



Pirate Pride

January 2022

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

The Newsletter of the Merrillville Community School Corporation

Senior Standouts!



Kiersten Stowe

Kiersten Stowe was one of six recipients in Lake County to receive a Lilly Endowment Scholarship that will provide full-tuition for four years of full-time undergraduate study. [Page 7](#)

Kiersten and five other MHS seniors were named 2020 National Recognition Scholars based on their exemplary PSAT scores. [Page 6](#)



Vincent Feliciano



Caleb Carter



Bianaca Mbachu



Juliana Gonzalez



Great Bah

Overhead Door of NWI brings holiday cheer to Fieler



From left, Fieler Elementary School Principal Mike Megyesi, Assistant Principal Amy Hinkel, Overhead Door owner Jim Cameron, his wife Ellen Cameron, son Jeff Cameron, Social Worker Annette Brown-Gilliam, Kindergarten Teacher Nicole Olson and School Secretary Tina Detterline.

Overhead Door Company of Northwest Indiana made a special delivery to Fieler Elementary School last month, bringing a donation of more than 500 toys for school children!

Owner Jim Cameron, his wife Ellen and son Jeff toted in bags and boxes filled with games, sports equipment, crafts, and more from their pickup truck that was loaded up with gifts

Mr. Cameron said they began their shopping on Black Friday. Their purchases were guided by Fieler staff who identified ages and genders of students whose families were in need this holiday season.

This is the 11th year Overhead Door Company of Northwest Indiana has made this holiday gift to community children.

Mr. Cameron said the donation is their way of giving back to the community that supports them.

BOARD OF SCHOOL TRUSTEES

Mark S. Lucas
President

Judy C. Dunlap
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Linda C. Jonaitis
Secretary

DeLena N. Thomas
Member

James Donohue
Member

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@mysc.k12.in.us or 219-650-5477.

Tune in
TUESDAYS @ 6 p.m.
Miller Elementary School PTO Facebook Page
www.facebook.com/MillerSchool.PTO

Families, grab those electronic devices and tune in to enjoy

Read Alouds

by Miller Elementary School Principal Jennifer Griffin

Every Tuesday throughout the school year
(except days when school is not in session)

She will introduce you to a great book, and kids will get a chance to win prizes!
All students throughout the school corporation who tune-in are eligible to win!



WINNER!



WINNER!



WINNER!



WINNER!

Second grader values her time with school resource officer

Iddings Elementary School second grader Tori'anna Campbell spent 50 of her hard-earned Pirate Bucks on 30 minutes with someone she aspires to be like.

Teacher Nina Gavric said her students can spend their Pirate Bucks on a variety of selections, including becoming principal for a half hour; but Tori'anna, who aspires to be a police officer, asked if she could save hers to spend some time with School Resource Officer Cpl. Allison Ellis.

Ms. Gavric said Tori'anna earned her Pirate Bucks by demonstrating leadership qualities and by al-

ways following the Iddings code of being respectful, responsible, and safe.

Ms. Gavric said Tori'anna always works through challenges and works hard to reach her academic goals.

"She is considerate of others and makes sure other classmates stay on

track," Ms. Gavric said.

"I want to be one when I grow up," said Tori'anna of Cpt. Ellis' profession. "I want to catch the bad guys."

Town of Merrillville Police Chief Wiley Luther Cuttino was happy to reward the student. He arrived at the school and swore in Tori'anna as a junior officer, presenting her with a certificate and a badge.

Afterward, Tori'anna spent her time patrolling the school hallways with Cpl. Ellis, checking out her squad car, and asking Cpl. Ellis all sorts of questions about her profession.



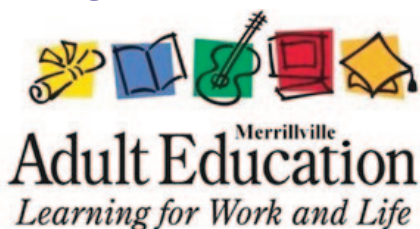
School Resource Officer Cpl. Ellis (left), Tori'anna Campbell and Merrillville Police Chief Cuttino.

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 passing 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: Jan. 25 and 26, registration deadline Jan. 20; Feb. 8 and 9, registration deadline Feb. 3; Feb. 22 and 23, registration deadline Feb. 17; March 8 and 9, registration deadline March 3; March 22 and 23, registration deadline March 17;



April 5 and 6, registration deadline April 4; April 19 and 20, registration deadline April 14; May 3 and 4, registration deadline April 28; May 17 and 18, registration deadline May 12; May 31 and June 1, registration deadline May 26.

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 219-650-5318.

MARK YOUR CALENDARS

Jan. 17

No School

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day

Jan. 27

Grades 7-8

Parent/Teacher Conferences

3:30-6:30 p.m.

Feb. 18-21

No School

President's Day Holiday Weekend

March 7

Grades K-6 Regular School Day

Grades 7-12

No Students/Teacher Work Day

March 24

Grades 9-12

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

Teachers win foundation awards for new projects, supplies

Merrillville Education Foundation (MEF) recently announced it will award eight grants totaling \$7,292.36 to teachers in the Merrillville Community School Corporation to enhance the learning experiences for students. Kinesthetic and visual learning activities, fine arts orchestra and theater programs, and STEM kits are just a few of the winning grant ideas in the foundation's 38th round of awards.

"The grant committee is very pleased to award this fall's round of grants to very deserving winners," said MEF Executive Director Mary Hoffman. "We are happy to support these educators. Their projects will inspire students to be successful in the classroom and beyond."

Wood Elementary School

John Wood Elementary School Kindergarten Teacher Stacie Anderson will receive funding for her project "Kinesthetics Phonics for Kindergarten." Anderson said it would be an extension of what they already do using



Jolly Phonics.

"We are looking to bring a supplemental phonics program to our students that will not only help them remember their letter names and sounds, but is also practical and makes sense," she said.

Ms. Anderson said the "Nellie Edge ABC Phonics: Sing, Sign, and Read" program is a multisensory ABC and phonics immersion program.

"Our students would not only be learning letter names and sounds, but sign language as well, and this is something that can go with them into adulthood," Ms. Anderson said.

Amber Welsh, Wood Elementary

cont'd next page

Zeigler Subaru makes donation to Salk Elementary School

Zeigler Subaru of Merrillville supported Salk Elementary School with a gift of \$3,000 through its partnership with AdoptAClassroom.org.

Congratulations to teachers nominated by their building administrators to receive \$500 each: Kristen Cueller, Carrie Brown, Lyn Dravet, Ladd Downham, Kristina Shultz and Heather Harrell.

Principal Nicholas Petralia and Assistant Principal Nikki Laird nominated the six educators for what they do not only in school but after school hours as well: clubs, committees, sponsors etc.

"I used the donation to purchase math manipulatives, flexible seating, and headphones," said Ms. Shultz. "I am so appreciative of the donation! Subaru gave me a wonderful opportunity to provide resources to my students that I wouldn't be able to afford with my own money.

"My students have been able to use the math manipulatives in small groups. My kids are loving the wobble seats and it helps them stay focused," the third grade teacher added.

Mr. Downham, a physical education teacher, said he will use the generous donation to purchase some much needed

equipment.

"There will be a variety of items that can benefit kindergarten through 4th grade students," he said.

"The students will use these items to become more physically literate. With some equipment being 40 years old, I am extremely thankful to receive this wonderful gift to help upgrade equipment and benefit my students."

Ms. Harrell, a fourth grade teacher, said she has used the donation to purchase items for her classroom such as math manipulatives, computer mice for student Chromebooks, and items for guided reading groups.

"This donation was much appreci-



Photo back row from left: Kyle Faiman, Zeigler General Manager; Teachers Heather Harrell and Ladd Downham; Principal Petralia; front row: Assistant Principal Laird; Teachers Kristina Shultz and Kristen Cueller; Naomi Foth, Zeigler Talent and Development; and Mark Artibey, Zeigler New Car Director. Not pictured: Teachers Carrie Brown and Lyn Dravet.

ated," she said. "There are many businesses that are going through rough times, and for Subaru to choose to give back to the students in our community during this time is such an amazing thing for them to do. My students and I can't thank them enough!"

Teachers win foundation awards for new projects, supplies

from previous page

School first grade teacher, will receive funding for her program “SEL Literacy.” She will use the “Ninja Hacks” book sets along with PATHS to help develop first grade students’ SEL (social and emotional learning) tools and strategies.

“These tools will help students regulate themselves and problem solve with their peers,” Ms. Welsh said.

Pierce Middle School

Pierce Middle School Orchestra Director Bethany Borgo won MEF funding for her cello replacement project.

“The purpose of this project is to acquire string instruments for student use in the MCSC Orchestra Program,” Ms. Borgo said. “This project would provide school-owned instruments to promising string students whose lack of resources would otherwise prevent their participation in our program. Having these new cellos would enrich the orchestra program, enhance at-risk student learning in core subjects, and would create a resource to be used for years to come.”

Merrillville High School

The Merrillville Education Foundation also promised funding to Merrillville High School Math Teacher Eric Curosh for his project “Learning Mathematics Visually.”

Mr. Curosh said the desire of his project is to provide students for years to come with graphing calculators to use while in class.

“Very few students enrolled in ‘Pre-Calculus A: Algebra’ own a graphing calculator,” he said. “With this grant, most students in our precalculus classes will be given the opportunity to use these calculators with money not being an issue.”

MEF will also invest in the MHS Performing Arts programs, thanks to an application submitted by MHS Performing Arts Department Chairperson and Choral Director Melinda Reinhart.

“Although our lives are starting to

get back to a new normal with pandemic protocols, our arts programs are truly struggling to get audiences back in the seats,” Mrs. Reinhart said. “Audiences (box office sales) are our sole means of recouping our production costs and funds are needed.”

She added that students learn so much more than lyrics to songs, lines of dialogue, and a few dance steps; they learn, cultivate, practice and hopefully master numerous life skills throughout our journey in rehearsals, not to mention the additional life-lessons as a result of performing during a global pandemic.

Iddings Elementary School

Iddings Elementary School Social Worker Nicole Dominguez won funding for her project “Treasure Chest Sensory Path.”

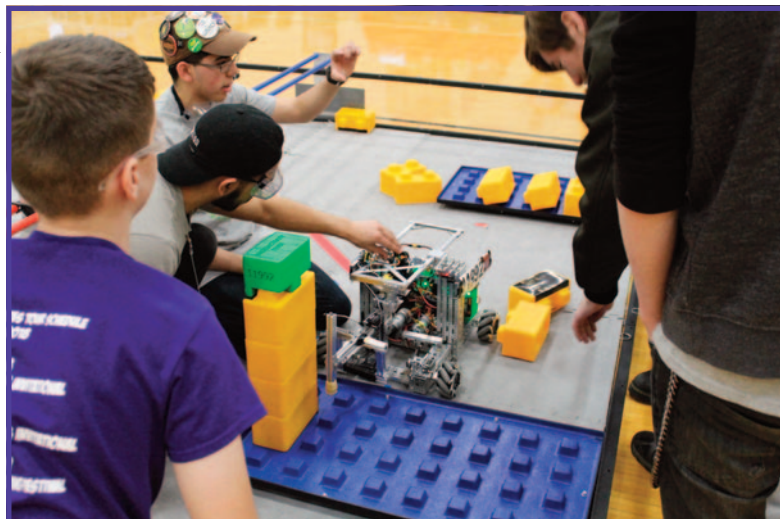
She will use the support for “Treasure Alphabet Hop” from The Sensory Path, a social-emotional tool to provide students sensory input that regulates their brains and bodies when they are overstimulated or emotionally unregulated.

Fieler Elementary School

Fieler Elementary School Kindergarten Teacher Michelle Frey will receive foundation support for her project “Kindergarten Alphabet Learning” that offers hands-on activities to develop fine motor skills, independent learning, writing, letter knowledge and listening skills.

Merrillville Intermediate School

Merrillville Intermediate School teachers Joy Kent, Angela Wells, Anto-



The MHS Robotics Club was a past recipient of a grant provided by the Merrillville Education Foundation.

nio Cervantes and Kimberly Choi teamed up and won funding for their project “STEM Kits - Creativity is the Power to Connect the Seemingly Unconnected.”

The team stated on their application, “STEM kits give curious students the skills to tackle problems confidently. The kits spark positive feelings about learning and promote greater self-confidence in students when faced with challenges.”

More information about these projects is available on the foundation website,

merrillvilleeducationfoundation.org.

Since 2002, the Merrillville Education Foundation has awarded 451 grants to Merrillville teachers totaling \$389,281.01. These grants have impacted 123,262 student experiences in grades PK through 12.

The foundation is committed to being the primary private sector partner in supporting public education where public funds are not available in the Merrillville Community School Corporation.

Merrillville Education Foundation, Inc. is designated a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization, and participates in a variety of ongoing fundraising events to generate monies for grants. All donations are tax deductible.

National Recognition Scholars at MHS named

Six National Recognition Scholars were named at Merrillville High School by the College Board in 2020.

These seniors earned their recognition based on last year's PSAT scores. They scored in the top 10 percent in the state and also within their ethnicity.

Students receiving African American Recognition from the College Board include: Great Bah, Caleb Carter, Bianaca Mbachu, and Kiersten Stowe.

Vincent Feliciano and Juliana Gonzalez received the College Board's Hispanic Recognition.

The College Board National Recognition Programs grant students academic honors that can be included on college and scholarship applications. Colleges use these honors to identify students from underrepresented groups who have excelled on their PSAT/NMSQT, PSAT 10, or AP Exams and in their classrooms.

The College Board National Recognition Programs create pathways to college for underrepresented students by awarding them academic honors and connecting them with universities across the country.



Great Bah



Caleb Carter



Vincent Feliciano

2020 National Recognition Scholars



Juliana Gonzalez



Bianaca Mbachu



Kiersten Stowe

Alumni Connections

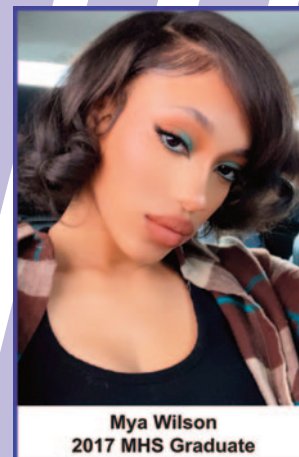
**Read their stories
on our website
www.mvsc.k12.in.us**

**Share your story, inspire
others & make a difference.**

**Send an email to
mcscmedia@mvsc.k12.in.us**



Reesie Woods
2015 MHS Graduate



Mya Wilson
2017 MHS Graduate

Once a Pirate, Always a Pirate!

Senior earns free tuition to any university in Indiana

Kiersten Stowe was one of only six Lake County high school seniors who were recipients of the Lilly Endowment Scholarship!

Her scholarship will provide full-tuition, required-fees, and a special allocation of up to \$900 per year for required books and equipment for four years of full-time undergraduate study leading to a baccalaureate degree at any Indiana public or private nonprofit college or university accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

Kiersten and her mother Jennifer were surprised by the news of this early holiday gift by Legacy Foundation Grant Administrator Jodi Kateiva and school corporation administrators after being invited to a special meeting in the MHS principal's conference room last month.

"We welcome you to the Legacy family," said Ms. Kateiva.

Kiersten plans to pursue a degree in psychology and is considering attending IUPUI (Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis), Indiana University or Notre Dame.

The MHS senior has a long list of achievements, extra coursework and activities on her resume. Among them:

- Recognized scholar athlete on the varsity track team every year by maintaining a GPA of 3.5 or higher.
- Played in orchestra ensembles that ranked gold at ISSMA competitions.
- Earned orchestra recognition by performing outside of school time and was section leader in bass section.
- Earned recognition for a cumulative GPA of 3.8 and over.
- Recognized as a Thespian Presidential Scholar.
- Vice President of the National Honor Society
- Many summer study programs including music, leadership, math, performance, and women's and gender studies.
- Extracurricular activities including



Assistant Superintendent Dr. Dexter Suggs (left) and Executive Director of Curriculum and Instruction Marnita Taylor (right) congratulate Kiersten Stowe (center right) and her mother Jennifer.

string orchestras; Quiz Bowl; Family, Career, and Community Leaders of America (FCCLA); Spell Bowl; Track and Field; French Club; Thespian Troupe; Academic Superbowl; Northwest Indiana Youth Symphony Orchestra; International Thespian Society and Prima Chamber Orchestra.

If you think that's busy, Kiersten also holds a part-time job.

"Hard work pays off," said MHS

Principal Mike Krutz.

The Lilly Endowment Community Scholarship Program is a statewide program administered by local community foundations throughout Indiana.

Legacy Foundation administers the program in Lake County and Independent Colleges of Indiana (ICI) provides statewide oversight of the program.

Since the program's inception in 1998, 4,912 Indiana high school students have been awarded the Lilly Endowment Community Scholarship.

Creating ornaments, holiday cards for seniors



Students at Clifford Pierce Middle School created holiday cards as well as candy cane and wreath ornaments for residents in a local assisted living facility as part of the holiday giving makerspace in the CPMS library. #MerrillvilleReads

JOIN US!

MHS PERFORMING ARTS

Upcoming Shows

Spring Musical



'You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown'

7:30 p.m. March 11 & 12,
18 & 19; & 3 p.m. March 20

For reservations/tickets,
call 219-650-5307, x1-7012.



Students perform in the Spring 2021 musical "Smokey Joe's Cafe"



"Sounds of the Season" Choir Holiday Concert

MHS Choir Contest Concert Feb. 3, 7 p.m.

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

MHS String Recital 'Black Composer Exposure' Feb. 13, 3 p.m.

*** LOCATION CHANGE
to Freshman Cafeteria,
enter through Door I**

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



MHS orchestra students at their holiday concert.

**Choir & spring musical performances in Reinhart Auditorium,
located through Door M of Merrillville High School, 276 E. 68th Pl.**

MHS Student Government, Santa make holidays bright

Santa visited all of the schools last month, bringing presents for students and stopping for a few photo ops!

Each year, the Merrillville High School Student Government coordinates a wish list for families in need with a child or children in the Merrillville Community School Corporation.

Once the list is compiled, the entire school corporation comes together to sponsor these children and families: Of-

fices pool their resources; student organizations go shopping; teachers/administrators and their families add students to their lists; and local churches adopt students in need, spearheaded by affiliated staff.

This year, 131 students were identified and included on the list.

From everyone at MCSC, we hope you enjoyed your holidays, and welcome back!



*Thank you to
MHS Student
Government
for all your work in
making the holidays
brighter for many
MCSC families.*

Staff Feature

Employee helps to maintain a great learning environment

Can you imagine being the grounds coordinator for the entire school corporation?

That's how Donald Wirick spent the first 25 of his 30-year career with the Merrillville Community School Corporation. Now he works as general maintenance at MHS.

"I have always enjoyed the different types of jobs that pop up daily," Mr. Wirick said. "Also, I enjoy the people that I get to work with on a daily basis."

One of the main reasons he said he has stayed so long was he enjoyed the real sense of family within the corporation "from day one."

One of his most memorable moments was the time he helped prank the assis-

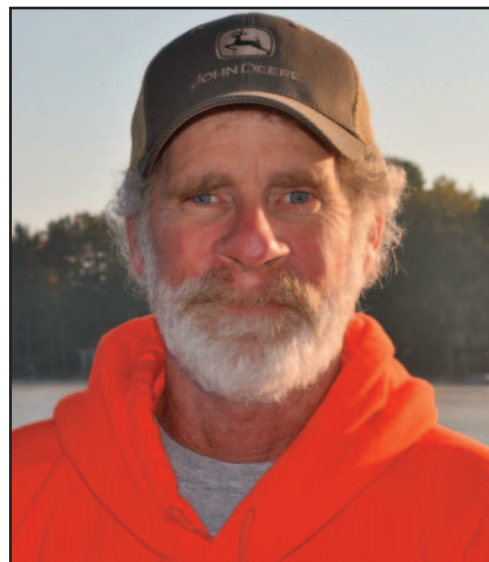
tant superintendent into thinking a kitten was trapped in the ceiling above his office.

"I had nothing to do with the planning," he said. "I was only called upon to implement part of the ruse. It was epic!!"

He said he plans for his MCSC tenure to come to an end in June 2022.

"I have a solid two years of 'honey-do's,' then I may volunteer at a local hospital for a couple of days a week.

"For 30 years, I have been lucky enough to watch the Senior Drive Around," he added. "Knowing that I have helped make a great learning environment for the students has always inspired me to come to work."



Donald Wirick

Teacher Feature

Fieler teacher marks 24 years teaching, 32 years coaching

This teacher was born and raised in Merrillville, graduated from Merrillville High School, and is a Pirate through and through.

"I am loyal to this town and community," said Lori Govert. "We have raised our family in Merrillville. Our children received a top-notch education, but far beyond academics, they learned diversity, tolerance, acceptance, responsibility, friendship, love and pride."

Mrs. Govert is a Title 1 teacher at Fieler Elementary School and the MHS cheer coach.

As a teacher, she's worked here for 24 years, also holding the past role of third grade teacher at Miller Elementary School. As a cheer coach, she's been here for 32 years.

She has served on multiple committees throughout the years and has been on the Board of Directors of the Merrillville Education Foundation for 20 years.

She said she has stayed so long because there are always wonderful people to work with and young people to teach and guide.

"Besides, there is a lot of work to do

and I am not done yet!" she said.

"I believe in paying things forward," Mrs. Govert added. "Working for the Merrillville Community School Corporation allows me to share my talents. It is the right thing to do!"

Mrs. Govert said she enjoys her career because Merrillville always had a vision, and she appreciates the families, colleagues and friends who inspire her every day.

"I have so many stories and memories!" she said. "Every story centers around the amazing friends and colleagues I have worked with throughout the years. We have lived through successes, laughter, loss, tears, growth, challenges, obstacles and triumph. Without the love and support of all the people I have worked with throughout the years, I wouldn't be the person I am today."

She hopes her friends and colleagues will always think back to the memories they have shared and smile, cry or laugh out loud without regret!

Mrs. Govert is able to retire in two years, but she hasn't yet made that decision. She said if and when she does, she



Lori Govert

hopes to spend her retirement making up for lost time with her husband, kids, grandkids and dad.

"I would love to dabble in event planning or work for a foundation," Mrs. Govert added.

Board of School Trustees honors recent retirees

The Merrillville Community School Corporation Board of School Trustees recognized 2019-21 retirees at a recent board meeting. Thank you all for your years of service and dedication to the school corporation and the children of this community! We have the most amazing employees! Once a Pirate, always a Pirate!

- **Dean Stadt**, Maintenance/Custodian, 10 years
- **Juan Guajardo**, Maintenance/Grounds Service, 10 years
- **Willis Holmes**, Transportation/Driver, 10 years
- **David Demmon**, Iddings Grade 4 Teacher, 11 years
- **Larry Herzog, Jr.**, Transportation/Driver, 11 years
- **William Parnell**, Maintenance/Specific, 12 years
- **Lisa Knight**, Iddings Nurse, 13 years
- **Thomas Nunley, Jr.**, Maintenance/Custodian, 13 years
- **Willie Harbin**, Transportation/Driver, 15 years
- **Susanne Peterson**, Transportation/Bus Aide, 15 years
- **Catherine Lewis**, Miller Playground/Cafe Aide, 17 years
- **Martha Ortiz**, MHS Guidance Secretary, 18 years
- **Susan Timmons**, Fieler Playground/Cafe Aide, 18 years
- **Robert Rodriguez**, Maintenance/Maintenance Class II, 19 years
- **Rosellyn McMahon**, Fieler Grade 1 Teacher, 20 years
- **Ann Herzog**, Transportation/Driver, 21 years
- **Colleen Hostetler**, Admin/Central Director of Food Service, 21 years
- **Paulina Bryson**, Maintenance/Custodian, 22 years
- **Anja Churilla**, Transportation/Driver, 22 years
- **Christie Collins**, Transportation/Driver, 22 years
- **Lynn Shoback**, Miller Grade 3 Teacher, 22 years
- **Guadalupe Boursier**, Pierce Teacher Aide, 23 years
- **Debra Staffeld**, MHS Math Teacher, 23 years
- **Silvia Smith**, Maintenance Day Care/Custodian, 24 years
- **Linda Hall**, MHS Secretary to Asst. Principal, 24 years
- **Denice Chobanov Barsich**, Iddings Teacher Aide, 25 years
- **Patricia Kisting**, Secretary to MIS Principal, 25 years
- **David Jenkins**, Pierce Industrial Tech Teacher, 26 years
- **Denise Qualkinbush**, MIS Library Coordinator, 26 years
- **Susan Shudick**, Transportation/Driver, 28 years
- **Sharon Rowe**, Pierce Non Cert Aide, 31 years
- **Donald Scott Semper**, Maintenance/Grounds Service, 36 years
- **Gregg Williams**, Pierce Earth/Space Science, 38 years
- **Pamela Schiller**, Iddings Art Teacher, 46 years



Retiree Catherine Lewis receives her plaque and certificate from the Board of School Trustees. Ms. Lewis worked for the school corporation for 17 years. Back row: Board Member James Donohue, Board President Linda Jonaitis, and Board Member DeLena Thomas.

**A GREAT WAY
TO PREPARE
FOR THE
HOLIDAYS!**



**Wood Elementary
School
First Graders
created
gingerbread houses
last month!**

MCSC FAMILY & COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT SPECIALISTS

Merrillville High School
Kimberly Collins
219-650-5307, x7574

Pierce Middle School
Cheryl Smith
219-650-5308, x8105

Merrillville Intermediate School
TBA
219-650-5306, x6892

Miller Elementary School
Marissa Rogulich
219-650-5303, x6339

Iddings Elementary School
Renee Flynn
219-650-5302, x6206

Wood Elementary School
TBA
219-650-5305, x6551

Fieler Elementary School
Darcia Parham
219-650-5301, x6164

Salk Elementary School
TraShaina Jackson
219-650-5304, x6448

Your new go-to school staff

Parents and guardians, new MCSC staff members have been added to help you effectively navigate your children's schools and increase your knowledge of activities and events in which you can participate.

These staff members are called Family and Community Engagement Specialists (F.A.C.E.S.), and they are more than happy to help you and your child get the most from your MCSC experience.

Among their many activities, these staff members will offer parents and guardians a knowledge of basic community resources, help with attendance

issues with reminders and advice, orient new families and students to make sure they are equipped with basic knowledge, and create an awareness of upcoming events and opportunities to engage in your child's school.

They are every MCSC parent's new go-to person. Get to know the F.A.C.E.S. team member in your children's school and introduce yourself, if you haven't done so already.



Marissa Rogulich, family and community engagement specialist at Miller Elementary School, gets to know parents in the car line by handing out goodies.

Fun things to do with your family

- Color a coloring page completely.
- Cut paper snowflakes.
- Make a fort to cover the living room.
- Watch a favorite movie inside the fort.
- Build a snowman (real or a craft).
- Donate old toys & books to a local charity or daycare.
- Do a puzzle bigger than you've ever done before.



Parents, did you know?!

- If your child is going to be absent, CALL the office OR send your child with a LETTER the following day!
- Each child is allotted FIVE excused personal illnesses WITHOUT a doctor's note; IF you have reached that maximum, each day they are out for an illness a doctor's note MUST be provided to get the absence excused.
- Criteria for an excused absence is as follows: a doctor/dentist appointment, being sick WITH a doctor's note, death in the immediate family, court attendance, religious holiday, other and/or special/emergency circumstances.
- If a family accumulates 10 or more unexcused absences and/or 10 tardies, the family will be considered truant and referred to the truancy court.
- Picking up your child early before the designated dismissal time is the equivalent of a tardy; the only time that this is excused is if there is a doctor/dentist appointment with proper documentation.
- We understand that emergencies happen, so contacting the school when it is convenient and safe to let us know of the situation is best.



Senior Citizens Pass

The free ticket to PIRATE entertainment for ages 60+

- Attend school-sponsored theater performances
- Enjoy concerts: band, orchestra and choir
- Cheer on our Pirates at athletic competitions!

To learn more, visit www.mvsc.k12.in.us or call 219-650-5300.



Community Resource Corner

Energy assistance program available to families

The Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP) is designed to assist low-wage earning households.

EAP provides a one-time annual benefit that helps pay for the high cost of heating your home in winter. Additional assistance may be applied if you have received a disconnection notice or are about to get disconnected.

However, an EAP benefit will not cover all of your annual heating and electric costs, so you should continue to pay your bills regularly.

Northwest Indiana Community Action provides EAP services in Lake, Porter, Jasper, and Newton Counties.

HOW DOES THIS PROGRAM HELP?

- Provides eligible households with a one-time payment to the energy provider(s).
- Provides energy savings education to help reduce energy burden.
- Reduces potential Health & Safety risks associated with the use of unsafe heating approaches and exposure to extremely cold temperatures.

For more information, call or visit:

Lake County Community Services, Inc.
1450 East Joliet St., Suite 202
Crown Point, 219-663-0627

Lake County Gary Neighborhood Services
300 W. 21st Ave., Gary, 219-883-0431

Appointments are required. Contact sites for information and application.

Visit online: <https://www.nwi-ca.com/>

Northwest Indiana Community Action

Purple Reign Step Team makes high school debut

Merrillville High School has added a brand-new team to its lineup of student activities and organizations.

For the first time in its history, Merrillville High School has a step team, offering a continuation of the thriving Purple Reign Step Team activities students at Merrillville's Pierce Middle School have enjoyed since 2017.

Merrillville has the only school-sponsored step teams in Northwest Indiana. Stepping is a percussive, highly-energetic art form that was first developed through the song and dance rituals performed by African-American fraternities and sororities. It's modern-day roots date all the way back to the early 1900s.

According to step coach Elizabeth Hardy, family and consumer sciences teacher at Pierce Middle School, "A lot of the girls went on to high school and wanted to continue the journey they've started.

"When I first began coaching at Pierce, I had quite a few high schoolers who asked if I'd ever bring the team to MHS," Ms. Hardy said. "I realized that just like the students in middle school were looking for a safe place and community, so are the high schoolers."



Purple Reign Coach Elizabeth Hardy (from left) watches Merrillville High School freshman Nevaeh Johnson and junior Makayla Morris practice their new routine.

She said the team provides participants with a bond, family and a place to be themselves.

"I believe that this is the time to help the students grow, learn, and step into the person they were created to be," Ms.

Hardy said. "This is the opportunity to help students gain trust, respect, maturity, and responsibility.

"For example, a person who is shy and quiet in the classroom can be amazing at stepping and strolling, but they just need that extra encouragement to step out of their shell," she continued. "It helps build their confidence and step out of their comfort zones as well. The team helps the students be the best version of themselves in the classroom, in the hallways, at home, and definitely when it's time for them to perform."

Pierce Middle School Principal Lafonda Morris shared other positives that have resulted from having Purple Reign at her school.

"There are two very important things that have taken place due to our step team: most important is that it gives the young ladies something to do because not everyone is an athlete," she said. "It gives them an incentive to do well in



Merrillville High School Purple Reign Team members practice: (front left to right) Nevaeh Johnson, Kayla Smith, Elena Gordon, Makaila Welch, J'Yonna Williams, Jasmine Edwards; (back left to right) Makayla Morris, Journey Pleasant, Zena Thomas.

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MIS group spreads 'sunshine' by giving back to the community

Giving brings as many or more smiles to faces as does receiving, which is why you can count on the appropriately named Sunshine Committee at Merrillville Intermediate School to enthusiastically spread cheer throughout the school year. Its members and students work on service projects that give back to the community.



New gloves and hats collected and donated to MCSC elementary school children in need.

Made up of nearly a dozen teachers, the group, now in its second year, finds an organization in the community to support each month and dials in the energies and enthusiasm of students to help make a difference in the lives of others.

Last month, the Sunshine Committee created a competition between the school's three PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) houses to collect new gloves and mittens to donate to elementary students in need.

In October, the group held a penny war to raise money for Breast Cancer Awareness. Pennies were collected from students only.

"In this one-day event, we were able to raise more than \$600 to donate to the Pink Ribbon Society located here in Merrillville," said Harmony Hofstra, MIS teacher and Sunshine Committee leader.

In November, the group partnered



MIS teachers Harmony Hofstra (left) and Jennifer Pala (right) presenting their donation to Ann Peters, founder of the Pink Ribbon Society.

with the S.T.A.N.D. (Socially Together and Naturally Diverse) Club for a food drive for the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana.

Purple Reign Step Team

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school, and it gives the opportunity to display their talents.

"The second important thing is that it gives the parents a reason to come to the building and see the positive things that are happening here at CPMS, to be proud and have the opportunity to boast about their child's talents, and an opportunity for those parents and students to bond as a group and become great role models for the building," Mrs. Morris added.

The Pierce Purple Reign Step Team was founded by teacher LaShawn Ballard during the 2017-18 school year with the purpose to enhance each student's intellectual, physical, social, moral and cultural development. The mission is to promote academic

achievement, unity and leadership within a diverse organization, through teamwork and to encourage self-respect, discipline and community responsibility.

Mrs. Morris believes Purple Reign's activities also motivates students to start thinking about their futures.

"Some of the young ladies have yet to think about going to college," Mrs. Morris said. "Since there is a rich history with Divine 9 sororities/fraternities stepping, this may cause these students to not only enroll in college but to pledge and give back to the community. Anything that will increase the desire for my students to enroll in college and attain a degree is a good thing!"

Over the years, Pierce's Purple Reign has performed at basketball games and competed at contests in Illinois and also near Indianapolis. The

team even won three trophies.

Ms. Hardy, who took over coaching the team during the 2019-20 school year, said she didn't start stepping and strolling till she joined Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Incorporated in 2019.

Last year, the Purple Reign Step Team competed virtually and won their first one-minute competition, which was a worldwide contest, she said. This year will be the teams' first in-person competitions since Ms. Hardy became coach.

The teams have been hard at work, meeting separately to practice for their halftime shows and prepare for their performance at their Jan. 29, 2022, competition.

Ms. Hardy said she hopes one day to have one big team that will even include intermediate school students.

Planetarium features new programs, technology

In March 2020 when COVID-19 shut down Merrillville schools, planetarium shows at Pierce Middle School also came to a screeching halt.

Up until then, the school's planetarium, which is the only planetarium in Northwest Indiana, had been a busy destination, offering both student and seasonal community shows, and even drawing student groups from various other school districts.

But the COVID-19 shutdown also brought an opportunity for the planetarium that no one really anticipated. Since there were no demands on the technology and equipment and an undetermined amount of downtime, there appeared time to re-evaluate and improve upon one of the more unique aspects of the Merrillville Community School Corporation.

Founded in 1973, the planetarium's primary goal is providing programs and information that support the curriculum of Merrillville schools.



Planetarium Director Josh Elder (right) asks MHS architecture and drafting design students for ideas in creating engaging and immersive displays and activities in the planetarium's waiting area.

Previous Planetarium Director Gregg Williams, who came on the scene in the early 1980s, worked hard to continuously modernize and keep up with rapidly changing technology, in addition to maintaining and running the entire planetarium.

MCSC administrators and technology staff took a trip to the Adler Planetarium in Chicago to learn and as much as they could about its operation that could be applied to the planetarium at Pierce Middle School.

The school board approved the investment in new software, projectors, and Evans and Sutherland shows. New audiences will have the ability to view highly detailed maps and soar in and out of planets, moons, and solar systems.

Every piece of equipment was replaced, and the technology was simplified and streamlined.

With the initial upgrade completed, the planetarium will open once again this month to provide unique immersive educational experiences to Merrillville students, complementing the learning that is already taking place in the classrooms.

According to Mr. Elder, the school corporation purchased shows that matched the academic standards that go with each grade level.

"K-6 teachers reviewed the new shows," Mr. Elder said. "Not all our new shows are about astronomy. In our new program for kindergarten, Big Bird and Elmo talk about the moon. Third graders will get a program about bugs which also relates to their science curriculum."

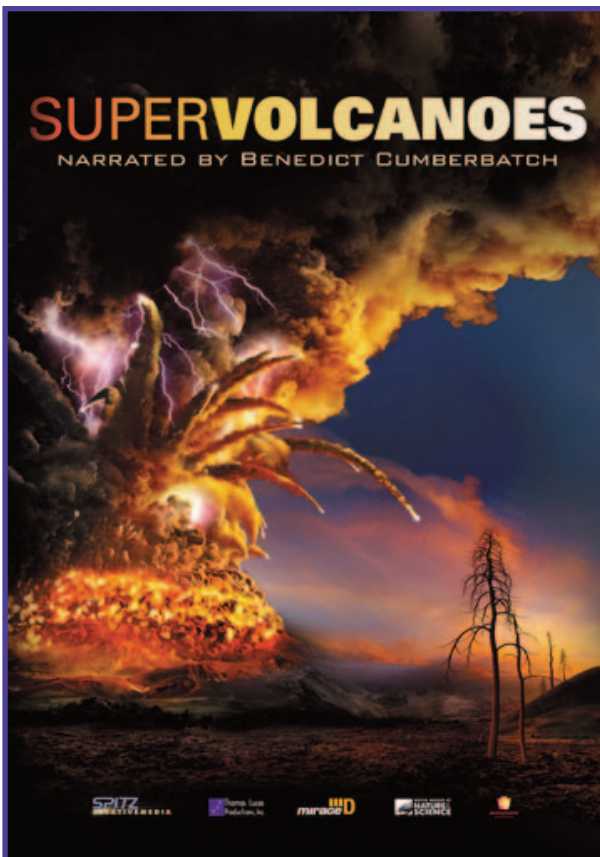
He hopes community shows will start up again in the summer.

The planetarium's experience will continue to evolve, according to Mr. Elder, as they identify and update other aspects of it to make the entire experience more interactive and immersive.

For example, MHS architectural students were invited to visit and provide input in the redesign of the planetarium's waiting room with the goal of beginning the audience's immersive and interactive experiences steps before they set foot in the planetarium itself.

"It's a good idea to involve students in as many ways as possible," Mr. Elder said.

Mr. Elder said he wants to keep things fresh to keep kids coming back,



This program on supervolcanoes is available for MHS earth science classes.

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Planetarium

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and he hopes to be able to use a nearby classroom as a hands-on lab to provide experiences related to the shows in the planetarium.

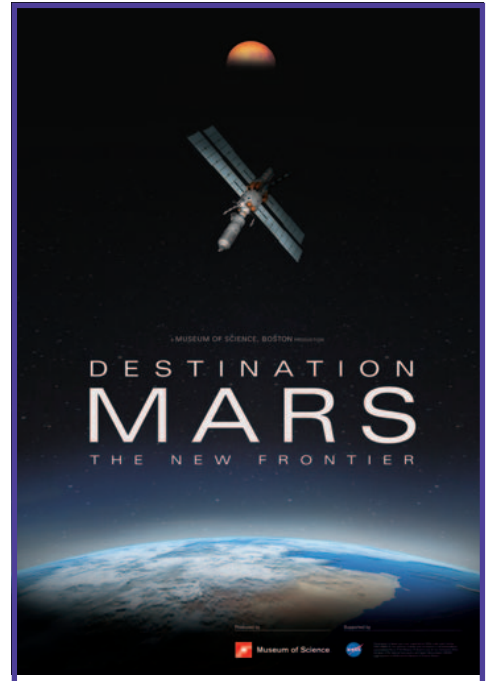
The new director will continue to sponsor the Planetarium Club at Pierce Middle School and train the students on the planetarium software and presenting the shows.



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Kindergarteners will get to enjoy "One World, One Sky."



"Destination Mars" is a new program geared toward fifth graders.

COVID-19 Screening for Parents

Every morning before you send your child to school please check for signs of illness:



FEVER 100.4* OR CHILLS

*or school board policy if threshold is lower



SORE THROAT



COUGH* OR SHORTNESS OF BREATH

*especially new onset, uncontrolled cough



DIARRHEA, NAUSEA OR VOMITING, ABDOMINAL PAIN



HEADACHE*

*particularly new onset of severe headache, especially with fever



NEW LOSS OF TASTE OR SMELL

*May present with more than one symptom. This list does not include all possible symptoms.

- 1** Does your child have any sign of illness above?
 - 2** Was your child in close contact (within 6 feet for a total of 15 minutes over a 24-hour period) with anyone confirmed with COVID-19?
 - 3** If the answer is **YES** to any of the questions, **DO NOT** send your student to school. Instead, get your child tested for COVID-19 and isolate them until their test result is received.
 - 4** Please keep your student home until they meet the criteria to return to school.
- ➔ If your child has trouble breathing, chest pain, new confusion, inability to wake or stay awake or bluish lips or face. **CALL 911!****

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