 7-12 through regional contests, and less than one percent were recognized at the national level. Prior to being named national winners, all four Fox Chapel Area students were named Gold Key winners in the Pittsburgh Arts Region of The Scholastic Art Awards of 2017. Gold Key works were then judged at the national



level by a panel of creative-industry experts. Approximately 2,500 students were selected as the most talented young artists and writers in the nation by receiving national Gold or Silver Medals.

## STUDENTS SIGN TO PLAY SPORTS AT COLLEGIATE LEVEL

Fox Chapel Area High School student athletes recently signed and committed to Division I, II, and III colleges and universities. The students are: Annamarie Alfery – Soccer – University of Akron, Gabriella Badway – Basketball –



Students from the Class of 2017 who signed to play sports in college.

Le Moyne College, Adam Cook – Cross Country/Track – Allegheny College, Anthony Cordaro – Golf – Lehigh University, Gary Davis – Football – Westminster College, Deena DeBaldo – Soccer – Duquesne University, John Feczko – Football – Case Western Reserve University, Jake Livingston – Basketball – Denison University, Madeline Lucey – Soccer/Track – Washington & Jefferson College, Michael Mahon – Wrestling – Waynesburg University, Megan McCrady – Lacrosse – Georgetown University, Nicholas McRandal – Baseball – Mercyhurst University, Maia Pauley – Swimming – Pomona College, Jared Pegher – Wrestling – Ohio University, Conner Romango – Football – Bucknell University, Michael Snowball – Soccer – Baldwin Wallace University, Bryanna Urso – Soccer/Basketball – Allegheny College, Dixon Veltri – Soccer – University of North Carolina Wilmington, Alexandra Wessel – Lacrosse – Oberlin College, Calle Zmenkowski – Softball – University of Pittsburgh-Greensburg, and Houruiyang Zong – Football – Case Western Reserve University.



# STUDENTS ORGANIZE FIRST AREA HIGH SCHOOL HACKATHON

**H**ackathons are popular at college campuses around the world. However, there are not many opportunities for high school students to participate in these day-long competitions. For the first time in the Pittsburgh area – and among one of the first in the state and nation – three Fox Chapel Area High School students organized a high school hackathon, FCHacks.

On March 25, more than 185 students in grades 8-12 from 28 schools gathered at Fox Chapel Area High School to discover, first-hand, how exciting computer science and engineering can be. The teams of students conceptualized an idea and then used hardware and software to take their idea and turn it into reality using computer science and engineering skills. Projects at a hackathon are built from scratch and can include apps, drones, games, robots, and more.

Fox Chapel Area High School's Hackathon was unique because it was organized by students – seniors Mihir Garimella and Bliss Uribe and junior Andreas Paljug. According to Mihir, about 30 percent of the students who came to the hackathon were beginners and had never written a single line of code before. Students with more experience were also challenged by building more complex projects. Mentors from schools, universities, and tech companies around the region were on hand to help the students with their projects.

“We think FCHacks was a great way to show students how the skills they might have learned out of a book in a computer science class can be applied to make virtually anything they can dream up,” Mihir commented.

Another interesting part of FCHacks was a pitch workshop, taught by professors from the Katz School of Business at the University of Pittsburgh. Mentors showed students how to effectively present their projects to the judges.

A science fair-style expo, as well as an awards ceremony, concluded the event. Prizes were awarded for the best projects, as well as a special prize for beginners.

“The fact that so many students were willing to wake up early on a Saturday, spend the entire day building projects, and left excited about what they'd built is really inspiring to us – and, for us, that makes the event a huge success,” Mihir said.

According to Fox Chapel Area School District Superintendent Gene Freeman, Ed.D., the district is committed to supporting



1. The winning team's project was entitled "Mobile Music" and was a portable music sleeve that enabled musicians to practice their violin fingerings "on the go." Here, the group presented their completed project to a team of judges. The team included three students from Fox Chapel Area and one from Thomas Jefferson High School. 2. Three Fox Chapel Area High School students organized the first-ever FCHacks. 3. A team of students tested their idea at FCHacks. 4. Students discussed their project ideas with mentors. 5. Each project was built from scratch.

its students as regional and national leaders. “We are one of the few districts that empower students to host conferences for others. Typically, conferences and workshops that positively impact students are organized and facilitated by adults. In the Fox Chapel Area, we believe that students also have much to offer and with that in mind, we actively cultivate opportunities for our students to take leadership roles. FCHacks is one example of many more to come!”

FCHacks was free for attendees, thanks to the title sponsor, Eaton. Other sponsors included Birchmere Ventures, Net Health, the Software Engineering Institute at CMU, BirdBrain Technologies, and .tech domains.

A video highlighting FCHacks is available on the district's website at [www.fcasd.edu](http://www.fcasd.edu), and on the Fox Chapel Area School District YouTube Channel.



The framing of the mobile Fab Lab was delivered in late April. High school students from the technology education department completed the construction and outfitted the inside of the mobile lab.

## MOBILE FAB LAB TO ENHANCE LEARNING FOR YOUNG STUDENTS

*Made Possible by The Grable Foundation*

Fab Labs, developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), are digital fabrication laboratories set up to inspire people and entrepreneurs (and students!) to turn their ideas into new products and prototypes by giving them access to advanced digital manufacturing technology. Thanks to a grant from The Grable Foundation, Fox Chapel Area High School students have designed and built a mobile Fab Lab that has been outfitted with the latest technological equipment. It will be used within the district for elementary students, as well as shared with other schools. Justin Papariello, Fab Lab manager, led Fox Chapel Area High School engineering and other technology education students in equipping the mobile Fab Lab in a tiny house in partnership with 84 Lumber Tiny Living.

"We think the Fox Chapel Area School District is the first to put a Fab Lab in a tiny house," said Mr. Papariello. The frame of the house was prefabricated and was delivered at the end of April. The students worked on everything else, from windows to siding to electrical wiring. Additionally, while outfitting the Fab Lab, they were required to create unique solutions for space confinement. As a result, they built objects that can be used for other things, such as a table that can be converted into a chair and/or a desk. "This hands-on, student-driven project

is known as an 'authentic' learning experience," according to Mr. Papariello. The inside of the tiny house includes everything people would normally find in a Fab Lab – 3-D printers, CNC machines, laser engravers, vinyl cutters, computers, and other pieces of technological equipment.

Deputy Superintendent David McCommons, Ed.D., recently visited the high school students while they were working on the mobile Fab Lab. "Empowering students to utilize learning from all content areas to create something as powerful as a mobile Fab Lab is very special," he said. "Our students were wiring, soldering,



Students installed graphics on the mobile Fab Lab door.





An advanced engineering student works on the CNC machine on signage for the mobile Fab Lab.

designing and printing graphics for the outside, installing windows and retractable awnings, and determining the best locations for equipment,” he said.

While Fab Labs, like the one in Fox Chapel Area High School, mostly serve older students, the district recognizes that young students must engage in computer science, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and digital fabrication learning experiences as well. The school district’s Director of Instructional and Innovative Leadership, Megan Cicconi, connects the Fab Lab experiences to other recent changes in the Fox Chapel Area curriculum. “We created a very comprehensive vision for innovation in our district. The new elementary computer science curriculum that embeds computational thinking and digital citizenship, along with this mobile Fab Lab, are just two components of a much larger picture,” she said. “They are also deeply connected to the district’s new STEAM curriculum that launches in the fall of 2017.” The arts are an additional component of STEAM.

The mobile Fab Lab was built on a trailer so that it is easily moveable by vehicle and, now that it’s completed, the mobile lab has been taken on the road! The mobile lab will visit not only Fox Chapel Area elementary schools, but will also be taken to other schools in the greater Pittsburgh area where students would not normally have access to a Fab Lab. “We will literally roll into a parking lot and set up a classroom with tables, tents, and laptops,” Mr. Papariello said. “We want to spark technological interest among younger students, not just in our school district, but beyond. This was all made possible because of The Grable Foundation grant.”



An advanced graphics student draws design plans for the AV equipment in the mobile Fab Lab.

According to Gregg Behr, the executive director of The Grable Foundation, “We’re excited for the teaching and learning moments that this mobile Fab Lab will create, not only for educators and students in the Fox Chapel Area, but also for teachers and students up and down the Allegheny valley.”

The Grable grant also includes funding for three high school work experience students to travel with the Fab Lab and help teach the lessons to the younger students. According to Fox Chapel Area High School senior and advanced engineering student Michael Bliss, working on the mobile Fab Lab has been “really cool. I’m looking forward to visiting the elementary students. I’m also looking forward to being able to be with the kids and showing them something I enjoy and also showing them the technology that I’ve learned.”



Students run electrical testing on the outlets in the mobile Fab Lab.

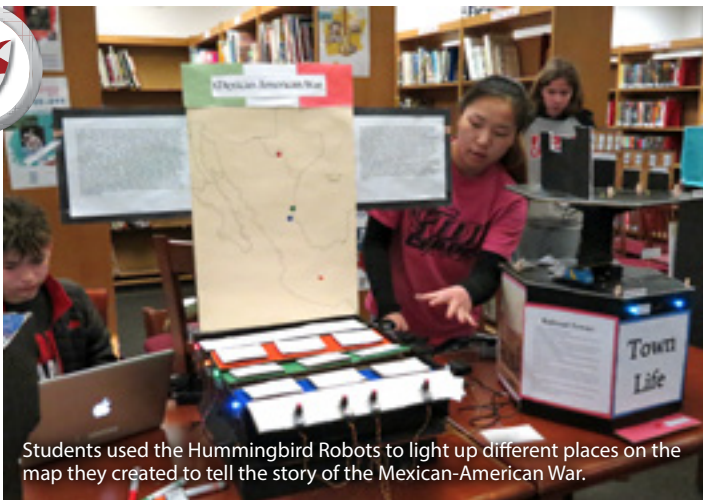
Led by Mrs. Cicconi, a team of elementary school teachers are developing a curriculum for the Fab Lab which will then be shared with the teachers wherever the Fab Lab visits. The STEAM concepts will be infused in a project-based approach to enhance the impact of the Fab Lab experience.

Ashley Nestor, Ed.D., the district’s executive director of elementary education and instruction, said the mobile Fab Lab curriculum will initially target second grade students who will engage in the digital fabrication units and utilize the tiny house. “We are very intentional with curricular changes,” Dr. Nestor said. “In order to ensure the best for our students we strategically select areas for growth. Although the mobile Fab Lab will first impact second grade students, we will be writing additional curricular units for other grade levels in the future.”

According to Fox Chapel Area School District Superintendent, Gene Freeman, Ed.D., “We believe that we are better together, which is why we authored this grant to impact Fox Chapel Area students as well as those in neighboring communities. We are honored to have been awarded this grant from The Grable Foundation and look forward to a unique collaboration as we provide opportunities for elementary students to participate in digital fabrication.”

The mobile Fab Lab debuted at Remake Learning Days which was celebrated in mid-May and was featured as part of special events that week. Additionally, Fox Chapel Area has also been asked to make a presentation about the mobile Fab Lab at the International Society for Technology in Education Conference in San Antonio, Texas, at the end of June.





Students used the Hummingbird Robots to light up different places on the map they created to tell the story of the Mexican-American War.



The students used Hummingbird Robotics Kits to make their displays come alive with lights and movement.

## DMS STUDENTS BUILD INTERACTIVE HISTORY DISPLAY

Years ago, when a teacher told students they needed to learn about certain time periods in history, they normally would open up a textbook or encyclopedia, read, and write a paper. Today's technology allows students to do so much more when learning about historical times and events, and provides a more engaging and effective experience as well. Dorseyville Middle School seventh graders recently completed a history lesson using technology, specifically, their district-

provided iPads and Hummingbird Duo Robotics Kits. The kits come with everything a student needs to make anything into a light-up, moving robot.

A team of Dorseyville Middle School teachers decided to use an interdisciplinary approach to present the unit on Westward Expansion, Reform, and the Industrial Revolution and used history, science, and robotics concepts to create the assignment. The students researched their historical topic associated with the 1800s and

designed and created a museum-like display. Additionally, they learned about the engineering process through the incorporation of the robotics kits where they studied analog circuits and coding the Hummingbirds with Scratch 2.0 in order to make the interactive displays light up and move.

According to social studies teacher David Snyder, the process wasn't always easy. "There were many days where the students experienced difficulty," he said. For example, the students learned not only how to compose basic code with the kits, but they also learned



Students demonstrated surgical techniques of the 1800s through their display which was similar to an Operation® game.

how to debug and revise that code. Mr. Snyder continued, "However, without opportunities to fail, the students aren't able to find ways to persevere and create new ways to solve the problems before them."

Mr. Snyder knew that the multidisciplinary approach would play to the strengths of different students. "The skills that they have the opportunity to practice in a project like this one – research, brainstorming, collaboration, communication, fabrication, coding, revision – are all skills that many employers are looking for in their future employees. If we can help strengthen those skills while teaching the U.S. History curriculum, even better." He continued, "When students are able to see how content from one class is able to influence the decisions they make in another class, the overall experience is more authentic."



A student put the final touches on the "Women's Rights Movement" interactive display. The project spun and lit up to tell the story of women's rights.

# LEARNING AND GROWTH A TOP PRIORITY FOR NEW ADMINISTRATOR

While most people might not enjoy the difficult and tedious job of analyzing data, it is a strong suit of Fox Chapel Area School District's new director of student achievement and instructional verification.

"I have always enjoyed analyzing student achievement data and then connecting results to instructional practices," said G. Daniel DiDesiderio, Ed.D. "Great school districts have an understanding of how their various assessments of students not only help them meet the academic learning standards, but to exceed them as well."

Dr. DiDesiderio comes to Fox Chapel Area from the Seneca Valley School District where he served as a principal at Haine Middle School for more than three years. He also served as an elementary principal in the Montour School District and, earlier in his career, was both a teacher and an assistant principal in the Greenville Area School District.

According to Dr. DiDesiderio, it's not enough that school districts analyze student data. They must respond to it in a strategic way and adjust teaching and learning in order to help students reach their fullest potentials.

"My experience in multiple levels as a principal has helped me to understand that student achievement data is only as good as the response to it. School leaders and teachers must interpret the data in a way that promotes progressive changes to how instruction is delivered," he said. "I will help our staff further recognize the abilities of our students in order to promote the highest level of learning in the classroom."

What interested him most in working for Fox Chapel Area is the district's commitment to improving student achievement and that the district has set student learning and growth as a top priority. Dr. DiDesiderio has been impressed by not only the district's high standards for learning, but also the support and resources provided for its students. "Fox Chapel Area School District is focused on student achievement and growth beyond the standards set forth by the state," he said. "This level of focus is not something you can find in many school districts."

Dr. DiDesiderio strongly believes that all students deserve a solid educational background that will challenge and enrich their lives for years to come. "All of my professional goals center around maximizing rigorous learning opportunities for students and ensuring that they are prepared for their next steps, whether it be post-secondary education or the workforce," he stated.

Dr. DiDesiderio started working in the Fox Chapel Area School District at the end of February and replaced Alicia Gismondi who retired in April. He has a bachelor's degree in music education and a master's degree from Westminster College. He has a doctorate degree from Capella University. His doctoral research topic was "Data Analysis to Guide Instruction and



Photo Courtesy Hill's Studio

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*"Fox Chapel Area School District is focused on student achievement and growth beyond the standards set forth by the state. This level of focus is not something you can find in many school districts."*

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Focus Student Learning Goals." He pointed out that it was one of only a few current research pieces that focuses on both analysis and the instructional response.

Originally from New Wilmington, Dr. DiDesiderio now resides in Moon Township with his wife Anne. School roots run deep in the DiDesiderio household as Anne is an elementary school teacher in the Upper St. Clair School District. They have two small children and, as a family, they enjoy traveling and biking on local railway trails. Additionally, in his spare time, Dr. DiDesiderio likes to cook and grill and also enjoys outdoor activities such as boating, hiking, hunting, and fishing. He also coaches his older son's soccer team.





## EDUCATOR NAMED CARNEGIE SCIENCE AWARD WINNER

**A**lison Francis has had a passion for early childhood education since she began her career in teaching. When studying for her master's degree, she said she discovered project-based learning and has always incorporated it into her lessons with her young learners. As a result of her innovative teaching, Mrs. Francis has been named the 2017 Carnegie Science Center's Elementary Educator Award winner.

Mrs. Francis, the facilitator of Fox Chapel Area School District's Creativity and Literacy Program since 2013, was nominated for the award by Megan Cicconi, the district's director of instructional and innovative leadership. Mrs. Francis was selected as a leader in both STEM- (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) and maker-education. She has dedicated her career to making science accessible to young learners and she described STEM-based instruction as "a great way to make learning come alive for students." Mrs. Francis developed the Creativity and Literacy Program for young children and their caregivers to experiment with



technology tools. Additionally, she also established a Digital Dream Studio at O'Hara Elementary for students and teachers to explore game-based learning together.

A few years back, when Mrs. Francis heard that the district received a \$20,000 grant from the Allegheny Intermediate Unit to be put toward STEM-education for early childhood, she knew the Creativity and Literacy Program would benefit. "It excited me in that there was an opportunity to create a program that no other school district had to engage young children and their parents," she said. "I like the idea of project-based learning and doing cross-curricular lessons that engage the students."

According to Mrs. Cicconi, Mrs. Francis is a regional leader in both early childhood and elementary education. "Her expertise in providing opportunities for students to engage with STEM-concepts is unrivaled, and we are grateful to the Carnegie Science Center, Eaton,

and Chevron for recognizing her with this prestigious award."

Mrs. Francis was among a total of seven people recognized for their leadership in education in the region. She was presented with the award by Chevron during a formal celebration at Carnegie Music Hall in Oakland May 12.

"I'm excited that I am being recognized for the innovative programming that I've been able to create with the support of the district," stated Mrs. Francis, who began her career in the Fox Chapel Area School District teaching kindergarten at Fairview Elementary School in 2009. In 2013 she developed the district's STEM-based Creativity and Literacy Program, located at Kerr Elementary, for young learners and their caregivers.

The Carnegie Science Center established the Carnegie Science Awards program in 1997 to recognize and promote outstanding science and technology achievements in Western Pennsylvania. The awards program was sponsored this year by Eaton.



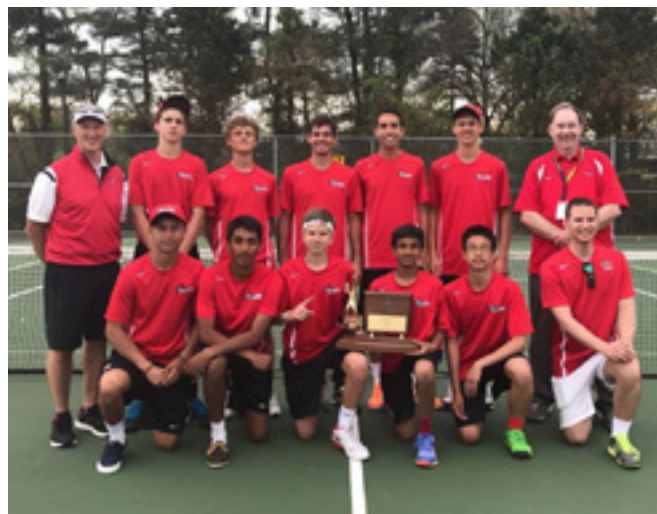


## BOYS' TENNIS WINS BACK-TO-BACK GOLD

The players on the boys' tennis team didn't let their young chronological age stand in their way of winning the program's second WPIAL Class AAA gold medal in two years. The team defeated Peters Township, 4-1, in some grueling championship matches that ended up as revenge for the Foxes after they lost to the Indians in a non-section match at the end of the season.

It was especially sweet for Coach Dave Prevost who had retired from coaching in 2015 and had never seen his boys' team win a WPIAL gold crown in his more than 50 seasons as a Foxes' tennis coach. Last season the team won its first-ever WPIAL championship under the direction of Alex Slezak. This year, Coach Prevost came out of retirement and admirably filled in for Coach Slezak who was sidelined with a back injury.

Members of the team are seniors Neil Bencherif and Jared Cohen; juniors Karsten Lagerquist and Kurran Singh; sophomores William Kabazie, Jay Kashyap, Jared Nord, Robby Shymansky, and Brandon Wei; and freshman Milo Baron.



In addition to winning the WPIAL Class AAA team championship, the boys' varsity tennis team advanced to the PIAA playoffs.

## SOPHOMORE DIVER MAKES HIS NAME KNOWN

Only a sophomore, Jonah Cagley recently took third place at the PIAA AAA Diving Championship, making him the only diver in school history to place that high so early in his scholastic athletic career. Earlier in the season, Jonah, an "A" student, also broke the previous school scoring record and won the WPIAL championship to become the first diver in school history to do so. His score of 525.20 points quite literally blew the competition out of the water by more than 30 points. His improvement over last year's standings – as a freshman he placed second at WPIALs and 12<sup>th</sup> at states – was the direct result of his eagerness to improve and his steady persistence.

High school diving coach Vernon Yenick says, "Jonah is a determined hard worker who is a very



Sophomore Jonah Cagley performs a dive at the PIAA Diving Championship in March.

powerful diver. He's also a very coachable athlete. After you instruct him, Jonah is pretty much able to make an immediate change or adjustment."

In fact, Coach Yenick has such high regard for the natural athlete and his skills that he foresees Jonah as "the future of Pennsylvania diving," and places him among the country's top-20 divers in his age group.

"Jonah will come on strong as a contender to qualify for the USA Diving nationals this summer and hopefully open some eyes. His performance on the 3-meter board is becoming stronger and his 1-meter seems to be his best event due to his consistency. He's also using a brand-new dive on the 3-meter – an inward 2½ somersault in pike position. That is going to be his future, his 'I can score high and nail this dive every time' dive," Coach Yenick says.

Photo Courtesy Costello Productions





Adam Bisnowaty salutes the crowd following a Pitt Football Game.

## ADAM BISNOWATY'S JOURNEY TO THE NFL AND THE BIG APPLE

The long-awaited call finally came in at roughly 4:30 p.m. Saturday, April 29, on a day that had started out overcast with a looming spring rain and then turned into a beautiful sunny afternoon. Adam Bisnowaty's day had started out much the same way as he nervously waited to see if he'd get drafted into the NFL after enjoying terrific athletic careers at the University of Pittsburgh and, before that, at Fox Chapel Area High School.

It was New York Giants' head coach Ben McAdoo who eventually called in the sixth round of the NFL Draft after the organization had traded up to get Adam and consequently, relinquished its right for a final selection in the draft.



Adam stops at the Point State Park fountain for a photo with his dog, Frank. Adam and his girlfriend Katherine often take their dogs, including a Corgi named Bentley, to Pittsburgh area parks.

Of course, Adam quickly told the coach he'd love the opportunity to play for the team and breathed a huge sigh of relief now that this part of his future was finally determined. There were no television crews around to record the dream that only comes true for about 1.5 percent of all NCAA football players, but it was rather appropriate for a guy who is known for his humility.

In fact, in addition to being known as humble, the new New York Giant has been called many other things, including an exceptionally hard worker, a community volunteer, kind-hearted, and, ironically enough, a gentle giant. But put him on the turf, and the 6'6", 304-pound offensive tackle morphs into what has been described as an overly aggressive mauler, someone



who plays with an edge and doesn't mind extra contact, and a downright nasty player nicknamed "Biz-Naughty."

Adam is okay with all of those descriptions, and even relishes his on-field reputation as a tough player. But the four-time All-ACC and five-time All-Academic honoree understands fully well that the ferocity he's been known for thus far will be tested greatly when he's among more experienced, older players. He says, without a doubt, he's up for that challenge.

"I'm just ready to get back to what I love, and that's football," says the former Pitt offensive tackle who has a more relaxed tone in his voice now that the draft is over. "I'm ready to use my physicality and work hard to be the best player I can be, and the best player in my position."

In addition to the physical and technical improvements he knows he must attain to play at the professional level, Adam will also be tackling a playbook that could contain up to 1,000 different game-day options, and he must do so in a very short amount of time. That shouldn't be a problem for the scholar-athlete who earned both a bachelor's and master's degree before graduating from Pitt and who is known for his keen football IQ.

### **Overcoming Early Challenges**

Adam's rise to eventually becoming a New York Giant wasn't always an easy one, especially when he was young, but he downplays his struggles saying, "Everyone has a story; mine isn't so different from a lot of others."

Maybe not so different, but it did involve something that seems to remain a timeless problem. "I was a chubby kid growing up and was constantly made fun of for being so big" he reveals. "I weighed 250 pounds in seventh grade. Back then, I would have laughed if anyone told me I'd be where I am today. But then people started to encourage me to use my size to my advantage, so I joined the wrestling and football teams and threw the discus for the track and field team. The funny thing is, before I started playing, I never really liked football all that much, but I found that in sports, since I was bigger, I was better. I kept working harder and harder until I developed the athleticism and skills to continue playing football in high school and college, and now at the highest level."

His progression to a professional athlete really started to gel in the years he played offensive tackle for the Fox Chapel Area High School Football Team. At that point, he started to take football more seriously, gained a lot of maturity, and became one of the most heavily-recruited players in Pennsylvania. Before he graduated in 2012, Adam drew interest from dozens of NCAA Division I schools and was having a hard time deciding among Florida, Purdue, the University of Michigan, Michigan State, and Pitt. His gut told him there was no better place than home, so he accepted Pitt's full-scholarship offer. The foundation he had worked so hard to build in high school flourished into a trophy-studded career after being redshirted in his freshman year. He went on to win many prestigious awards for his performance on the field, and was instrumental his senior year in leading a high-energy offense that scored the most points in university history.



Photo Courtesy Pete Madia/Pitt Athletics

But, as a realistic person who knows his football career will end at some point, he's very proud of earning his bachelor's degree in rhetoric and communication and a Master of Science in health and fitness. In fact, he had fully intended on attending graduation ceremonies for his latest degree, but then a little thing called the NFL Draft intervened that weekend.

### **Giving Back**

Those who know Adam say about the only thing that might be bigger than his massive frame is his heart. Few people know how many hours he spent quietly visiting the sickest children at Children's Hospital of Pittsburgh of UPMC, mentoring at-risk youth, and donating his time to help out at football camps. Although he usually dodges praise for doing something he is so passionate about, the ACC and Pitt have recognized him for his community service. It's also been a way for him to pay forward the many boosts he received throughout his life, especially when he was growing up and needed it most.

Among those whom he credits for helping him to become the man he is today are Fox Chapel Area teacher and coach Brandon Peifer, and the district's director of athletics Michael O'Brien. To this day, both remain trusted confidants and close friends.

Adam says Mr. Peifer – his wrestling, strength and conditioning, and football position coach – would often pick him up at his house at 5:30 a.m. so he could work out before classes started. "He understood my potential and encouraged me to maximize it." He says Mr. O'Brien believed in him as well and always gave him good advice. "I've been very fortunate to have such a strong support group, and that includes my mom, who worked hard to maintain our lifestyle as a single parent. I learned my work ethic from her," Adam states.

As Adam now looks ahead to a life in the Big Apple, there's a large part of the Fox Chapel Area that he'll take with him. The friendliness, kindness, and helpfulness that people in this community and Pittsburgh are known for surely will be welcomed in his new surroundings and make him one popular Giant, literally and figuratively.



# FOX CHAPEL AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

## District Administration

611 Field Club Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238  
412/963-9600  
[www.fcasd.edu](http://www.fcasd.edu)  
Superintendent: Gene Freeman, Ed.D.  
Deputy Superintendent:  
David P. McCommons, Ed.D.  
Business Manager: Kimberly M. Pawlishak

## District Resource Staff

Executive Director of Elementary Education and Instruction: Ashley L. Nestor, Ed.D.  
Executive Director of Secondary Education and Instruction: Matthew J. Harris, Ed.D.  
Director of Special Education and Pupil Services: Lonnie Carey, Ed.D.  
Director of Instructional and Innovative Leadership: Megan Cicconi  
Director of Literacy: Sari Brecosky  
Director of Student Achievement and Instructional Verification: G. Daniel DiDesiderio, Ed.D.  
Director of Ancillary Services: Daniel Breitreutz  
Director of Athletics: Michael O'Brien  
Coordinator of Communications: Bonnie Berzonski

## FOX CHAPEL AREA SCHOOLS

### Fairview Elementary School

738 Dorseyville Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238  
412/963-9315  
Principal: Rebecca A. Stephan, Ed.D.

### Hartwood Elementary School

3730 Saxonburg Boulevard  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238  
412/767-5396  
Principal: Rachel K. Fischbaugh, Ed.D.

### Kerr Elementary School

341 Kittanning Pike  
Pittsburgh, PA 15215  
412/781-4105  
Principal: Paul S. Noro, Ed.D.

### O'Hara Elementary School

115 Cabin Lane  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238  
412/963-0333  
Principal: Kristy L. Batis  
Assistant Principal: Stephen P. Edwards

### Dorseyville Middle School

3732 Saxonburg Boulevard  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238  
412/767-5343  
Principal: Jonathan T. Nauhaus  
Assistant Principal:

Timothy A. Mahoney  
Assistant Principal:  
James Phillip Prager Jr., D.Ed.

### Fox Chapel Area High School

611 Field Club Road  
Pittsburgh, PA 15238  
412/967-2430  
Lead Principal: Michael H. Hower  
Program Principal (A-L):  
Daniel E. Lentz, Ph.D.  
Program Principal (M-Z):  
John J. McGee, Ph.D.

For the latest information on school activities and weather-related delays and cancellations, visit the Fox Chapel Area School District website at [www.fcasd.edu](http://www.fcasd.edu).

The athletic events calendar can be found on the Fox Chapel Area School District athletic website at [www.fcasdschoolsports.org](http://www.fcasdschoolsports.org) and click on "SCHEDULE STAR."

## COMPLIANCE STATEMENT

The Fox Chapel Area School District is an equal rights and opportunity school district. The school district does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, age, creed, religion, gender, sexual orientation, ancestry, national origin, or handicap/disability. The district shall make reasonable accommodations for identified physical and mental impairments that constitute disabilities, consistent with the requirements of federal and state laws and regulations.

Additional information pertaining to civil rights, school district policies, and grievance procedures can be obtained by contacting the compliance officers listed below between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday-Friday. This notice is available from the compliance officers in large print, on audiotape, and in Braille.

Title IX:	David P. McCommons, Ed.D. (412/967-2456)
Section 504 and ADA:	Lonnie Carey, Ed.D. (412/967-2435)
Address:	Fox Chapel Area School District 611 Field Club Road Pittsburgh, PA 15238

## FOX CHAPEL AREA SCHOOL BOARD

Photo Courtesy Hill's Studio



Front Row (left to right): Lisa M. Rutkowski (2019 - Region I); Terry L. Wirginis, President (2019 - Region II); Gene Freeman, Ed.D., Superintendent; and Sandra M. Garbisch, Assistant Secretary (2019 - Region II)

Row 2 (left to right): Robert Mauro (2017 - Region III); Paul J. Giuffre, Esq., Solicitor; Nancy B. Foster, Vice President (2019 - Region III); and Somer Obernauer Jr. (2017 - Region I)

Row 3 (left to right): Joel R. Weinstein, Treasurer (2017 - Region III); David P. McCommons, Ed.D., Deputy Superintendent; Kathleen Anuszek, Board Secretary; Dharmesh Vyas, M.D., Ph.D. (2017 - Region II); and Eric C. Schmidt (2019 - Region I)

Region I covers all of Sharpsburg Borough and Wards 2, 3, and 4 of O'Hara Township; Region II covers Districts 2, 4, and 5 of Fox Chapel Borough and all of Indiana Township; and Region III covers all of Aspinwall Borough, Blawnox Borough, Wards 1 and 5 of O'Hara Township, and Districts 1 and 3 of Fox Chapel Borough.

School Board meetings are usually scheduled for the first and second Mondays of each month at 7 p.m. The public is invited to attend.