



Pirate Pride

September 2021

www.mvsc.k12.in.us * 219-650-5300

The Newsletter of the Merrillville Community School Corporation

Federal funds go toward extra support, safety for students

The Merrillville Community School Corporation was awarded funding through the summer of 2023 to help address the impact COVID-19 has had and continues to have on its students and families.

The funds were provided by the federal government through the Education Stabilization Fund through the Coronavirus Aid Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act for the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund (ESSER Fund).

Signed into law on March 20, 2021, the U.S. Department of Education awarded the money to state educational agencies for the purpose of providing local educational agencies, like the Merrillville Community School Corporation, with emergency relief funds to address COVID-19's effect.

Funding was earmarked for impact during three school years: 2020-21, 2021-22, and 2022-23.

In order to prioritize the areas of con-

sideration when making final decisions on how to best utilize these funds, the corporation sought input from parents, high school student representatives, administrative team members and staff.

For the 2020-21 school year, MCSC was awarded more than \$1.3 million to use through the end of the 2020-21 school year, including last summer.

The Summer Boost Program, a unique summer school experience, was a prime example of where a lot of this money was invested. The school corporation identified 531 children in grades 2-7 based on their



The Summer Boost Program operated with a ratio of five students per teacher to give students extra support and attention after a challenging school year.

i-Ready test scores and district assessments and invited them to participate in an immersive classroom experience that

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'Have a great first day and a great year!'

With bubble machines, pom poms and noise makers, members of Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity cheered on students as they arrived for their first day at Merrillville Intermediate School.

Thank you all for your support and enthusiasm in helping to kick off the school year!!

Corporation appoints new chief financial officer

The Merrillville Community School Corporation has a new chief financial officer.

Meghan Damron was approved by the Board of School Trustees to replace Hilda Damianick, who retired June 30 after more than 14 years of service.

Mrs. Damron comes from Griffith Public Schools, where she served as the director of business services and human resources, as well as the corporation treasurer.

"I am very thankful for my experiences with Griffith as it has led me to this opportunity," said Mrs. Damron. "I am looking forward to being a part of the Merrillville Pirate Family."

As she did at Griffith, Mrs. Damron will oversee the financial operations of the Merrillville Community School Corporation, including capital plans, bud-

ets, annual financial plans and more.

Her responsibilities include purchasing and bidding, employee benefits, board relations, facility usage, grants, workers compensation, legislative issues, and more.

She will supervise the operations of the following departments: accounting, accounts payable, payroll, purchasing, transportation, food services and building and grounds.

Mrs. Damron is certified as a chief business officer and also in human resources by the Indiana Association of School Business Officials.

She earned a Master of Business Administration from DeVry University's Keller Graduate School of Management and a Bachelor of Science in business management from Southwest Missouri State University.



Meghan Damron
Chief Financial Officer

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Nicholas G. Brown, Ed.S.

We hope you've enjoyed this edition of Pirate Pride. If you have story ideas, questions or comments, please contact the Corporation's Public Information Officer at dstuckert@mvsc.k12.in.us or 219-650-5477.

Church helps with lunch debt

Trinity Free Methodist Church under the direction of Rev. Rollie Hatfield raised \$765 to be used to pay off student lunch debt at John Wood Elementary School for current active students.

Any funds left will be used toward paying outstanding lunch debt for inactive John Wood students.



Senior citizens can attend for FREE!

Enjoy a night out with a performance or sporting event and help cheer on our amazing students. Senior citizens with a Merrillville Community School Corporation Senior Citizens Pass can attend concerts, theater performances and games for free!

Seniors who received their Senior Citizens Pass in 2020 are reminded they are still valid; just show the passes to ticket takers at the door. To learn more about upcoming events, visit the corporation website, www.mvsc.k12.in.us.

To obtain a senior Senior Citizens Pass, seniors must live in Ross Town-

ship and be at least 60 years old. They must bring identification that has their birth date and address to the Merrillville School Corporation Central Office, 6701 Delaware St., during office hours 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Mondays through Fridays.

Please note the pass does not cover events held on school property that are sponsored by outside entities, such as performances by M&M Productions/Ross Music Theatre or any Indiana High School Athletic Association event finals (sectionals, regionals, semi-state and state finals).

Service helps adults earn their high school diplomas

Merrillville Adult Education (MAE), located in Merrillville High School, can help individuals earn their high school equivalency credentials by preparing them to complete the HiSET exam.

MAE's free preparation classes are designed for students to go from their current knowledge to a point where pass-

ing the HiSET the first time is a reasonable goal. Instruction is available Mondays through Thursdays.

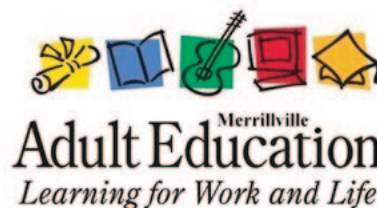
Preparation classes are not required prior to taking the HiSET.

Upcoming 2021 HiSET test dates include: Sept. 29 and 30, registration deadline Sept. 23; Oct. 12 and 13, registration

deadline Oct. 7; Oct. 27 and 28, registration deadline Oct. 21; and Dec. 8 and 9, registration deadline Dec. 2.

To register for a testing date or for more information, visit the Merrillville Community School Corporation website, www.mvsc.k12.in.us or contact the Adult Education Office:

sgreen@mvsc.k12.in.us or 219-650-5310, ext. 5318.



Basketball camp for elementary kids

Students in grades 1-4 can learn new skills with the coaches and players of Merrillville High School from 4:30-6 p.m. Sept. 20-22.

Cost is \$30 per



camper. All campers will receive a T-shirt.

Transportation must be provided by parents; use entrance P for drop off and pick up. Forms and money due by Friday, Sept. 17.

[Download the form here!](#)

Order your child's birthday treats online

Ordering birthday treats for your child's class is easier than ever!

While you can still call the Food Service Department and order your treats, you can also visit the school corporation website, www.mvsc.k12.in.us, and order treats any time of day, seven days a week!

Simply go to the "PARENTS" tab on the right-hand side and select "Food Service & Menus." The "PI-



RATE BIRTHDAY TREATS" link is on the left side.

All treats are compliant with USDA smart snack guidelines.

The order must be placed at least two weeks in advance, and treats must be paid in advance prior to classroom delivery.

Please have the funds available on your child's Skyward account two days before the order is to be delivered.

Free/reduced lunch/textbook application due by Sept. 29

Parents whose children are on the free and reduced lunch and textbook program can reapply to participate in the 2021-22 school year.

Applications currently on file will expire Sept. 29.

Meals will remain free throughout the 2021-22 school year; however, it is important for parents to apply and take advantage of reduced textbook fees in addition to other benefits that may be offered by state or federal programs, like

[P-EBT](#) and the [broadband benefit](#).

You can reapply using any of these convenient methods:

- Apply online using Skyward;
- Download an application from the website to complete and mail or bring it to the central office;
- Visit your schools or the corporation's central office during office hours to obtain a form to complete. The office is located at 6701 Delaware St.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Sept. 24

First Grading Period Ends

Sept. 30

Grades 7-8 Parent/Teacher Conferences, 3:30-6:30 p.m.

Oct. 22-25

No School/Fall Break

Nov. 2

Election Day/E-Learning Day

Nov. 12

Second Grading Period/Trimester 1 Ends

Nov. 15

No Students/Teacher Work Day

Nov. 18

Grades K-6 Parent/Teacher Conferences, 12:30-7:30 p.m.
No School for K-6 Students



Fostering Future Football Pirates

MHS Pirate football players worked with the Merrillville Pop Warner kids, taking them through drills, helping them with form, fostering a love of the sport, and all around having a great time! GO, PIRATES!



PIRATE PRIDE! PIRATE PRIDE! PIRATE PRIDE! PIRATE PRIDE!

Federal funds help to increase support, safety for students

From page 1

operated with a ratio of 5-to-1 students to instructor.

The grant money covered items like technology devices; teacher salaries, benefits and supplies; tech assistance; transportation fuel, salaries and benefits; and PPE (personal protective equipment).

Funding also supported resources to address social and emotional needs of students and staff, like hiring social workers and offering additional assistance programs on mental health.

A summer social and emotional learning program (SEL) complemented the Boost program to provide support

for 14 at-risk males transitioning from Merrillville Intermediate to Pierce Middle School.

For the 2021-22 school year, the corporation was awarded roughly \$5.8 million in federal funds. The plan that was created includes the addition of more than 50 new positions, most of which are existing jobs in which staff members were added, such as maintenance/custodial staff, permanent substitute teachers, social workers, a school nurse, and instructional staff.

Some brand-new positions for which the Board of School Trustees approved job descriptions were also added, including virtual program positions such as family and community engagement specialists, program advisers, parent

liaisons, school truancy adviser, etc.

The corporation invested in year-round 24/7 online tutoring for students in grades 5-8 and Freshman Academy, as well as spring onsite tutoring for students in grades 1-8.

Other purchases planned using the grant include PPE, updated custodial cleaning/sanitizing equipment, instructional supplies, security cameras and software, and technology devices and software.

The federal government allocated more than \$13 million to MCSC to expend during the 2022-23 school year.

For details on the next year's plan for these funds, visit the corporation website, www.mvsc.k12.in.us.

Family of high school teacher donates land to Merrillville schools

The Merrillville Community School Corporation Board of School Trustees recently accepted a donation of land from the family of a Merrillville High School teacher.

The James F. Giannini family donated seven and a half acres of land, located at 124 E. 73rd Ave., near Pierce Middle School. Ben Nicksic, a math teacher at MHS, said the land was purchased by Giannini, who was his grandfather, and has been in his family for decades.

"The Merrillville School Board is honored to accept this donation from the Giannini family on behalf of the entire school community," said Linda Jonaitis, president of the board of school trustees.

"The donation honors the past but also provides an opportunity to build for the future.

"The sense of community that this family has expressed reflects the culture that exists in our schools and community, and for this we are grateful," she said.

Sandi Stoffregen, one of Giannini's four daughters and Mr. Nicksic's aunt, said her father, who was town engineer for Merrillville and had his own engineering firm, considered at one time to build a subdivision on the land, which could be divided into 22 lots. Mr. Giannini passed away in 2013.

Mr. Nicksic said his family had no plans for the land until he started working at the high school. A property appraisal noted its highest and best use would be "for some form of recreation such as a park, playground or school use."

"Ben's involvement with MHS reinforced that idea for us," Mrs. Stoffregen said.

"Merrillville schools are so great, due to the fact that no student seems to ever feel like they do not have a place here," Mr. Nicksic said. "There are so many avenues for college or career readiness that real success is possible for all kids, even if they do not do well in traditional classes."

Mr. Nicksic, who has been a math teacher at MHS for four years, said this feeling of student belonging and purpose at a school hasn't always been his experience in his career as a teacher, and he feels it is paramount to building a

community that includes everyone.

He described a day last year when he visited auto shop and ran into one of his students who, despite all efforts, struggled in his math class.

"The pride he had when he showed me the work he had done in Mr. Johnston's class," Mr. Nicksic said. "He said cars make sense to him, whereas a lot of math did not.

"I assured him that he had found something great that he liked, and that skill was something I myself would

struggle at," he continued.

"It's been a great experience working at MHS, and we as a family wanted the land to help build something for a kid like that who will now have a successful career and life," Mr. Nicksic added.

The school corporation has no immediate plans for the land.

"Whatever is best for the school is what we'd like to see happen," Mr. Nicksic said.



Sandi Stoffregen (from left), one of James F. Giannini's four daughters, Ben Nicksic Merrillville High School math teacher, and his mother Donna Nicksic, another Giannini daughter, visit the portion of land their family donated that faces 73rd Ave. in Merrillville.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS: Upcoming MHS concerts

Choir SNEAK PEEK Concert*

Thursday, Sept 30, 7 p.m.

Orchestra Concert*

Thursday, Oct. 7, 7 p.m.

*Subject to change.

Visit www.mvsc.k12.in.us to confirm.



Local business sponsors new uniforms for Band of Pirates

The Merrillville High School Marching Band of Pirates will be sporting a new look this fall, thanks to the help of Centier Bank.

The local, family-owned business donated \$10,000 toward the purchase of new uniforms for band members, bringing the total funds raised to \$20,000.

"We are very grateful to Centier for providing this support for our students," said Nick Brown, superintendent of Merrillville Community School Corporation. "Our Band of Pirates always represent our schools with pride and quality, and these new uniforms will be appreciated as we march forward."

Anthony R. Contrucci, Centier's senior vice president for community relations, said the bank is proud of its partnership with the Merrillville Com-

munity School Corporation.

"As a community bank, our goal is to create a positive impact in the communities that we serve," Mr. Contrucci said. "And I personally take pride when we can support our youth, especially when it is providing them with the resources that they need to continue to excel with their passions."

The MHS Band Boosters worked hard to raise \$10,000 through fundraising campaigns, but the volunteer group needed an additional \$10,000 in order to meet the requirements for the school corporation to match, dollar for dollar, the additional \$20,000 necessary to purchase the uniforms.

"The uniforms the students currently wear are more than 17 years old and have reached the end of their useful-

ness," said Mark Danielson, MHS band director.

Band uniforms are worn at least a dozen times each school year during football games, competitions, parades, pep rallies and many other events, according to Mr. Danielson.

"I was a student athlete and member of my school band," said Mr. Contrucci. "My coaches and band directors always stated, 'if you look sharp you will play sharp and perform well.' That is why Centier was thrilled to be able to help fund the band's new uniforms.

"The members of the school band have earned these uniforms due to their hard work, passion, and dedication to their craft, and this gift is an acknowledgment of their sacrifice and success," he continued. "They deserve them."



Representatives from Centier bank present a check for \$10,000 to the Merrillville Community School Corporation staff and students.

Every month there's another chance to win \$1,000



- Have some great news to share about our schools?
- Have a great experience or a fabulous teacher that needs some kudos?
- Did one of our staff members make your day?
- Did your child get the help he or she needed?

Please share that on our [NICHE page right here!](#) Just type in Merrillville Community School Corporation to get started. NICHE holds a drawing every month, so participants have the opportunity to win \$1,000!

Every month there's a chance to win, so send your friends and family the link!

Foundation awards bikes to Fieler students

Ten students at Fieler Elementary School got a great start to their Memorial Day holiday weekend Friday when they received bicycles, donated by Coleen Schultz through the Live, Love, Give Foundation in memory of her son Nick Schultz.

Officer Schultz was a Merrillville police officer who was killed in the line of duty.

The names of all students who were recognized as "Pirate Stars" throughout the 2020-21 school year were placed in a drawing, and one boy and one girl from each grade were awarded the new bikes.

Pirate Stars are students who demonstrate the character trait or virtue of the week.



Front from left: Sophia Payan and Kamerson Forbes, kindergarten; Chantel McDonald and Tyree Speedy, first grade; D'Arcy Ledford, second grade; A'Niyah Kelly and Jesse Robinson, third grade; Aaliyah Echols and Tramon Thompson, fourth grade; back row: Assistant Principal Amy Hinkel; School Resource Officer Det. Cpl. Allison Ellis; mascot Pirate Pete; Coleen Schultz from the Live, Love, Give Foundation; School Resource Officer Mike Bunnell; Principal Mike Meygesi. Not pictured is bike winner Isiah Carter, second grade.

Take a walk, make a difference

The Merrillville Education Foundation invites you to participate in its Fourth Annual Walk-a-Thon fundraiser on Saturday, Oct. 9!

Participants in the "Better Health, Better Minds" event will be walking at Merrillville High School to raise funds for MEF teacher grants.

[DOWNLOAD YOUR REGISTRATION FORM HERE](#) and join them for a day of prizes, food, exercise and fun, while supporting new education opportunities for Merrillville Community School students.

Details

- Registration begins at 8 a.m. and walking will begin at 9 a.m.
- Location of the walk will be at the Merrillville High School Soccer/Track & Field Area (east of the football stadium). In case of rain, everyone will walk in the MHS



Field House.

- Minimum participation donation is \$10 for ages 5 and up.
- EVERY participant must submit a signed event disclaimer in order to walk in the event.
- Participants are asked to walk one mile, but can choose to walk more if they wish.
- T-shirts for ages 5 years and older will be given to each participant who raises/brings in at least \$20 in sponsorship donations and submits the registration form and donations to their school's office by Thursday, Sept. 23. Late registration and additional funding may be turned in on the day of the event, but no T-shirt can be guaranteed. Additional T-shirts will be available to purchase on Saturday, Oct. 9, while supplies last.
- Participants will receive one raffle

ticket for a chance to win a door prize on the event day. The raffle ticket will be given at the time of registration on Oct. 9.

- Participants raising \$100 or more are guaranteed a prize! The student who raises the most money will get first choice of the available prizes.
- This is a family-friendly event open to EVERYONE in the community. If you are unable to participate, consider making a donation to MEF.

2021 Sponsorship Opportunities

MEF is asking for help from community businesses and school patrons.

Please consider contributing in one or more ways to help provide opportunities for students. To view suggested sponsorship opportunities, **[CLICK/TAP HERE](#)** for an information letter.

MEF also needs gift cards/gift certificates for Walk-a-Thon participant prizes.

Pfizer vaccine approved for children ages 12-15

The Pfizer vaccine will help keep you safe.

The FDA has issued an extension of the Emergency Use Authorization (EUA) allowing use of the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine to prevent COVID-19 in individuals 12 years of age and older. COVID-19 vaccine can be given at the same time as other routine vaccinations.



COVID-19 vaccination is an important tool to help us get back to normal.

The vaccines teach our bodies how to recognize and fight the virus that causes COVID-19. In an ongoing clinical trial, the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine has been shown to be up to 100 percent effective at preventing COVID-19 following 2 doses given 3 weeks apart. Fully vaccinated is defined as two weeks past your second dose of the Pfizer vaccine.



Play sports!

No more missing games, practices or other extra-curriculars! You won't be sidelined from your favorite activities if you are fully vaccinated, so long as you don't develop symptoms.



Go to school!

When you go back to school in the fall, the school year will be more normal. If you are fully vaccinated you won't have to miss important lessons or tests to quarantine if you're a close contact of someone with COVID-19 as long as you remain symptom-free.

What changes once you are fully vaccinated:

- ✓ You can gather indoors with other fully vaccinated friends and family without wearing a mask.
- ✓ If you've been around someone who has COVID-19, you do not need to quarantine as long as you remain symptom-free.

In public and at school, you should still take precautions, such as wearing a mask, staying at least 6 feet apart from others and avoiding crowds. Experts are still researching things like how long the protection from the vaccine lasts and if it prevents you from giving the disease to other people and will update the guidance for vaccinated people as we get new information.

Prevent COVID-19

Children can get sick with COVID-19 and spread the virus to others, even if they don't have symptoms. Most children with COVID-19 have mild symptoms or have no symptoms at all. However, some children can get severely ill from COVID-19. They might require hospitalization, intensive care, or a ventilator to help them breathe. In rare cases, they might die. Experts are also investigating a rare but serious medical condition associated with COVID-19 in children called



Get the facts about the Pfizer vaccine. Point your smartphone camera at the QR code to learn more.

Multisystem Inflammatory Syndrome in Children (MIS-C). The National Institutes of Health estimate that 11-15% of children infected with COVID-19 develop long-term symptoms.

For more information visit: www.OurShot.IN.gov



5/21/21

New transportation director takes the wheel

Jennifer Jimenez joined the Merrillville Community School Corporation staff last spring, not long before school let out, as the new director of transportation.

Ms. Jimenez came from the School City of Hammond where she spent 25 years in school transportation, starting as a bus aide and working her way to supervisor, which is how she spent her last four years there.

In between those two extremes, she spent 12 years as a driver and nine years as a route coordinator.

"My choice to become the Director was not an easy one," Ms. Jimenez said. "I left an amazing group of ladies whom I miss dearly. I believe I can offer the Merrillville community an abundance of experience and would like to share what I have learned with my new transportation family.

"I also came to Merrillville to finish my transportation career," she continued. "I have heard so many wonderful things about the

Merrillville Community School Corporation.

"In my short time here, I have felt so welcomed, and it has been such a positive experience. I'm so glad I made the choice to join the Pirate Family," she added.

Ms. Jimenez is the mother of six children. She loves to swim and enjoys bike riding.

"I have always loved working with children," she said. "I'd like to invite all parents to call with any comments or concerns regarding transportation," Ms. Jimenez recommended. "I hope to make every student's school bus ride a memorable and enjoyable one.

"Please keep in mind the students' safest mode of transportation to and from school is on the school bus," she said.



Jennifer Jimenez
Director of Transportation

**PIRATE
PRIDE!**



PARENTS,
children should be
outside at their bus
stops 10 minutes before
their scheduled
pickup times!
Thank you!

BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP! BEEP!



**Bus
Drivers
Needed**

Very Competitive Wages

\$17.97-23.56/hr

**10 years of experience
starts at \$21.09/hr**

**Full-time benefits package
available with Part-time hours.**

Paid Training

**Paid CDL Skills Test
& DOT physicals**

Staff Feature

Food Service administrative assistant started in the school kitchens

Sherrie Stupic has been in Food Service here at Merrillville Community School Corporation for 31 years! She is currently the administrative assistant to the food service director at Central Office, where she has been for the last 11 years.

"I don't think I ever intended to stay so long, but I love my job!" said Mrs. Stupic. "I always enjoyed serving the students and interacting with them. Now, working on the administrative side of food service, it is just as rewarding. We are still helping students every day with nutritious meals."

Mrs. Stupic actually started out in the dish room at Harrison Junior High School, which is now Merrillville Intermediate School. She changed positions over her time there to be a cashier, cook/server and eventually assistant manager.

After seven years, she became the cafeteria manager at Miller Elementary School, where she spent the next 13 years.

On the last days of a school year, she

said they would have cookouts at Miller.

"My husband would come and help us, and he could hear me talking with students in the lunch line and calling each by name," Mrs. Stupic said. "He asked, 'how do you remember all these kids?' I told him that when you serve them day after day and year after year, you know just about all of them."

"Even now being at the administration office, I will come across a student name who has just graduated and say, 'they were one of my kids at Miller,'" she continued.

Mrs. Stupic said her grandmother inspired her love of food service.

"My grandmother worked in a school kitchen in Highland until she was 75 years old," she said. "I believe that liking your job and giving back to the community is a huge inspiration."

"I love doing for others!" said Mrs. Stupic. "I have enjoyed cooking meals and serving them, as well as making menus. The corporation is really all about the students, and that is the most



Sherrie Stupic

important thing."

She said she has no definite plans to retire, but when she does she plans to do a lot of traveling and doing things with her grandchildren.

Staff Feature

Co-athletic director marks 32 years with school corporation



Amy Beckham with Pop Warner star

MHS Co-Athletic Director Amy Beckham just started her 32nd year with the Merrillville Community School Corporation.

Over her time here, she has also worked as a teacher, coach, and assistant athletic director.

What Ms. Beckham likes best about working here is "Everyone works together to get things accomplished for our kids." She said the support and friendships inspire her to keep working here.

"Merrillville gave me a shot, and I do remember that each day," she said.

She said she'll retire at some point to do "whatever I want, when I want."

SPIRIT APPAREL

Click here to get 15% off any order of \$85 or more! Code: SEPT21 Deal Ends Sept. 30

Schedules for MHS athletics available at merrillvillepirates.com

Three schools see personnel changes in role of Dean

Four educators are stepping into the role of Dean of Students this year.

These individuals are key to shaping and sustaining each of their school's culture, providing leadership to the staff and overseeing the implementation of schoolwide discipline systems and procedures.

Two of these educators will tackle the new role of MHS Dean of Students. These two positions are funded through the emergency federal funds made available for schools to address the impact of COVID-19.

David Maldonado will serve in the role of MHS Dean of Students for the freshman and sophomore classes. Mr. Maldonado has been a world language teacher and head wrestling coach at Merrillville High School for 19 years.

"I see it as an opportunity to help our students here at MHS with other aspects of their academic career outside of the realm of Spanish," Mr. Maldonado said. "Hopefully I can impact our students and school enough that I can help fill a void or be a strong liaison between students, teachers, administrators, parents, and our 'Pirate' community."

He says he will bring a very firm but fair approach to the position of Dean of Students, as well as a strong ability to communicate and collaborate well with all parties who have an interest and investment in the academic careers and well-being of MHS students.

"My goal is to make the educational environment at Merrillville High School a better and safer place in order to create a positive, inclusive, and welcoming environment that will be conducive to learning for all students," he said. "I want students to want to be here and take pride in their school and community!"

Mr. Maldonado attended Iowa State University and earned his Bachelor of Arts in Spanish language and culture with a teaching endorsement in secondary education.



David Maldonado

"As a teacher, coach, and parent of students here at Merrillville High School, I have an enormous investment in our students, school, and community," he said. "I always look to improve the character and reputation of our school. Our character is how we see ourselves, and our reputation is how others see us!"

"We have a lot of control over improving our character, but in improving our character we intentionally improve our reputation," he continued. "It will take everyone in our community to accomplish this, but I look forward to being part of the journey of making our 'Pirate' Community a better place."

Kristie Gore will serve as MHS Dean of Students for the junior and senior classes where she hopes to provide leadership, structure and strategic direction for students.

Ms. Gore is starting her fourth year with the corporation. This Merrillville High School graduate has served here for three years as a Pierce Middle School PEP instructor.

"This is my 16th year in education," Ms. Gore said. "I started as an elementary math teacher, then transitioned into middle school math."

"Being an educator for this long has allowed me to create strategies that assist me in connecting with students, which allows them to be successful in school and outside of school," she continued. "It is about teaching them how to apply the knowledge gained."

Ms. Gore earned two Master of Education degrees from Indiana University Northwest: one in curriculum and the other in administration. She also earned two Bachelor of Science degrees: one in elementary education with a middle school math endorsement from Calumet College of St. Joseph and the other in health service management from IUN.

Alan Dickerson will serve in a new role as the Dean at Pierce Middle School this year.

He has been a part of Merrillville

Community School Corporation for more than 13 years as a teacher at Pierce. He has also served as a department head for three years and as a team leader for four years.

Mr. Dickerson's background includes once serving as a classroom teacher and an ordained minister in a treatment facility program.

"I have experienced the ups and downs of life and wish to help others to succeed," he said.

He is a graduate of Indiana University Northwest with a degree in secondary education. He looks forward to continuing to serve the parents and students of Merrillville in his new capacity.

Tammy Rassbach will start her sixth year with Merrillville Community School Corporation as the new Dean of Students for John Wood Elementary School.

"Educating students in some capacity has always been my passion," she said. "I love to see when the 'light bulb' goes off in their learning."

"Getting to know students on a personal level is key in educating them," she continued. "They need to feel loved and safe before learning can occur and knowing this is key in education."

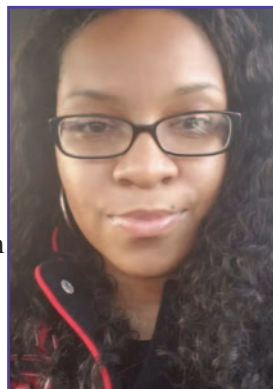
Mrs. Rassbach started her career in Merrillville as a second grade teacher at Iddings Elementary School after 12 years with another district.

She became an instructional coach for both Salk and Wood Elementary Schools in 2019.

"Over the past 18 years, I have



Alan Dickerson



Kristie Gore



Tammy Rassbach

MHS thespians hosted retreat to connect with other schools

While summer is a great time for students to kick back and relax, MHS students in Thespian Troupe #1692 used a couple days of their break to learn more about their craft and connect with others with similar interests.

The group hosted the annual Indiana State Thespian Leadership Retreat on Aug. 6-7. The event created an opportunity for troupe directors and 75 students from a dozen schools across the state to participate in various workshops and advocacy activities.

Delegates also engaged with keynote speaker and professional Stage Manager J. Jason Dautner. Mr. Dautner, a 15-year veteran who previously worked on the Broadway production of "To Kill A Mockingbird" with Jeff Daniels, shared with students the trials and tribulations of being a strong leader in such a demanding industry.



MHS students who participated in the two-day retreat included, from left: Lauren Molenda, Nomi Green, Precious Moore, Priya Hildebrand, Leah Peloza, Merci Tan, and Ember Wolstenholme.



**Performances: 7 p.m. Nov. 4, 5, & 6;
2 p.m. Nov. 7**

Reinhart Auditorium, MHS Entrance M

Tickets: \$10 adults, \$7 senior citizens, \$5 students

Schedule may change. Please check the school website for updates.

Synopsis: Young Rose lives a peaceful, carefree life in her tiny wintry town of Radio Falls. But one day when Rose asks her Uncle Roger the truth of what happened to her parents, she learns there's more to the history of Radio Falls than she could have ever realized. The town has been trapped within perpetual winter ever since the evil Rime Witch came and stole the magic coin that sustained peace and happiness for the little town. Rose sets out to find the Rime Witch and return the coin to where it belongs. Soon, the coin's power invites the town to wonder what else it's missing.

Three schools see personnel changes in role of Dean

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taught a variety of grade levels: fifth, third and second," said Mrs. Rassbach. "I briefly stepped out of the public school system to work as a consultant for an education company for a math intervention program that allowed me to coach teachers on this program. When I returned to the classroom, I landed here in Merrillville, teaching second grade at Iddings.

"This variety of experience, teaching and coaching, provided a good foundation for the Dean of Students," she continued.

Mrs. Rassbach is a graduate of Purdue University with a Bachelor of Arts in elementary education and a Master of Science in educational studies and leadership.

"Having my master's in administration, I knew one day that I would transition from the classroom into a leadership role," she said. "When the Dean of

Wood became an open position, I knew this was my time to transition into leadership."

She has been married 26 years to her husband Chris, who is a Pirate grad.

"We have two grown children, Jared and Camryn," she said. "Jared is a union electrician and Camryn teaches first grade at Salk Elementary School. We have three dogs that we love dearly: Harper, Aria and Brady."



Remembering Dorothy Yetsko

Friends gathered last month to remember MHS Cafe Aide Dorothy Yetsko, who passed away from COVID-19 on Nov. 24, 2020. A memorial brick was purchased by co-workers, and Principal Mike Krutz and Assistant Principal Tim James placed it in the Memory Garden, which is outside Door A of the high school.

Ms. Yetsko was hired by the school corporation in September 2004 and transferred to the Freshman Cafe as an aide when the wing opened in 2009. She is missed by all who knew her!

Miller principal begins third year of online read alouds

Miller Elementary School Principal Jennifer Griffin has begun her third school year of weekly read alouds on the Miller Elementary School PTO Facebook Page.

Families are invited to grab their electronic devices and tune in every Tuesday at 6 p.m. to see what Mrs. Griffin will read next.

"My hope is to instill the love of books and reading to our students and families," Mrs. Griffin said. "I want to engage my listeners, as I make the stories come alive through my read alouds."

Mrs. Griffin often takes her read alouds on the road to feature local businesses of interest to families with young children. In addition, she offers prizes that are available to any Merrillville students who join her online.

"As I start my third year providing

these weekly readings, it is important to me that I put books in the hands of students with book giveaways to build their own home libraries," she said. "My goal is to have students/families across the corporation to tune in."



Miller Elementary School students are excited at hearing the news that Principal Griffin will again read books online weekly. From left Roy Garrett, Brandon Davis, Anthony Hunter (back), Miller Elementary School Principal Jennifer Griffin, Joshua Washington, and Bailee Cook.

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High school rolls out new CNA program

Merrillville High School has completely taken over and is now running its own CNA program this year, a milestone for the school's Career and Technical Education Program.

The move substantially reduces fees for students planning to become certified nursing assistants, as they will no longer have to pay the additional costs for instruction at a different school, and reduces the challenges of transporting students offsite during the school day.

Over the course of the program's five-year existence, MHS had partnered with organizations that could provide the qualified instructors and curriculum, like Victory Training in Hobart and also the University of St. Francis and former St. Anthony Hospital in Crown Point.

The MHS CNA program will have its own classroom and lab, and two registered nurses have been hired as educators to accommodate the growing number of students enrolled in this

year's program: Brandi Lawrence-Knocke and Angelique Todd, who each brings more than 10 years of experience working in various healthcare settings.

"We are excited to offer this program to more students, with the help of two excellent instructors, and serve the growing need for healthcare workers in our community," said Bob Phelps, director of technology and CTE.

"The students will be together all year in a hands-on, immersive experience," he added. "They will finish the year in a local long-term care facility working towards their CNA license."



Brandi Lawrence-Knocke (left) and Angelique Todd will instruct Merrillville High School CNA students this year, as the program moves in-house.

Cont'd next page

PIRATE PRIDE!



Thank you, T-Mobile!

Our friends at T-Mobile provided breakfast treats, coffee and gifts for our teachers at Fielers and Miller Elementary Schools and donated school supplies for their students.

Thank you for brightening our day and for making a difference in our community with your program that gives back! We appreciate your support!!

Alumni Connections

Want to tell your story?

Send an email to
mcsmedia@mvsc.k12.in.us



Jada Shannon
2014 MHS Graduate



Brianna (Urser) Hairlson
2008 MHS Graduate



Alicia Frazier
2017 MHS Graduate

★ Read their stories on our website
www.mvsc.k12.in.us ★



Anthony Rivera
2020 MHS Graduate



Adam Sherwinski
2013 MHS Graduate



Lori Tubbs
1988 MHS Graduate



Dr. Keiko Cooley
2010 MHS graduate



Erik Smith
1993 MHS Graduate

Once a Pirate, Always a Pirate!

High school rolls out new CNA program

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Once they complete the program and become certified, students can enter the workforce and take care of patients in a number of different healthcare settings, like hospitals, long-term residential facilities, nursing homes, rehabilitation centers, adult daycares and more.

According to MHS Assistant Principal for Career and Technical Education Mike Knocke, in addition to the program moving in-house, there are other reasons for this increase in student enrollment.

"We have many parents in the health-

care industry," Mr. Knocke said, acknowledging the influence parents have with their children's career choices.

Additionally, not only will students earn certifications at MHS, but they will also earn college credit for the courses, he added. Many students use their MHS training as a base for further healthcare instruction at the college level.

"Each one of three classes that will be offered in our CNA pathway will be aligned to Ivy Tech's dual credit, meaning students can receive dual credit hours," he said.

The students will take the Principles

of Healthcare and Medical Terminology courses during the first two trimesters. During the third trimester, students will intern at a long-term care facility to gain on-the-job experience.

"This makes the CNA program (pathway) unique in that students can become a concentrator in one year," he added.

Concentrator is a CTE term indicating that students have taken a certain number of classes to fulfill a graduation requirement, he said.

This year, the state requires students to pass a set of three classes to be a concentrator.



Celebrating seniors at the football game Aug. 27

Cheer on our Pirates!

FOOTBALL REGULAR SEASON

- Michigan City: Sept. 17, 7 p.m., @ Michigan City HS
- **HOMECOMING!** LaPorte: Sept. 24, 7 p.m., @ MHS
- Valparaiso: Oct. 1, 7 p.m., @ Valparaiso HS
- Lake Central: Oct. 8, 7 p.m., @ Lake Central HS
- Chesterton: Oct. 15, 7 p.m., @ MHS

GIRLS VOLLEYBALL REGULAR SEASON

- Chesterton: Sept. 14, 6 p.m., @ Chesterton HS
- Crown Point: Sept. 16, 6 p.m., @ Crown Point HS
- Wheeler: Sept. 20, 5 p.m., @ Wheeler HS
- Portage: Sept. 21, 6 p.m., @ Portage HS
- Michigan City: Sept. 23, 6 p.m., @ MHS
- Whiting: Sept. 27, 6 p.m., @ MHS
- Valparaiso: Sept. 28, 6 p.m., @ MHS
- Hammond Morton: Sept. 29, 6 p.m., @ Morton HS
- LaPorte: Sept. 30, 6 p.m., @ Laporte HS
- Hammond Bishop Noll H.S., Oct. 4, 6 p.m., @ MHS
- Lake Central: Oct. 5, 6 p.m., @ Lake Central HS
- Hanover Central: Oct. 6, 6 p.m., @ MHS
- Chesterton: Oct. 7, 6 p.m., @ MHS

BOYS SOCCER REGULAR SEASON

- Valparaiso: Sept. 15, 6:30 p.m., @ MHS
- Lowell: Sept. 18, 10 a.m., @ Lowell HS
- Portage: Sept. 20, 6 p.m., @ Portage HS
- Michigan City: Sept. 22, 6 p.m., @ Michigan City HS
- West Lafayette: Sept. 25, 11:30 a.m., @ West Lafayette HS
- Crown Point: Sept. 29, 6:30 p.m., @ Crown Point HS
- Hobart: Oct. 2, 11:30 a.m., @ MHS

GIRLS SOCCER REGULAR SEASON

- Valparaiso: Sept. 14, 6:30 p.m., @ TJ Middle School
- Hanover Central: Sept. 16, 5 p.m., @ MHS
- Michigan City: Sept. 21, 5 p.m., @ MHS
- Lowell: Sept. 25, 10 a.m., @ MHS
- Crown Point: Sept. 28, 5 p.m., @ MHS
- Hobart: Sept. 30, 5 p.m., @ MHS

See you there!

*Schedules for Sectionals, Regionals,
Cross Country, Girls Golf & Boys Tennis
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