



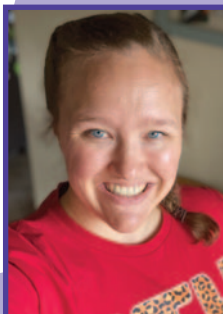
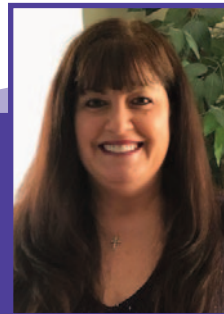
# Pirate Pride

November 2021

[www.mvsc.k12.in.us](http://www.mvsc.k12.in.us) \* 219-650-5300

The Newsletter of the Merrillville Community School Corporation

## 2021-22 Most Inspiring Teachers (pages 8+)





## Organization plans winter coat giveaways for families in need

Coats for Kids & Families, a community-wide effort to provide coats for children and families facing economic hardship, will distribute coats it recently collected to families in need.

Coats will be given away from 9 a.m.-noon on these Saturdays at these locations: Nov. 13, Merrillville Intermediate School, 1400 W. 61st Ave.; Nov. 20,

Impact Christian Church, 7071 Broadway, Merrillville.

Coats for Kids is a 501(c)(3) organization. For more information, visit the Merrillville School Corporation website, [www.mvsc.k12.in.us](http://www.mvsc.k12.in.us), or the organization's Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/coatsforkidsandfamilies/](https://www.facebook.com/coatsforkidsandfamilies/)

## Save your Strack & Van Til receipts

Strack & VanTil will help our schools by providing free education equipment during the school year.

Collect your receipts from Strack & VanTil and submit them to one of our participating schools:

- Wood Elementary School
- Merrillville Intermediate School
- Miller Elementary School
- Iddings Elementary School
- Fieler Elementary School

Ask your family and friends to save their receipts as well so your school can

maximize the points that they earn.

Every dollar spent earns a point towards earning educational equipment. Receipts need to be dated from Sept. 1, 2021, through March 1, 2022. Receipts are due by March 13, 2022.



### BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

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### SUPERINTENDENT

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](mailto:dstuckert@mvsc.k12.in.us) or 219-650-5477.*

## Support our schools as you holiday shop

The holidays are just around the corner, and you know what that means: SHOPPING! You can support Merrillville Schools when you purchase your gifts through Amazon Smile!

The Merrillville Education Foundation partners with Amazon Smile. When families choose the foundation as their favorite charitable organization while they shop with Amazon Smile, Amazon will donate a portion of the purchase price to the Merrillville Education Foundation.

Twice a year, the foundation awards grants to Merrillville teachers who use the money for opportunities

that enhance student learning and achievement, promote social and emotional development of our students, and contribute to a strong community through a belief that education is key.

Be sure to choose Merrillville Education Foundation as your favorite charitable organization.





## Books-A-Million! book drive helps schools

Thank you to all the community members for shopping at the mall's Books-A-Million! during their summer book drive for Merrillville schools. Many people visited and purchased a new book to donate.

A total of 266 books valued at more than \$3,000 was donated to the

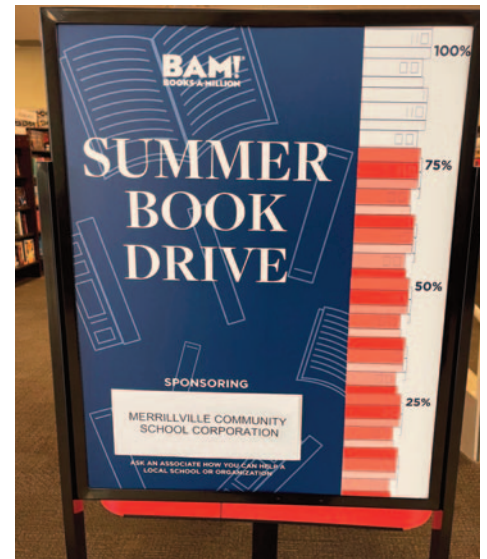
Merrillville Community Schools.

Students are loving the new books, which were added to the school libraries' collections.

These donations will provide children with thousands of hours of reading enjoyment and help them develop a great love of books.



Media staff pose with all the books donated from the BAM! book drive. Back from left: Alicia Sanford, Tish Beatty, Tiffany Underwood, Kristina Sides, Megan Henderson; front row: Elizabeth Kenyon, Meghan Erickson.



## MARK YOUR CALENDARS

**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

**Nov. 24-26**

No School  
Thanksgiving Holiday

**Dec. 9**

Grades 9-12 Parent/Teacher  
Conferences, 3:30-6:30 p.m.

**Dec. 20-21**

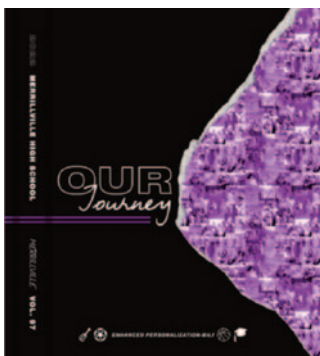
No School/Winter Holiday  
Thanksgiving Holiday

**Jan. 17**

No School  
Martin Luther King Jr. Day

## MHS Yearbook discount through Feb. 11

Last year's book sold out! You won't want to miss out on this year's book, which captures all the fun as students return full time to MHS. Order now to reserve your book at a low price.



The yearbook class is hard at work covering sports, clubs, classes and the arts. The book will feature all those special talents, hobbies and interests that

make our students special as they complete their journey through high school.

An added feature this year is Yearbook Plus, which will allow each student to upload 10 of their own personal photos, accessible through a QR code. Students will receive details on uploading photos next month.

The book is \$65 through Feb. 11. Payment plans are available. You can pay with a credit card through [www.jostens.com](http://www.jostens.com) or pay in cash at school in Room M108.

For a look at the Yearbook Plus program, watch this video: <https://youtu.be/K4WvQYMePZw>



# School's guest readers help 'spark' students' love of books

When the staff at Iddings Elementary School decided to participate in the national program "One School, One Book" this fall, they enlisted the help of some local heroes.

Members of the Merrillville Fire Department jumped at the chance to be a part of a program that educates families and schools on the benefits and importance of reading aloud.

"Being part of the community is very important to us and our department," said Capt. Phil Hasier. "What better way than to engage kids, especially at a time when teachers are struggling to be creative with all the different challenges they faced over the last year or so. So why not help out in some small way when it comes to educating our children?"

Merrillville firefighters embarked on the creation of seven videos to kick off each week of reading the book "Charlotte's Web" for the school. Each video featured a firefighter reading a chapter

within the context of their own jobs.

Capt. Hasier credited Lt. Scott Molchan as the creative genius behind the videos.

"He pitched the idea to have different backgrounds," Capt. Hasier said. "Anyone can sit in a chair and read. What's special about a fireman reading to kids? He said 'let's put some of our stuff in the background,' and he just kept going."

In the video series, Lt. Molchan read his chapter from on top of a fire engine; Firefighter Nick Vansipma read from atop an extended aerial ladder in front of the station; Firefighter/Paramedic Adrienne Hammerstein read her chapter from the inside of an ambulance; and Firefighter Jason Coin read from a building that appears to be "burning" using video special effects.

Lt. Molchan is featured in another video where he starts to read a chapter while dressed in diving gear and "magically" changes into regular clothes when he realizes no one would be able to hear him through his scuba mask.

"We really appreciated the MFD taking the time to engage our students in reading 'Charlotte's Web,'" said Michelle Coughlin, principal of Iddings Elementary School. "They have been so creative and allowed our students to see different aspects of the fire department that they may not have seen before. The students watched these videos in the classroom and really enjoyed seeing community members reading to them."

Elementary school resource officer Det. Cpl. Allison Ellis and Heather Ulrich from the school corporation's central office staff, who doubles as a



Capt. Phil Hasier reads chapters from "Charlotte's Web" from the firehouse.



Firefighter Nick Vansipma reads from atop an extended aerial ladder in front of the station.



Firefighter Jason Coin reads from a building that appears to be burning using video special effects.



Second grader Maryssa Shoppa poses in front of a backdrop as part of the fun for "One Book, One School."

representative of the Faith community, rounded out the featured readers that mix in with Iddings Elementary School teachers.

As the teachers and students embraced the book over the few weeks, they participated in activities related to it, including coloring and bulletin board contests, taking photos with a "Charlotte's Web" backdrop, and creating their own webs.

The school wrapped up the book and activities before fall break by watching the movie.



# 'Charlotte's Web' coloring contest winners



First grader  
Caito Bradley



Second grader  
Sabrina Hutton



Fourth grader Lily Sylvester

## One School, One Book



## Wood students enjoy Fire Prevention Week activities

Wood Elementary School kindergarteners and first graders got a visit from some very special guests.

Their friends at the Hobart Fire Department stopped by to talk to them and give them an up-close look at their trucks and equipment as part of their Fire Prevention Week activities. Students each got a coloring book as well.

Thank you, Hobart Fire Department! The kids had a great time with you and learned a lot!







# PERFORMING ARTS



JOIN US!

## Holiday Shows



Congratulations to the MHS Band of Pirates who earned silver at the Indiana State School Music Association Marching Band Festival.

### MHS Holiday Band Concert Dec. 7

- 6 p.m. Freshman (Concert Band)
- 6:30 p.m. Intermediate (Symphonic Band)
- 7 p.m. Advanced (Wind Ensemble)

**Ticket price:** One can of food or one non-perishable food item that will be donated to the Ross Township Food Pantry.



### 'Scrooge the Musical'

7:30 p.m. Nov. 27, Dec. 3 & 4;  
& 3 p.m. Dec. 5

Tickets available from any MHS Choir member or online:

<https://bit.ly/ScroogeReinhartAuditorium>

### 'Sounds of the Season' MHS Holiday Choir Concert Dec. 16, 7:30 p.m.

**Ticket price:** \$6 at the door,  
Family Pass \$20.



Concert Choir at their fall Sneak Peek Concert.

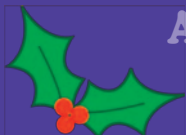


MHS orchestra students at their fall concert.

### MHS Holiday Orchestra Concert Dec. 9

**Ticket price:** Adults \$4 (\$6 at the door); school age children \$2 (\$4 at the door); Seniors \$2 (\$4 at the door).

All performances in Reinhart Auditorium, located through  
Door M of Merrillville High School, 276 E. 68th Pl.



## Culinary Arts students primed to earn Ivy Tech college credit



Congratulations are in order for the students in Ms. Tubbs' culinary classes who passed the entrance exam for Ivy Tech. This means the students who pass Ms. Tubbs' classes will not only earn credit toward their high school diplomas, but they will also jumpstart their college careers by earning college credit for these dual credit culinary classes! These students are enrolled in Hosp 101 Food Safety and Sanitation; Hosp 102 Basic Food Theory; and Hosp 103 Soups, Stocks and Sauces. Back row from left: Marcus White, Egypt Brandon, Tyler Wheaton, William Joseph, Mateo Andrews, and Dakota Vermilyer; front row: Erika Bailey, David Maldonado, Khaliah Whyte, Ashley Ervin and Ms. Tubbs.

## New cooperative effort a win-win for students and Food Service Dept.



Students Jada Smith (left) and Janiya Smith are two of several interns getting some hands-on experience working in a commercial kitchen, thanks to a new program between the MHS Culinary Arts classes and the school corporation's Food Service Department.

The interns are helping the high school Food Service staff prepare nutritious food for hungry high schoolers in the Freshman and Main Cafeterias. The interns do a variety of things: portion fruit, wrap fruits and veggies, serve, clean up, sweep, mop, etc.

Not only are they getting some great

experience in using equipment, customer service, and basic food safety, but they are also getting graded for their efforts by their teacher Patti Tubbs.

"The internship is especially great for students who would otherwise be unable to get work experience because of transportation issues," said Ms. Tubbs.

In addition, due to a labor shortage, the Culinary students are a welcome addition to the staff.

"They are a pleasure to have as helpers," said Penny Parmley, MHS cafeteria manager.

## Senior class fundraiser Nov. 16

You have to eat and what better way to support the Class of 2022 than to plan your dinner at the Merrillville Chick-fil-A.

Come and eat on Tuesday, Nov. 16, between 5 and 7 p.m., and our senior class will receive a percentage of the sales.





Each year, the Crossroads Chamber of Commerce asks the school districts within the communities it serves to nominate their most inspiring teachers.

Based on interviews and applications, the Chamber chooses one teacher from each district as the Most Inspiring Teacher of the Year.

This year, the Merrillville Community School Corporation nominated these educators for this distinguished award. See what their administrators had to say about them.

# 2021-22 Most Inspiring Teachers



**Vicki Antich, First Grade Teacher  
Salk Elementary School**

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 1988**

*Vicki is one of the most positive people that you will ever meet and a true inspiration for our students and staff. She absolutely loves and adores her students. She will do anything to help ensure they are successful. The amount of growth that her students get simply by being in her class is nothing sort of remarkable. She will take some of our most at-risk students and help them reach their full academic and behavioral potential. Vicki's students love coming to her class, and she is willing to go above and beyond for the benefit of her students. Vicki is a great person and an even better educator. .*

**-Nicholas Petralia, Principal**

**Joan Cseke, Third Grade Teacher  
Wood Elementary School**

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 2018**

*Joan is a very positive person and teacher. She loves working at Wood, her students, her third grade team, and her family more than anything. One experience that a staff member shared with me about Joan was last year during COVID. One of Joan's students was showing symptoms and the school nurse was contacted. Joan was very loving, calm and reassuring with the student who was scared and not feeling well. After the student left the classroom, Joan brought the child a box of tissues, a prize that she would have received later in the day, and a few snacks. She made sure the child was calm and felt safe. In this situation, Joan went above and beyond her teacher job description.*

*Joan is also very organized.*

**-Alison Petralia, Principal**



**Sarah Mildaas, Fourth Grade Teacher  
Iddings Elementary School**

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 2017**

*When students returned in person last February, she worked closely with a couple of students who found it challenging to be back in the classroom. Through developing individual plans, parent communication and constant self-reflection, she made a difference in the lives of these students and others in her class. Sarah's flexibility is a great asset to our building and students. While she taught 4th grade last year, she was ready to move to kindergarten over the summer. She had her room set up (in the kindergarten portion of our building). When the need arose on the DAY BEFORE SCHOOL STARTED, she moved right back into a 4th grade position and adjusted from what she thought would be a year of teaching kindergarten to once again joining the 4th grade team.*

**-Michelle Coughlin, Principal**



# 2021-22 Most Inspiring Teachers

## Jacqueline Sanders, Third Grade Teacher Miller Elementary School

Started with Merrillville Schools in 2019

*Jacqueline Sanders has a knack for creating a learning environment for her students that screams STUDENT-CENTERED. Mrs. Sanders has a way of making learning fun and engaging. Students have the opportunity to experiment with new knowledge, do hands-on activities that correlate with learning objectives and engage in meaningful discussions that they will remember for a lifetime. Mrs. Sanders values the need for building community in her classroom. She holds community circles in her classroom and focuses on 'Ensuring Ohana.' Each student respects the circle and one another, and respects the community environment of their classroom. There is no doubt that her classroom has a 'family' feel and all students know that 'no one will be left behind or forgotten.' Mrs. Sanders sets high standards for herself and her students. She provides a differentiated approach with all of her students, meeting each of them at their level of learning.*

**-Jennifer Griffin, Principal**



## Jessica Churchill, Fourth Grade Teacher Fieler Elementary School

Started with Merrillville Schools in 2018

*Jessica is an overcomer, a problem-solver, an innovator, and a dynamic member of our 4th grade team. Her enthusiasm, patience, and passion for teaching (and her students) is nothing short of amazing. Jessica does not work or serve for awards or accolades, but simply to inspire and impact all those she comes in contact with each day. She teaches her students to strive for excellence, to love reading, and to respect each other; and she teaches all of us to give our best for our students. While remaining current with the latest instructional strategies and technologies, she can still reach a troubled or struggling student with simple, yet profound, motherly instincts and empathy coupled with complete professionalism. Likewise, she can accelerate and challenge her brightest of students because of professional development experiences and innovations she has pursued.*

**-Michael Megyesi, Principal**



## Angela Wells, Fifth Grade Teacher Merrillville Intermediate School

Started with Merrillville Schools in 2017

*Angela Wells is THAT teacher that goes above and beyond for her students while also helping out her colleagues. Angela puts in a lot of effort to making her lessons engaging and hands on. Her current project is using her 3D printer to make engaging manipulatives for her students. Her lessons involve students working together and sharing out ideas. Angela is constantly making and sharing resources with teachers 'just because'! She often has 'just a few extra copies' that she will happily send your way. Angela is always changing to meet the needs of her students, and they enjoy being in her classroom. Her dedication is obvious to those who know her. And she ALWAYS has a smile!*

**-Kara Bonin Principal**



# 2021-22 Most Inspiring Teachers



**Patrice Weil, Eighth Grade English Teacher  
Pierce Middle School**

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 2020**

*Patrice is an excellent teacher and person who goes above and beyond for the students and her colleagues. Not only does Patrice go above and beyond for her students in the classroom, she is great at building relationships. In the short time here at Pierce, she has become a very important go-to person in the building as well as a great support for teachers as the English Department head. Mrs. Weil has done a great job gathering her department and restructuring the English curriculum for the middle school, and we appreciate everything she has done to help improve our academics and culture here at Pierce.*

**-Mike Akins, Assistant Principal**

**Kelly Kratz, MHS History Teacher  
& Girls' Head Basketball Coach**

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 2014**

*She is one of my best teachers. What makes her great is her ability to build relationships with all kids and inspire and motivate them to engage in school. Mrs. Kratz has never given up on a student and is always willing to work with me when dealing with difficult students. She has high expectations for all of her students and earns their respect by modeling expectations. Mrs. Kratz is always on time, prepared, demonstrates a positive mindset and has a passion for coaching and her content area. She wants to be here, and her kids want to come see her. Merrillville High School is a great place for kids because of teachers like Mrs. Kratz.*

**-Tim James, MHS Assistant Principal**



**Joe Sokol, MHS Welding Teacher**

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 2019**

*Mr. Joe Sokol has been our welding instructor for the past three years, and his passion for his profession shows each day. He has let students come in during their lunch to practice welding, and he held a Summer Bridge Program to help students become certified after the school year was over. Last year, he was able to get two more students AWS Certified and three current students caught up on the standards they fell behind during the pandemic. Mr. Sokol is particularly skilled at getting students who have trouble with the traditional classroom setting to thrive in his class. Mr. Sokol has also been a tremendous advocate for his welding program and getting it to expand in order to help give our students more opportunities. With his advocacy, our program has just expanded from seven to 12 booths. This will allow his classes to be larger and will also allow his students to have more hands-on instruction in their lab. Mr. Sokol has reached out to make partnerships with different businesses in order to get his students recognized and the opportunity to be employed.*

**-Mike Knocke**

**MHS Assistant Principal for Career & Technical Education**



# 2021-22 Most Inspiring Teachers

## **Anthony “Bo” Patton, MHS Business Teacher & Boys’ Head Basketball Coach**

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 2013**

*He is so much more than just a teacher and a coach. He believes in developing the whole student, not just academically, but also in terms of character development and being a good human being. Mr. Patton models the behavior that he wants students to exhibit. He believes strongly in giving back to the community and creates opportunities for the players on his team to frequently participate in community service activities. He could just have the players practice, play, and go home; but he treats service to the community as something that is just as important. Some examples of the community service activities that Mr. Patton and the basketball team participated in are volunteering at the Northwest Indiana Food Bank, a basketball camp for students with special needs, the Lerner and Rowe backpack giveaway, and volunteering at the Inclusion Dance (a dance for students with special needs who attend from various high schools). Mr. Patton is certainly making an impact on our athletes by showing them that there is more to sports than just handling a ball, and his efforts can be felt on the gym floor, in the hallways of our school, and in the community.*

**-Candace Lillie, MHS Assistant Principal**



## **MHS Guidance Counselors**

*These two ladies are accomplished and dedicated educators who are highly trusted and respected by their students, staff, parents and stakeholders within our school community. Veronica and Betty model expectations for all of the stakeholders within our building and challenge our students to be their very best both in the classroom and in our community. Each has a case load of 300 students coupled with sponsoring our YES Interact Club and our Environmental Club. They directly impact hundreds of students on a daily basis at MHS. Through volunteering as Salvation Army Bell Ringers, visiting Local Senior Citizens Centers and hosting our MHS Carnival for Kids, our students are getting to experience the importance of giving back to our community.*

**-Mike Krutz, MHS Principal**



**Veronica  
Maldonado**

**Started with  
Merrillville  
Schools in 2005**



**Betty  
Jordan**

**Started with  
Merrillville  
Schools in 2004**

# PIRATE PRIDE!

# 2021-22 Most Inspiring Teachers



## Wade Boise, Secondary Math Coach

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 1999**

*Wade is a valued member of this team that sets high expectations for students, staff and other stakeholders in an effort to help others. Wade teaches content, but does not move on until the content is mastered by students. He continuously uses spiral review to make sure his students reach the peak of success in his classes. He uses data to make informed decisions. It is because of this that Wade has moved into a new position this year as Secondary Math Coach. Mr. Boise takes time to make sure students reach benchmarks in his classes. He continues to work with students that might fail a test. He will continue teaching, reviewing and reteaching. Mr. Boise does not give up on kids. He makes sure he exhausts all avenues to get through to all of his students. He is an active member of his church. He mentors youth to make decisions that positively affect their lives. He is a role model for students at MHS and has a very positive attitude that is contagious to students.*

**-Dan School, MHS Assistant Principal**

## Meghan Erickson, MHS Media Specialist

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 2009**

*Meghan has a passion for engaging her students and our staff in such a variety of ways. Students that join her courses rarely have been exposed to the world of media literacy, but quickly tap into their talents and develop an interest in the course. She encourages students to work beyond the classroom to develop community outreach projects. Meghan also serves our staff on our 'Parrot Head' Technology Cadre team, training staff on new technology and teaching techniques that focus on engaging students. Meghan regularly attends educational conferences and brings back exciting ideas for projects and educational games that she develops for the MHS staff. She is known for being flexible, easy to work with, and is prompt with her support of students and staff. She has worked within the high school library media department to establish curbside library through the Bookhub created for students that were virtual during last school year.*



**-James Stamper, MHS Assistant Principal**



## Tom Mackey, Theater Arts Teacher

**Started with Merrillville Schools in 2012**

*Mr. Mackey has a passion for engaging learners in such a variety of ways. Students that join his theater arts courses rarely have been exposed to the world of live performance, but quickly tap into their talents and develop an interest in the course. He encourages students to work beyond the classroom to develop community outreach projects such as building tables, gardens and places to rest and meditate around the school. Mr. Mackey inspires his students not only to learn basic construction skills and principles to be used in theater and design, but inspires them to take their talents outside the classroom. His students are always looking for ways to connect to the world outside the theater walls. Mr. Mackey's plays are incredible. He has a vision for creating unique experiences for our students and our community members who attend. His Thespian group has excelled to be awarded top honors in festivals and competitions across the state, earning 'Top Ensemble' awards for best casting.*

**-James Stamper, MHS Assistant Principal**



# Is your child up-to-date on routine vaccinations?

Many children and adolescents missed obtaining routine vaccinations while staying at home during the COVID-19 outbreak. Routine vaccinations help protect children from 16 serious diseases.

Your school nurse is available to support students, families, and school leaders with educating parents, reviewing immunization records, and providing families with information to support their child with becoming compliant with receiving immunizations.

## KEY CONSIDERATIONS:

The CDC and the American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) recommend every child continues to receive routine vacci-

nations during the COVID-19 outbreak.

Well-child visits and vaccinations are essential services and help make sure children are protected against vaccine preventable diseases.

The Vaccines for Children (VFC) program provides eligible children vaccines at no cost.

Parents should contact their child's medical provider about receiving routine vaccines. Many medical offices are taking extra



steps to make sure that well visits can happen safely during the COVID-19 outbreak.

## When to keep your child home from school

Please do not send your child to school when they are not feeling well. We are still in the mist of the ongoing pandemic, and the spread of the Delta variant is 10 times more contagious.

If you are giving your child medication before coming to school, they should be staying home.

If your child has been diagnosed with allergies that could be misconstrued as COVID-19 symptoms, please get in touch with your school nurse. A signed medical form from your physician is all the school nurse needs to be able to keep your child in school.

Your school nurses are dedicated to ensure that each and every student is healthy and safe while attending school. We appreciate your patience and consideration as we continue through this difficult, challenging and changing time.

Please feel free to contact your school nurse at any time.

Click here to visit the  
School Nurses' website.

## Mobile dentist visits coming up

The Mobile Dentist is coming to visit your child's school!

This FREE service will use a network of locally licensed dentists, hygienists, and assistants to provide high quality care to your child.

### Salk Elementary School

Tuesday & Wednesday,  
Dec. 13-14, 2021

### Fielser Elementary School

Friday, Jan. 28  
& Monday, Jan. 31, 2022

### Miller Elementary School

Tuesday, Feb. 1, 2022

### Wood Elementary School

Wednesday, Jan. 5, 2022

### Students will receive:

- Complete Oral Exam
- Cleaning
- Fluoride
- Sealants
- Oral health education
- A report card from the dentist
- A free toothbrush

If you haven't already done so, you can sign your consent here using:

<https://www.myschooldentist.com/>



## Staff Feature

**MHS officer manager/secretary started as a playground aide**

Marsha Pierson hasn't always been the office manager/secretary to the principal at MHS that most people know today.

When she started with the school corporation in August 1992, she worked at John Wood Elementary School in day-care and also as a recess aide. After about four years, she moved to Pierce.

"At the time they were under renovation, so the sixth-grade class was housed at St. Peter and Paul," Mrs. Pierson said. "I was the head secretary for Mr. Dave Dixon. Such a wonderful man to work with: Witty, compassionate with the students in their needs. Truly a dream job."

She moved on to the high school during the winter of 1997, where she said she has made lifelong friends.

"The people inspire me," Mrs. Pierson said. "I love the energy of the young people and close working relationships."

"We have some of the best employees around," she said. "Helpful, hard-working, and compassionate. I also have to mention our administrators are top

notch. They expect you to perform at your best, but they also entertain us with their silliness and interactions with one another.

"We work hard, then we stop for a few minutes, listen to a funny story, share a giggle, then back to work," Mrs. Pierson continued. "Our days go by quickly. We are not just coworkers, we are family. I have two sons of my own, but now, I also have a work daughter."

To her, the summer of 2020 served as a prime example of just how amazing her coworkers are.

"Our admins pulled together and worked tirelessly to empty every student locker, package all the books, and label them for pick up," she said. "No air conditioning, just a lot of sweat equity. No complaining, just doing what needed to be done."

"They also spent 12 hours a day, over four days, sitting in the sun trying to give our grads of 2020 the feel of graduation by creating a stage, passing out programs, and posing with the grads for pic-

**Marsha Pierson**

tures," Mrs. Pierson continued. "The people at MHS really do care about the kids."

After a MCSC career spanning more than three decades, she has set her sights to retire in April 2023. Mrs. Pierson plans to travel with her best friend, her husband, and never again set an alarm.

## Teacher Feature

**Iddings Elementary School teacher marks 32 years in Merrillville****Jeani Thiel**

Jeani Thiel, third grade teacher at Iddings Elementary School, said it is always exciting to see students grow and change, especially when you see them many years later.

She has been a teacher with Merrillville Community School Corporation since 1989.

"To be a positive person in a student's life is very rewarding," Mrs. Thiel said. "I have always enjoyed growing in this field and learning new ways to teach kids."

She actually started her career at John Wood Elementary School 32 years ago, then moved to Id-

dings. Mrs. Thiel has mostly taught third graders, but she has also taught fifth and second grades.

"Students are always surprising and entertaining me, as well as keeping me on my toes," she said.

After all of these years, she hopes to retire soon and already has some ideas on how she'll spend her time.

"My family has always visited different national parks, so we plan to explore the many more parks we have not yet been," she said. "Also, my husband and I look forward to traveling abroad when the pandemic/COVID-19 calms."

*Schedules for MHS athletics available at [merrillvillepirates.com](http://merrillvillepirates.com)*



## Entrance/reception area changes for high school visitors

Security is on everyone's mind, especially those of Merrillville school administrators.

If you haven't been through the MHS main entrance lately, things have changed! To increase the security of the school, entrance A has a little different flow to get into the building.

The renovation added checkpoints

before guests access the building. Visitors are now buzzed into the entrance, then vetted and buzzed into the front office, where a receptionist can run a quick background check before allowing guests access to the building.

In addition, the entrance into the front office got some clear signage, and the office itself got a welcomed facelift

with a new front desk behind glass, a purple soffit, new carpeting, paint and, of course, a Pirate!

The project has been the topic of discussion for a while, but the opportunity to tackle it came last summer.

The whole project took about six weeks, and the entrance was ready for the first day of school last August!



Tammy Schmellmeyer, main office secretary, greets visitors in the new Merrillville High School front office reception area.



## Transportation adds tracking, contact tracing technology

Parents, if your children ride the school bus, you'll soon be able to tell when they are physically on the bus and when they will arrive home!

The Merrillville Community School Corporation has invested in transportation technology that will increase the safety of all riders and bring peace of mind to parents. All buses will soon be equipped with Bus Guardian, a technology that will assist with student tracking and contact tracing.

When children board the bus, they will swipe school-issued ID cards that allow drivers to know whether or not they are supposed to be at the stop or even on that

particular bus.

On the way home, drivers will also be able to confirm that students disembark at the right stops. With the new technology, accurate ridership reports will be easy for administration to create.



Once the technology is ready to go, parents can download "Here Comes the Bus," a new app for their phones that will allow them to reference the whereabouts of their children.

Bus Guardian will really come in handy with substitute bus drivers and reliable contact tracing for COVID-19.

In addition to contact tracing, the Transportation Department can use the software to create detailed inspection reports for cleaning and sanitizing buses, another important process that will keep everyone safe!

School administrators hope for the software to be up and running next month! Stay tuned for updates!

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## Enchanted Backpack donates supplies to Pierce Middle School

Pierce Middle School was the recipient of \$8,500 worth of supplies from Enchanted Backpack.

Two vans from the organization arrived Oct. 14, filled with boxes and bags of items that included books, notebooks, construction paper, copy paper, crayons, dry erase markers and erasers, glue sticks, pens, pocket folders, pencil sharpeners, toothpaste, gloves and hats, sneakers, socks, and much more.

A small army of teachers and administrators, and even School Resource Officer Mike Bunnell (bottom left photo), helped to unload the supplies.

"This right here is a truly humbling experience," said Pierce Principal LaFonda Morris. "Who really ever gets anything for free. We got all of this stuff for free for our children. It makes you want to cry to see two vans roll in full of stuff. And all you really have to do is say 'thank you.' I'm really pleased to be the recipient of these materials for our students."

Enchanted Backpack is a 501(c)3 organization in Illinois that was started with the belief that all children deserve to have the tools they need to learn and excel, and that all teachers deserve to have the support and materials to make their classrooms exciting learning centers.



## Bataan Death March

On Oct. 20, the cadets from the Air Force JROTC participated in the Bataan Death March.

This March commemorates the Bataan Death March of WWII; in addition, our cadets marched the 14 miles in four hours!





# High school readies welding program for growth

After a school year that challenged both students and teachers with virtual and blended learning, more than 100 Merrillville High School students requested welding classes during the 2021-22 school year, nearly double that of previous years for the school's Career and Technical Education (CTE) program.

Students were ready to get back to hands-on learning, and the recently completed classroom renovation is now primed to accommodate the increasing number of students.

The \$79,000 construction project took place over the last several months, adding student workstations, improvements to shop ventilation, electrical, five new multi-function machines and fume extractors. A Perkins Grant along with funding awarded by the Hobart Redevelopment Commission covered approximately \$45,000 worth of equipment upgrades.

"As a district, we are committed to improving the welding lab for the students," said Bob Phelps, director of technology and CTE. "We increased our capacity to serve our students by removing outdated equipment and adding five more welding bays with new multi-process welders. The students now train in a cleaner, safer lab that meets our post-secondary and industry partners' expectations."

Historically, the introductory class of 12 students required them to take turns welding, but that process made it difficult to satisfy the hands-on requirements for dual credit or the Department of Education curriculum, according to Joe Sokol, MHS welding educator.

"With the expansion of the welding facilities, all of the students can have access to a machine for their entire class period," he said. "Since we offer four welding classes a day, we will be able to accommodate 48 students per trimester."

The Welding II class that maxed out at seven students can now accommodate 12 students.

The MHS welding program will increase dual credit participation during this school year, which means students



With the expansion of the MHS welding classroom, each student will have a machine to work on for the entire class. Prior to the renovation, students had to take turns.

will not only earn credit toward their high school diploma, but will also earn credit toward college or trade school, giving them a jumpstart on their future education. In addition, the program will increase the number of welder certifications issued to students.

"We are setting the groundwork to begin implementing the Next Level Programs of Study (NLPS) curriculum in the fall of 2022," Mr. Sokol said.

He added that those requirements will focus on a greater concentration within the CTE Pathways.

"That means transitioning from Welding I and Welding II into specific areas of knowledge," he said. "After completing the Principles of Welding course, students will move into concentrators: Shielded Metal Arc Welding (SMAW) and Gas Arc Welding (GMAW & FCAW).

"Students will gain a deeper understanding of specific welding processes," he continued. "They will be able to pursue more welding qualifications, which will increase their employability and help build a professional resume of skills."

He added that as the MHS program continues to grow, so do the relationships it builds with manufacturers and suppliers in Northwest Indiana who seek skilled employees.

"On any given day you can walk in and see Merrillville students of all skill levels on their way to becoming certified welders while still in high school," Mr. Phelps said. "By providing those students with great instruction and professional equipment, we are setting them up for success."

Mr. Sokol began his third year at Merrillville High School this fall. MHS CTE Assistant Principal Mike Knocke credits the educator for the success of the program.

"Mr. Sokol is an enthusiastic teacher who cares deeply about his program and his students," Mr. Knocke said. "He is constantly looking for innovative ways to build up student engagement and is always willing to come in to help our students."

"When you get a teacher that offers

*cont'd next page*



## Salk Elementary School Fall Walk highlights school's Red Ribbon Week activities



Salk Elementary School students took their annual march through the neighborhood during the Fall Walk last week.

Part of Red Ribbon Week activities, the event is a favorite of students and staff who come together as a school with an anti-drug message.

The MHS Marching Band of Pirates and cheerleaders came out to lead the children through the streets as well as greet them upon their return. The town's police and firefighters were on hand to make sure everyone stayed safe.

The tradition has been around for more than a decade and was canceled only once due to COVID-19 during 2020.

## High school readies welding program for growth

*from previous page*

the unique energy that Mr. Sokol comes with, combined with a program in which

students get large amounts of hands-on experience, students are going to gravitate to that program," he added.

Mr. Sokol even worked over the

summer to help his students increase their skills and earn welding certifications.

The teacher combined his love for education and technical crafts into a welding education career at MHS. After 14 years as a mathematics teacher, he changed careers.

"I pursued a new career in structural steel fabrication," Mr. Sokol said. "I served as a quality control/quality assurance manager, where I earned credentials as a Certified Welding Inspector and Certified Welding Educator.

"I also acquired welding qualifications and certifications in specific processes and positions," he added.

After several years in the QA/QC role, he was intrigued by an opening at Merrillville High School.

"The more I thought about coming back to the profession in a new capacity, the more excited I was at the opportunity," he said. "I am looking forward to building an amazing program for our students."



MHS Welding Teacher Joe Sokol (right) gets his students geared up for class.

# Alumni Connections

**Want to tell  
your story?**

Send an email to  
[mcsmedia@mvsc.k12.in.us](mailto:mcsmedia@mvsc.k12.in.us)



Dr. Jasmin McGee  
2014 MHS Graduate



Donald Long Jr.  
2015 MHS Graduate



Paige Wood  
2019 MHS Graduate



Keon Gibson  
2014 MHS Graduate



Cherise Higgins  
2017 MHS Graduate

**Read their stories  
on our website  
[www.mvsc.k12.in.us](http://www.mvsc.k12.in.us)**

## Once a Pirate, Always a Pirate!

# Basketball clinics and camps!

## MIS/PIERCE GIRLS

Attention all girls in grades 5th through 8th who are interested in basketball.

The MHS Girls' Basketball Team and coaches will hold MIS and Pierce nights on Wednesdays from 6 to 7 p.m. This is a FREE basketball clinic!

MIS and Pierce nights are scheduled for the following dates: Nov. 10, Nov. 17, Dec. 1 and Dec. 8

Come to MHS, enter through door Q and workout with the high school staff and players in the main gym.

Contact Coach Kratz for more information: [kkratz@mvsc.k12.in.us](mailto:kkratz@mvsc.k12.in.us) or 219-650-5307, x7558.



## ELEMENTARY BOYS

Elementary school boys (grades 1st through 4th) can learn new skills with MHS coaches and players!

Basketball camps will take place from 5:45 to 7 p.m. Nov. 16, 23, 29, and Dec. 6.

Campers are \$30 each. Forms and money are due into the MHS Athletic Office by Friday, Nov. 12.

Daily awards for working hard and positive attitude will be presented!

Transportation must be provided by parents. Use entrance Q for drop off and pick up.

For more information, contact Coach Patton, [apatton@mvsc.k12.in.us](mailto:apatton@mvsc.k12.in.us) or 219-650-5307, x6734. For all future camps, visit [www.merrillvillepirates.com](http://www.merrillvillepirates.com)

## GO PIRATES!





*Schedules for basketball, gymnastics,  
swimming and wrestling available  
@ [merrillvillepirates.com](https://merrillvillepirates.com)*

## Congratulations, Zachary Dunn!



Senior Zack Dunn finished his high school career with a 42nd place finish at the IHSAA State Championships at LaVern Gibson Championship Cross Country Course in Terre Haute, Ind.



## CLIFFORD PIERCE MIDDLE SCHOOL

*First Meeting*

Tuesday, Nov. 16

9 a.m. AND/OR 4 p.m.

Clifford Pierce Middle School  
Cafeteria  
199 E. 70th Ave.

### RSVP:

Cheryl Smith, Family & Community  
Engagement Specialist,  
(219) 650-5308, ext. 8105.