FEDERAL GRANT HAS BIG IMPACT ON PERKINS TECH NEEDS



Several waves of technology improvements, safety and security measures, and learning environment modernizations have happened thanks to a little-known federal program.

The Federal Impact Aid Grant, a federal aid program that reimburses districts for lost tax revenue from non-taxable federal property, has had a significant impact on our district since first received in 2018. The Impact Aid grant is the longest-standing federal education funding program, first signed into law by President Harry S. Truman in 1950.

In 1941, the federal government obtained more than 6,000 acres in Perkins Township through eminent domain to build the former Plum Brook Ordnance Works. The site, which is now home to NASA's Neil Armstrong Test Facility, contains critical infrastructure that is helping shape the future of space exploration.

Perkins Schools has utilized the funding for three primary initiatives – technological upgrades, school safety initiatives, and capital expenditures.

"The Federal Impact Aid Grant has played a crucial role in our district's transformation," said Superintendent Dr. Lonny Rivera. "It allows us to upgrade safety systems, embrace innovative technology, and modernize classrooms without sacrificing funds needed for everyday operations."

The district overhauled its student device program utilizing Impact Aid funds, transitioning to Apple MacBooks and iPads. This investment has greatly expanded student access to technological functionality, strengthening programs in graphics, coding, and multimedia production. This program has ensured all students have access to the technology necessary for today's learning environment.

This program has also allowed the district to make significant improvements to a multitude of aspects of student safety. Investments have included improvements to building access points and electronic locking system, a digital visitor management system that provides additional background screening, an extensive surveillance system, and an overhaul of the phone system for E911 functionality.

Future cycles are intended to be used to offset costs of a school resource officer, overhaul of the intercommunications and notification system, and additional improvements to facilities.

The District faces considerable deferred maintenance costs, as most of our critical infrastructure dates back to the 1950s. Three of the district's four buildings are operating with original boilers and lack sufficient air conditioning. Improvements to air quality are scientifically proven to improve student outcomes. Access to Impact Aid funding will help ensure these critical improvements can be made without increasing the local tax burden.

Impact Aid funding has allowed for gradual improvements towards creating a safer and modern learning environment. Projects such as the recent remodeling of the Perkins High School Pirate Learning Center have helped create modern spaces and improved student attendance.

"The Board of Education is committed to targeted investments to enhance the learning environment while preserving funds for critical day-to-day operations," Dr. Rivera said. "This balance is essential for our district's continued success. The funding received from the Impact Aid grant ensures our students have access to state-of-the-art technology in a safe and modern environment, while reducing the impact to our local taxpayers."

PERKINS SCHOOLS *by the numbers*

Grant Funding

ALLOCATIONS

- **4,500** | Chromebooks, MacBooks, iPads, Interactive Whiteboards purchased
- **15** | classrooms received new furniture
- **50+** | exterior access points overhauled
- **25** | bus cameras and electronic GPS systems installed

Bravo! PHS PERFORMS PAIR OF CLASSICS

AQUATONES PRESENT 'MAMMA MIA" AND DRAMA CLUB PUTS ON 'YOU'RE A GOOD MAN, CHARLIE BROWN'

The Perkins High School Aquatones and Drama Club will perform a pair of familiar musical classics in March – and both are open to the public.

The Aquatones, PHS's synchronized swimming troupe, open with the club's performances of "Mamma Mia" from Wednesday, March 19, through Saturday, March 22, in the PHS Natatorium. The shows are at 6:30 p.m. each night, and tickets are $8 and available at the door.

The Aquatones' take on "Mamma Mia" features numbers in and out of the water, all set to the classic pop music of Abba.

The production follows the journey of Donna Sheridan as she navigates the milestones in her life. From her endeavors of moving solo to the beautiful Greek Islands to the birth of her beloved daughter Sophie, and the first encounters with the three men who may be the father of Donna's child – Bill, Harry, and Sam – Donna's story is one of self-discovery and resilience.

PHS junior Ella West plays Donna and junior Bri Bucher plays a young Donna, freshman Lauren Bucher plays Donna's daughter Sophie, and seniors Sam Green, Emily Terry, Eve Hartley, Emma Hall, and Bella Barnum round out the lead characters.

The following week, the Drama Club performs its take on "You're A Good Man, Charlie Brown" for the spring musical. The production is based on the popular "Peanuts" comic strip by Charles M. Schulz, and includes several musical numbers featuring Snoopy, Linus, Lucy, Sally, and, of course, Charlie Brown.

Sophomore Nathan Reynolds plays Charlie Brown, senior Cadence Bryant plays Snoopy, junior Jaden Lyons plays Schroeder, junior Jeremiah Meadows plays Linus, junior Chole Raab plays Lucy, and junior Lilly Ryerson plays Sally.

The musical will be performed at 7 p.m. on Thursday, March 27, and Friday, March 28, and at 2 p.m. on Saturday, March 29. Tickets are $10 and available at **www.PerkinsSchools.org/Snoopy** or at the door.



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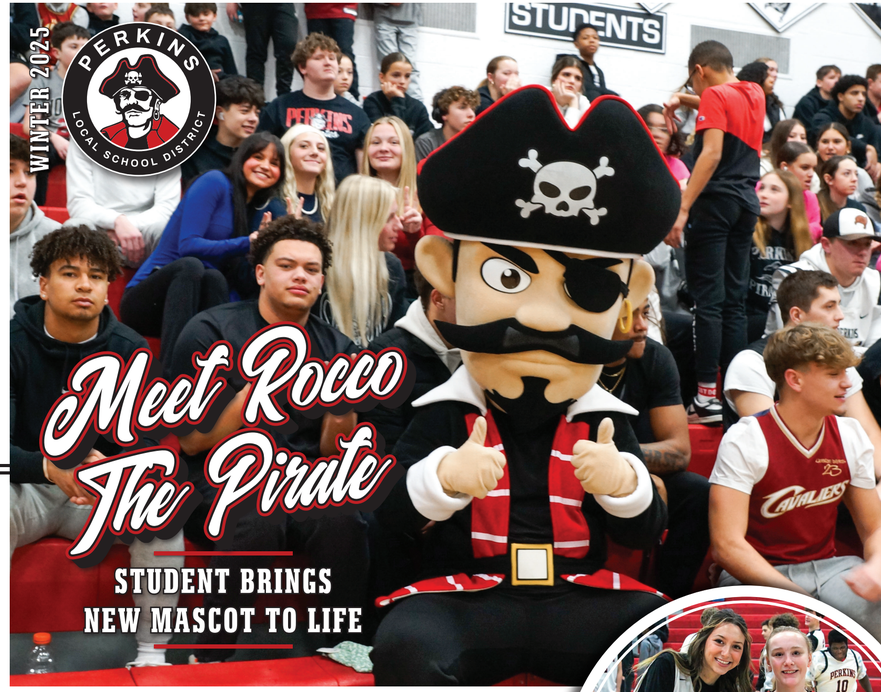
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A NEWSLETTER FROM *your* PERKINS LOCAL SCHOOLS

WINTER 2025



Meet Rocco The Pirate

STUDENT BRINGS NEW MASCOT TO LIFE



in this issue

Federal Grant Leads To Tech, Security Improvements

Forest Mural Grows In Meadowlawn

Aquatones, Drama Club Perform Familiar Classics

PHS Honored As Special Olympics 'Banner School'



ROCCO SPEER

Charts New Course For Perkins Mascot

PHS STUDENT BRIGHTENS SIDELINES WITH FRESH NEW LOOK

While a lot of Perkins High School students have Pirate Spirit in them, PHS sophomore Rocco Speer is the spirit inside the Perkins Pirate.

Late in the 2023-2024 school year, Rocco accepted the role of the PHS school mascot. Rocco, though, soon discovered a rather smelly situation – the mascot costume, which had a big rubber head and stuffy jacket, was more than 20 years old. It had seen its better days and, frankly, it was scary looking, especially to young Perkins fans.

"It just smelled like dirty gym socks," Rocco said. "I was like, 'there has to be something better out there.'"

Rocco researched mascot costumes and discovered a company in the Netherlands that made many popular character costumes for schools, universities, and companies. He began corresponding with the company and provided designs for a new, friendlier-looking Perkins Pirate.

At the same time, he shared his vision, plans, and drawings with PHS Principal Jeff Harbal and Athletic Director Brad Watson. Both agreed that the time was right for a new Pirate mascot.

"Rocco took this on himself," Mr. Harbal said. "He recognized the need for the costume to be replaced – and he got it done."

"I really appreciated that Rocco led this effort," added Mr. Watson. As school administrators, "We love it when students take on a project like this."

The new costume, though, was costly – to the tune of about $5,000. He turned to the Perkins Athletic Boosters Club for an assist.

"Originally, I went to the Boosters with a design and the quote from the company," Rocco said of his presentation in front of club members in the fall of 2024. "All I was looking for was the suit."

But, there were add-ons: extra cloth hands and feet in case the ones that come with it get worn out; a cooling vest for the person wearing the outfit on warm days; a display stand for the outfit, and other accessories that added to the cost. The Boosters went all out and sprung for the outfit.

"Rocco did an outstanding job presenting his idea of upgrading the Pirate costume," said Booster Club President Matt Schweinfurth. "From the beginning of his presentation, you could tell his passion to bring a new mascot to the school. Rocco's outgoing personality makes him a great fit to be a part of, not only the mascot, but bringing enthusiasm to our student body."



Rocco's Legacy

Follow on Instagram!

The new costume was delivered to Perkins High School on December 10 – just days after the state football state championship game. While that big game would have been the ideal time to debut the new Pirate mascot, it gave Rocco an opportunity to try out the outfit.

He's been working on moves – mascots do not speak, they mime their way through performances. He waves and high-fives fans, clowns around with fellow students, and gives lots of hugs to young Pirates. He already has become a fixture along basketball sidelines and plans to be at many more Perkins events.

Meantime, the PHS student body also has honored Rocco – voting to rename the mascot "Rocco" in honor of the student that set out to chart a new course for the Pirate spirit and create a legacy that is expected to last long after he graduates from PHS in 2027.

"I feel like when there's an 8-foot dude with this big Pirate head, you can't miss that," Rocco said. "But the little kids get really excited about it. That's one of my favorite parts."

PHS IGNITES

'Inclusion Revolution'

PERKINS NAMED NATIONAL BANNER UNIFIED CHAMPION SCHOOL FOR SPECIAL OLYMPICS



It's official: Perkins High School is a National Banner Unified Champion School for Special Olympics, and PHS now has the official banner to prove it – it was delivered during an assembly on Friday, February 7.

The assembly included a 20-minute Unified Sports basketball game played with student-athletes and their partners, and was followed by a pep rally, where PHS was presented with their National Banner. The entire school as well as Perkins community members participated in this pep rally to celebrate inclusion.

The audience also included Ohio Rep. D.J. Swearingen, a representative from U.S. Congresswoman Marcy Kaptur's office, Kristi Peters the Director of Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools, as well as a special video message from Cleveland Cavaliers star and Special Olympics Global Ambassador Tristan Thompson.

"I'm super proud and honored to share this moment with you," Mr. Thompson said.

Only seven schools in the state of Ohio have been recognized as a National Banner School, and PHS is one of them. This title recognizes that PHS has an inclusive school climate and a sense of collaboration, engagement, and respect for all members of the student body and staff.

To get the designation, PHS had to meet a rigorous series of 10 school-wide standards of excellence, including hosting collaborative athletic, academic, and extracurricular programs for students with and without disabilities, and have a plan to maintain the activities for years to come.

Most schools take three to five years to earn the designation, said Kristi Peters from Special Olympics Ohio. PHS earned the designation in less than a year.

"This is an absolutely incredible honor for all the students, staff, faculty, and community of Perkins High School," Ms. Peters said. "It was started by a small subset of students, and has grown to dozens of students who are now incredibly excited to be a part of the Special Olympics movement. It's very touching. This celebration was a testament to the power of teamwork, inclusion, and perseverance."

The PHS Pirates United Club includes students from all grade levels and students with and without disabilities. Together, they participate in classroom activities, plan events, and compete side-by-side in athletics.

PHS Intervention Specialist Lindsay Bookshar spearheaded the effort and organized students and staff to qualify as a Banner School. Receiving the Banner School designation is a big milestone – but just the beginning of a movement at PHS.

"We've shown that we are all-inclusive and working toward an inclusion revolution," Ms. Bookshar said. "Now, we're building on what we did last year. We're in the process of creating a new curriculum that's all-inclusive and design classes that are more unified."





MEADOWLAWN GROWS A FOREST

STUDENT ARTIST TURNS LOBBY INTO INVITING NEW SPACE

Walk into the front door at Meadowlawn Intermediate School and glance to the left. Right now, there is a giant work in progress. Soon, though, it will be an inviting space for students to sit and read.

Meadowlawn Principal Jeremy Hiser said teachers and staff wanted to create a space in the school for students to relax with a book. The front lobby, just outside the main office, seemed like the right place, but it needed some freshening up.

Fourth-grade teacher Shelly Roth worked with art teacher Kali Stayancho, and the idea of a forest scene was born. Ms. Stayancho then turned to Perkins High School for a student artist to help bring the vision to life. PHS junior Anna Ferback was recruited.

"They asked me to do a forest scene and gave me all the creative freedom of how I wanted to set it," Anna said. When completed, the painting will feature a pathway leading to a pond. "It's supposed to feel like you're looking into the forest."

Anna, who has won Gold and Silver Keys through the annual Scholastic Art & Writing Awards competition, began working on the mural in January. On many days, she has an audience of curious students watching her as she works.

"All the kids know what she is doing," Ms. Stayancho said. "They are looking forward to seeing the finished product."

Working a couple of afternoons each week, Anna said she expects to have the painting done in May. The painting is part of Anna's Academy Experience, which tasks PHS juniors and seniors with internships and projects to give them a feel for real-world career options. She pictures herself as an art teacher someday.

"I have never done anything this big before," said Anna. "There's a learning curve here, and I'm happy that I get to experience this. I have learned a lot of new things."

Mr. Hiser said that the forest theme fits well with the Meadowlawn name and the natural surroundings of the building. It also has a direct connection with the building's "One School, One Book" program this year, when all students and staff read "The Wild Robot," the story of a robot that gets stranded in a forest and befriends the local wildlife.

"It's going to be a cozy place to curl up and read a book," Mrs. Roth said. And soon the lobby will be a great place for students to get stranded.

