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EDITOR’S NOTE: If you know someone who does not have access to the Highlights online, please direct them to the Canon-McMillan School District administration building, 1 North Jefferson Avenue, Canonsburg, PA 15317, or call 724-746-2940, to receive a printed copy of the Highlights.
Canons-McMillan School District teachers participated in a day of Wellness at their February inservice day program. Aimed at keeping teachers on a path to a healthier lifestyle, the C-M Wellness Day, “FIT” in 2012, offered some extraordinary ways to eat healthy, exercise daily, maintain a stress-free day and stay motivated to create a positive atmosphere for students.

The District Wellness Committee, chaired by Miss Mary Matus, contacted area health/wellness and nutrition-related businesses to participate in its day-long program. The district staff was able to choose four hour-long sessions from among 27 classes in areas such as nutrition, healthy cooking, relieving stress, acupuncture, financial wellness, preparing for retirement and many more. A vendors’ area highlighted various evaluations such as BMI (Body Mass Index), foot problems, blood pressure and percent body fat screenings.

Highlighting the event was nationally known nutritionist, Leslie Bonci, M.P.H., R.D., C.S.S.D., L.D.N. She is director of sports nutrition at the UPMC Center for Sports Medicine and a nutrition consultant to countless organizations in Pittsburgh and nationwide. She is a registered dietitian, a board-certified sports dietetics specialist and a Pennsylvania-licensed dietitian and nutritionist. She has a bachelor’s degree in biopsychology from Vassar College and a master’s degree in public health from the University of Pittsburgh.

An expert on sports nutrition, weight management and digestive health, Bonci is frequently interviewed by local and national print and TV media, and tapes a weekly segment called “The Winning Plate” on KDKA-TV’s Pittsburgh Today Live. A former spokesperson for the American Dietetic Association, she writes a weekly blog for Runners World Magazine and serves on the editorial advisory board of Fitness Magazine.

Ms. Bonci is a nutrition consultant to the Pittsburgh Steelers, Pittsburgh Penguins, Pittsburgh Pirates, Milwaukee Brewers, National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) and numerous high schools and universities. She is the sports dietitian for the University of Pittsburgh Athletics Department and Pittsburgh Ballet Theatre. She also is a member of the U.S. Olympic Committee’s sports nutrition network and has worked with Bryan Clay, Olympic champion in the decathlon; Garrett Weber-Gale, Olympic swimming champion, and Tara Lipinski, Olympic figure skating champion.

The committee received much positive feedback from the district faculty and administration as well as those who participated in the event.

Wellness Committee members are, from left: Mrs. Terry Green, High School nurse; Mrs. Susan Vulcano, Canonsburg Middle School nurse; Mrs. Mildred Hendricks, elementary physical education teacher; Miss Mary Matus, High School health teacher/Wellness Committee Chairperson; Mrs. Nicole LoGreco-Joos, North Strabane Intermediate School nurse, and Ms. Penny Cousins, High School physical education teacher.
The students at Borland Manor and Wylandville elementary schools received a special belated Christmas gift in January.

They received two American flags that were proudly flown on Christmas Day 2011 by the 577th Expeditionary Prime BEEF Squadron, Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. The presentation was made by Senior Master Sergeant David Sweitzer, U.S. Air Force, uncle of Wylandville fourth-grader Shawn Stoner.

Senior Master Sergeant Sweitzer’s sister, Mrs. Amanda Stoner, had suggested that Shawn’s class make cards to be sent to those on duty in Afghanistan through her brother. Ms. Marella Kazos, principal at both Borland Manor and Wylandville elementary schools, thought it would be a good project for the classes in both schools.

The children created hand-made, motivational, holiday cards and Mrs. Stoner shipped them to Afghanistan.

At the school presentations, the students of each school sang patriotic songs in honor of receiving the new flags.

A reply letter dated Dec. 26, 2011, was received that read:

Dear Amanda and the students of Wylandville and Borland Manor Elementary,

Thank you all so very much for the wonderful and thoughtful holiday cards! They were all so creative and unique, and we all had so much fun reading all of them. We appreciate the time and effort that so many of your students put forth to bring some holiday cheer to us! We are all doing well here and nearing the end of our tour. I hope you enjoy the flags – we flew them on Christmas for you! If you’d like, you can email me and we can send some pictures of our airmen in action.

Again, thank you very much.

Capt. Robyn Froelich
Fifth- and sixth-grade students in Mr. Charles Tatum’s STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) enrichment class were tasked with designing a Martian Spaceport to be built in the year 2030. The teams took on the role of Aerospace Consultants as they completed the assignment. Teams researched past, present and futuristic vehicles that would support travel to and from Mars as well as on Mars. Students were also responsible for designing and constructing a spaceport that would allow humans to live on Mars. Students considered the Mars environment to design the safest community possible. The final presentation to the judges included a blog, photostory, commercial, diorama, research proposal, and drawings.

One winner was selected for each grade. Fifth-grade team Explorer took first place. In sixth grade, Team Midway came in first.

STEM in action at NSIS

▲ Left, Team Midway (sixth grade), pictured from left are: front row - Katie Secar, Emily Glokawitz, Emily Serene, and Anthony Weuntsal; back row - Grace Majestic, Samantha Sonnet, Esmee deCortie, Allison Paxton and Samantha Schafer.

Right, Team Explorer (fifth grade), pictured from left are: front row - Max Szall and Jason Lestander; back row - Titus Walker, Josh Turton, Dominic Dodson and Paul Durko.
The students in Wonderful Room 106 at Muse Elementary School are once again enjoying taking home Midnight, a cute little black bear that loves to visit their houses, and writing about his evening’s adventures. The idea was inspired by a story from their reading book called “Missing: One Stuffed Rabbit.”

Taking Midnight home for the evening has become a favorite second-grade activity. The children take Midnight home and then write a diary of his adventures speaking from Midnight’s point of view. The children are also given a camera to take a picture of themselves with Midnight. Each day a different name is drawn and Midnight gets to go home with a new friend.

The children read Midnight’s nighttime adventures to the class. This activity incorporates a variety of skills. The children are encouraged to use their creativity and good grammar skills. They also practice their oral reading and public speaking when they read Midnight’s story to the class.

This tradition has been going on for 10 years. It is especially fun when Midnight gets to revisit houses when a younger sibling is in second grade. In fact, there is one family that has Midnight making his third visit. That now-second-grader was 1 year old when Midnight first visited. In the previous two pictures, the three children were positioned in front of the foyer door. This year’s picture may be in the same place but with quite a change in the three children!

The handwritten stories are typed and bound into a book. The children are able to take the book home to share with their families. Finally, the book is made into a CD and the children are given their own copy to keep.

▲ Pictured from left are: front row - Austin Oravetz, Austin Megyesy, James Caldwell, Sarah Clendaniel, Olesya Grasky and Kamila Corwin; middle row - Ava Sylvester, Elias Lavrich, Victoria Geisler, Inecya Russell, Carter Tymoczko and Colton Bosang; back row - Dane Timmins, Sam Costello, Tori Wesolowski, Luke Harris, Dakota Gallagher, Kacie Lavella, Ashley Behling and Calvin Horney.
Muse Elementary School’s third-grade classes, taught by Mrs. Julie Ward and Miss Kristen Mavrich, brought learning to life with their landforms unit in Social Studies. After studying the various landforms and their physical features, they developed a blueprint for creating their own landform map. The students carefully analyzed the land and planned to include at least four authentically shaped landforms. They then mimicked their blueprint by using salt dough to produce a three-dimensional effect for the project. Finally, students painted their landforms to make them as genuine as possible. Throughout each step of the process, the students were encouraged to use good planning skills, logic, and creativity. The students enjoyed making a valid connection to real-life learning.


► Pictured with their landforms are, from left: front row - Joshua Williams, Ian Donehoo, Jeffrey Fyola and Devyn Sedora; back row - Hailey Neel, Brandon Belajac, Alex Boggio and Danielle Karol.
First Street Elementary School students prepared for this year’s PSSA (Pennsylvania System of School Assessment) testing by having their teachers serve them a nutritious breakfast.

Mrs. Heather Shaffer serves up breakfast to fourth-graders, pictured from left, beginning at lower left: Emily Kamp, Jenia Chandler, Colin O’Donnell, Alonzo Gregory, Carter Kerekes, Allison Shirer, Alex Gall, Trinetti Reihner and Brynn Chaplik. The teachers decorated for the event and then served breakfast for the kickoff of PSSA testing.
“The Panda and the Dragon” by Samantha Schafer.

A blanket of new snow fell as silently and softly as a sleeping kitten. Panda watched as the moonlight danced on the snow, sparkling like a million tiny jewels. Yes, thought Panda, this is the richest city in China, and even the Winter Solstice rejoices in its splendor. He beamed and smelled with pride as he looked around at his great city, its magnificent, marble structures, gold-trimmed rooftops, and jade walkways beautifully and ornately decorated with positive symbols and pictures surrendering majestically to the falling snow.

As Panda turned to enter his palace, a dark shadow overhead caused him to look up just in time to see the long, crimson dragon stealthily approaching the great city. A chill ran up his spine as the great beast swooped down and landed before him.

“Greetings, Panda,” said the dragon as he folded his wings to rest from his long flight. “I am the fiercest dragon in all of China.”

Panda stood motionless for a moment, watching the moonlight shine on the crimson scales of the great beast towering before him. Dragon continued, “I come in peace. I am weary and seek shelter for the night.”

The fetid odor of carrion reached Panda’s nose, and he sniffed disdainfully as he considered Dragon’s request. He cleared his throat and carefully replied: “This is the richest city in China, and I humbly offer you shelter in my barn for the night. You must leave at dawn.” Panda pointed the way to his barn, turned on his heel, and entered his palace.

Dragon wearily stumbled into Panda’s barn. Sleepily, he admired the ornate walls and gold trim of the building. Oh, to live in such splendor, Dragon thought as he wrapped his massive wings and jagged tail around his great, crimson body and drifted off to sleep.

A sudden noise outside brought Dragon wide awake at once. He listened to a muffled cry, a pitiful sobbing. His sharp talons scraped the jade walkways as he quickly stepped outside to find the source of such misery until he came upon a young monkey, weeping and shivering in the snow. The monkey’s eyes widened in fear as Dragon approached, but he was too frightened to run away.

“What is the meaning of this?” Dragon demanded. “You should be sleeping in your beautiful house - it is nighttime.”

“Monkey replied, still weeping, “I am too hungry to sleep, Great Dragon. I have a beautiful house, yes, but I am hungry. My stomach complains and will not let me sleep many a night.” Monkey realized that Dragon was not going to eat him and gingerly picked his way across the snow in search of any food he could find.

Dragon was perplexed. “Monkey, this is the richest city in China! Surely you must have some food…”? Sadly, Monkey shook his head and pointed a bony finger towards another jade walkway. Many other animals were quietly lurking in the shadows, scavenging for food. Dragon watched the famished villagers for a moment and listened to Monkey chatter.

continued on next page
Fable continued -

“We are all hungry. We work in the fields and harvest crops during the summer, but we are not allowed to keep extra to sustain us through the bitter, harsh winter. Panda sells everything to obtain money for beautifying the city. He says that it is a great honor to have the richest city in China.”

Dragon watched the monkey skitter off into the night and went back to the barn to try to sleep. Sleep did not come easily as Dragon pondered the situation. He decided to speak to Panda and he made his way to the palace to knock on the door.

“Who dares wake me up at this hour?” bellowed a sleepy Panda as he opened the door.

Dragon blew a ring of smoke through his nostrils before answering, “I wish to speak to you about your city.”

Panda rubbed sleep from his eyes and stepped outside. “What is it?” he grumbled.

“Panda, you say that you have the richest city in all of China…” Dragon hesitated before continuing, “It certainly is the most splendid city that I have ever seen with all the gold, marble, and jade.”

Impatient, Panda gave a big sigh. “Yes, yes, what is your point?”

Dragon grimaced, “Your city may be the richest, but all of your people are starving. You sold their crops and used them for your own needs. Now they are unhappy and hungry. How long will you keep doing this?”

Then Dragon turned and flapped his wings as hard as he could and launched himself gracefully into the snowy sky, leaving Panda uncomfortably standing there scratching his head.

Panda looked at the city, but not at just the royal, splendid buildings and saw the starving citizens scavenging for food. His heart sank, and he sadly went back into the palace.

As the peaks of dawn stretched brightly across the sky, a plan blossomed inside of Panda’s head. He called a meeting for everyone in the city. When he announced that he was going to supply every citizen with a plentiful amount of food each year, the villagers were surprised at Panda’s change of heart. Panda reassured them that there would be no more hunger. He finally had the perfect city. Wealthy, yes, but now full of happiness.

Samantha Schafer’s Rules and Things Number 27: Give to others who are less fortunate.

ESL Students Win Art Contest

Canon-McMillan High School’s ESL (English as a Second Language) class was the first-place winner in the Intermediate Unit 1 “Christmas Card Contest.” The students won a pizza party and the card they created will be used as the Intermediate Unit 1 Christmas card which will be sent to school districts for the 2012 holidays.

Pictured from left are: Junior Chao Fang (speaks Chinese), Senior Alexander Baskakov (speaks Russian), Sophomore Shai Wudkwyvch (speaks Chinese), Junior Fang Fang (speaks Chinese), Senior Art Prus (speaks Russian and Ukrainian) and Junior Ivie Figueroa (speaks Spanish). Not shown is their teacher, Mrs. Diane Pleskovich.
Congratulations to Kate DuCarme, an eighth-grader at Canonsburg Middle School, who has won the Benjamin Carson Scholarship Award. The scholarship is awarded to those students who have a GPA of 3.75 or above in all academic subjects and demonstrate humanitarian qualities in school and in the community.

The Carson Scholarship was started by Dr. Benjamin Carson who is a pediatric neurosurgeon. He was alarmed by the statistic that the U.S. ranked 21 out of 22 countries in science and math, at the time, and wanted to provide an incentive for students to do well in academics. According to the organization’s mission statement, “The Carson Scholars Fund offers $1,000 college scholarships to students based on high academic achievement and humanitarianism, regardless of financial need or other factors.”

Each school is only permitted to nominate one student for this award. Teachers can nominate students as early as elementary school. Kate was nominated by her Advanced English 8 teacher, Mrs. Shana Porter. For the past five years, Mrs. Porter has nominated one of her students who meets the criteria of a Carson Scholar. All five students have been awarded this honor. The students were Amy Vogrig, 2008; Michael Burchesky, 2009; Cassandra Popovski, 2010, and William Kohler, 2011.

Kate was required to write an essay on a quote from Dr. Francis Collins, Director of the National Institutes of Health and head of the Human Genome Project, who said, “It’s not just the DNA- it’s what you do with it.” Kate had to explain what she thought this quote meant and what she will do to make an impact on the world. Mrs. Porter was required to write essays on Kate’s reading activity, attitude toward learning, leadership ability, scholastic work ethic, motivation, and achievements. Kate also was required to report her community service and humanitarian activities.

Kate and Mrs. Porter were invited to an awards ceremony in April in the Grand Ballroom at the Omni William Penn in Pittsburgh. The scholarship foundation also noted that this year more submissions were received than in previous years.

Mrs. Shana Porter, left, and Kate DuCarme

Muse Elementary celebrates Dr. Seuss’s birthday

The children in Wonderful Room 106 at Muse Elementary School really enjoyed celebrating Dr. Seuss’ birthday. The children watched a video of “The Cat in the Hat” read by Justin Bieber. They then made their own Cat in the Hat puppets. The children made Lorax puppets, in preparation for seeing “The Lorax” movie. The children used their listening skills and followed directions by using a pattern to make their puppets. These were fun activities and they especially enjoyed posing for their class photo.

Pictured from left are: Sarah Clendaniel, James Caldwell, Olesya Grasky, Kamila Corwin, Calvin Horney, Austin Megyesy and Austin Oravetz; middle row - Ava Sylvester, Elias Lavrich (hidden), Victoria Geisler, Inecya Russell, Carter Tymoczko and Colton Bosang; back row - Ashley Behling, Dane Timmins, Sam Costello, Tori Wesolowski, Kacie Lavella, Dakota Gallagher and Luke Harris.
Canon-McMillan High School students were recognized for their art accomplishments at the recent Scholastic Art and Writing Competition of Southwestern Pennsylvania.

Brooke Stevenson, a junior, received a Gold Key and an American Vision Award, the highest level of achievement on the regional level, for her drawing entitled “Amadeus.”

Kiera Browell, a freshman, received two Gold Keys for her photography pieces “Dahlia Supernova” and “Hot Papaya Echinacea.” Madilynn Delach, a senior, also received a Gold Key for her digital art piece entitled “Cultural Cuisine.” Their Gold Key work was forwarded to New York for national level adjudication.

Winner of Silver Keys for distinguished achievement on the regional level was Kiera Browell, freshman, for her photographs, “Berry Patriotic,” and “What a Bee Sees.”

MERIT AWARD WINNERS:

- Madilynn Delach, senior, “Hijab,” drawing
- Hailey Mark, junior, “True Colors,” mixed-media

Other Canon-McMillan High School students who submitted artwork to the competition and had their entries exhibited in Gallagher Hall at California University were:

SENIORS – Kailee Leadingham, Casey Peel, Jasmine Powell, Danielle Stevenson and Angela Zanaglio

JUNIORS – Jordan Dobrowski, Jessica Ganser and Erene Semanderes

SOPHOMORE – Joseph Kosky
Dear Friends,

It’s now been nearly a year since the Frank Sarris Public Library held its grand opening, and the time has just flown by! We’re all settled in now and patronage is continuing to pick up. Some people come for the books, and we’re quite proud of our collection...materials are being added daily! Not only do we have new books in print and in audio formats, but our patrons now have access to a wide range of eBooks through our website - just click where you see the Overdrive button to be taken to the eBook catalog. Other people come to take part in one of our many programs.

Story Hour is a regular - and popular - offering, but it is far from being the only one. In recent months, we’ve offered a number of one-time events, hosting a 50th anniversary celebration for *A Wrinkle in Time* and providing instruction on topics such as manicures for middle-schoolers and candy-making for adults and older teens. Currently we’re offering eight-week programs for scrapbooking and art instruction. Of course, the library will continue to offer its ongoing programs and activities, and new people are welcome to join these at any time. Upstairs in the teen area, Wii is offered every Wednesday from 4:30 to 7:30 p.m. People with a fondness for crafting get together to knit or crochet individual projects every Wednesday at 6:30 p.m.

As time passes, we continue to strengthen our ties to the community. Recently we served as a collection point for the Washington County Food Bank’s food drive. And we enlisted a local business person to offer a workshop to teach job search skills. We’re pursuing other ways we can give back to the community that gives to us, as well. Twice our young patrons have colored holiday cards to bring cheer to local nursing home residents, and throughout a week in April we’ll be doing our own version of World Book Night, donating books to readers in need throughout the area.

Looking a little further into the future, May is National Pet Month when we’ll be working to aid our four-legged friends by collecting food and other supplies needed by the Washington County Humane Society. We’ll be hosting a very special Story Hour with a guest visit from Therapy Pets International. We are also planning Saturday Story Hours for Mother’s Day and Father’s Day.

May is the ideal time to register for our Summer Reading Program. Sign up begins early in the month and this year’s slogan is “Dream Big - Read!” The five-week-long program is open to children entering first through sixth grades and registration is limited, so please be sure to sign up well in advance of the June 8 deadline.

And, as always, you can access our website 24/7 for information and event updates.

Regards from... Frank Sarris Public Library
Over the past three years the Canonsburg Middle School Student Council has helped create a tremendous attitude of altruism amongst the seventh- and eighth-grade student body at CMS. It is the belief of the membership that this position, in an extracurricular activity, will help the middle-level students achieve a great deal of success in academic growth, greater self-confidence, a thorough understanding of teamwork and improved communication skills in a group setting.

CMS Student Council is a great way to find and develop potential student leaders. Student Council members are given the opportunity to help organize school activities, plan student events, conduct new student orientations, help to solve problems within the program, become advocates for fundraising and advertise the program to the rest of the student body.

With an enthusiastic group of eighth-grade officers, the CMS Student Council has worked extremely hard to help promote awareness of certain projects that directly affect the local area and the global community as a whole.

Since the 2009-2010 school year, the student body of Canonsburg Middle School has generously donated their time and effort to a number of various causes and charitable organizations. CMS has provided the Canonsburg-Houston Food Pantry with almost 2,300 food items and roughly $2,000 over the past three years to help ease the struggles of the local community in need of food during the holiday season and beyond.

After the devastating earthquake that rocked Haiti in January 2010, CMS students wanted to get involved and show their support for the survivors. Student Council helped organize a collection of “personal care packages” that was shipped to areas in Haiti that desperately needed them the most. These packages included: soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste, washcloths, antibiotic ointments, band aids and little personalized hearts containing words of encouragement from the students. CMS was able to construct roughly 400 care packages that were shipped to the areas of Haiti hit hardest by this natural disaster.

In March of each school year, the CMS Student Council puts together its schoolwide Pennies for Patients campaign through the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.
Each homeroom in the building competes against each other to see which can raise the most change in that span of time. The winning homeroom then receives a catered Pasta Italiano lunch courtesy of the Olive Garden. Since the 2009-2010 school year, Canonsburg Middle School has raised $5,750 to help aid in the fight against childhood cancer. In addition to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society, CMS has raised almost $1,000 for the Young Women’s Breast Cancer Awareness Foundation in Moon Township and in December 2011 donated $1,200 to the American Cancer Society’s Coaches versus Cancer project.

With the tremendous generosity of these altruistic campaigns, the CMS Student Council helped earn Canonsburg Middle School the prestigious Don Eichhorn Schools to Watch designation in the spring of 2011. Whether it’s academics or helping to support the local community, the students of Canonsburg Middle School continue to demonstrate a devotion towards the pursuit of excellence.

Marissa Theodore, a fifth-grade student at Cecil Intermediate School, was a winner in the state attorney general’s drug-free calendar contest. Fifth-grade students at Cecil Intermediate School designed artwork with a “drug-free” theme for this year’s Red Ribbon Week. Marissa’s work was selected and sent for judging at the statewide level among hundreds of other students’ works from throughout the state. Marissa received notice in mid-November she had been selected to have her design included in the 2012 Attorney General’s Drug-Free Calendar. Marissa and her parents, Tom and Tricia Theodore, and sister, Dominique, traveled to Harrisburg for a special awards ceremony with Attorney General Linda Kelly. Marissa said, “It was a fun experience to visit Harrisburg and get to tour throughout the attorney general’s office.” Marissa won a $200 savings bond and the honor of having her work in the calendar that is displayed in schools and state buildings throughout the Commonwealth. Her work was on January’s page.
About “Jesus Christ Superstar”

“Jesus Christ Superstar” is a rock opera with music composed by Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyrics by Tim Rice. It first played on Broadway in 1971. The musical provides a loose characterization of the Gospels’ account of the last week in the life of Jesus, and ending with his crucifixion. Canon-McMillan’s production minimized the religious overtones as well as, for those who have seen the 1973 film adaptation, any hippie references. “We are playing this as nonreligious and non-hippie, but as timeless,” says Mrs. Berg.

A revival of “Jesus Christ Superstar” began previews on Broadway at the same time as the CMHS production.

When the curtain rose on the cast of “Jesus Christ Superstar,” the pride seen and heard by students and parents was only exceeded by that of the four members of the Canon-McMillan faculty responsible for bringing the show to life: Mrs. Cindy Berg, director and producer; Ms. Maggie Sisson, music director; Mr. Mark Falvo, orchestra director, and Mr. Rob Montini, technical director. This dynamic foursome was responsible for the consistently strong and enjoyable performances that mark the annual musical experience as well as for keeping the arts alive and thriving at Canon-McMillan High School.

An accomplished actor and director, Mrs. Berg came to education after having life-altering experiences in children’s
Theatre. She holds two degrees from Point Park University: Communications and Secondary Education and Theatre Arts with an Acting concentration. Before coming to Canon-McMillan she was a drama instructor at Point Park College Conservatory, and Chartiers Valley High School. She also was the artistic director of South Park Children’s Theater and Old Schoolhouse Players.

“Working with students on theatrical projects is what brought me into teaching in the first place. I was a parent-volunteer, ended up directing and doing set design which led me to going back to college to earn my degrees in education and theatre,” says Mrs. Berg.

Ms. Sisson graduated from Trinity High School and attended Duquesne University, for a bachelor’s degree in music education. Prior to working at Canon-McMillan High School, she spent the first three years of her career at the middle school teaching seventh- and eighth-grade choir and general music.

“The last two months are hectic, but seeing the final product on stage makes it all worthwhile,” says Ms. Sisson. “We are truly blessed with talented, self-motivated students.”

“Ms. Sisson is the reason I got into music,” says senior Ben Jones. “I was dragged to a rehearsal six years ago, and didn’t want to sing. I was surprised I could sing. I’m still surprised I can sing.”

Mr. Falvo graduated from Washington High School, and attended Otterbein College for an undergraduate degree in music education before obtaining a master’s in music education from Bowling Green University. Prior to joining Canon-McMillan in 2002, he worked at Bishop Ready High School in Columbus, Ohio, and Penn Hills School District. While describing the months before the performances as “crazy,” Mr. Falvo enjoyed working with the students in the nontraditional setting of a musical. “My biggest joy is watching the students and sharing their pride in their accomplishments,” says Mr. Falvo.

Mr. Montini, a recipient of three degrees from Duquesne University, including a B.A. in Latin, B.S. in Education, and a Master’s of Science in Multimedia, has been at Canon-McMillan for 15 years. He was first hired to teach Latin. With a master’s degree in multimedia, he is a self-described “tech geek” who enjoys the creativity that comes from adding to the emotion and drama being carried out on stage through the use of lighting and sound. An accomplished musician, he has played French horn in over 20 pit orchestras for high schools and regional theater productions.

Choosing to spend countless hours past the typical workday to invest in a musical production was an easy decision for Mr. Montini: “I like working with the kids. They have an energy and enthusiasm that many people don’t get to experience.”

The musical experience at Canon-McMillan is much different than what many parents will remember about their youth. These days, the music, acting, stage design, lighting and sound make for a feast of the sensory system.

For the four teachers responsible, the collaboration that comes in the selection of the musical and the time-consuming process of bringing a show from a book of music to a reality is a highlight of the experience.

Top: Ben Jones as Judas is pictured with the three Soul Girls, from left, Samantha White, Brianna King and Kathryn Griffin.
Bottom: Picture of special effects used during the crucifixion scene featuring Joseph Helinski as Jesus.
KEY CONSIDERATIONS

What are the key considerations for selecting, then producing a show that has key involvement and accountability of students?

The Talent

First, the talent pool is considered. Mrs. Berg and Ms. Sisson research musicals beginning the summer before the year of performance. They must know the abilities of the students who would be auditioning as a necessary aspect of the process. "This year, we had a strong group of boys, so it was important to make a selection that would allow our talent base to be utilized to its fullest potential," explained Ms. Sisson. Of the nine primary roles, only one was female. "At first the girls, who are talented in their own right, were a little disappointed, but once they heard the music, they were excited about 'Jesus Christ Superstar,' too," she said.

Obtaining Rights

Because school districts must obtain rights to produce shows, with some rights being more challenging to receive than others, it is important to begin the process early. Mrs. Berg, as director, allows two months for this process. "Jesus Christ Superstar" was also being performed in late March at the Pittsburgh Musical Theater, so an additional requirement in obtaining permission to produce the show was advertising the PMT production.

"I believe that one of our responsibilities is to expose students to productions with which they won’t be as familiar," explained Ms. Sisson. "We try to alternate a popular, more widely known production with some that are less well-known, but still provide our students with opportunities to be challenged and to grow as stage professionals."

Funding

It may surprise some that the musical is not a line item in the District budget. A nominal fee is charged to attend a performance. The primary expenses are borne through the efforts of the Drama Boosters, a group of parents described as "amazing, life-savers, and saints!" Canon-McMillan parent Trish Baker currently serves as booster president. In addition to raising money to support the productions, the boosters have been found to pitch in with sewing costumes, building sets, and more.

Reviewing the score

Canon-McMillan band members are the first additions to the pit orchestra, conducted by Mr. Falvo. Because Canon-McMillan does not have a strings program, professional musicians are hired for those parts, as well as other instruments, as needed. This year, in a first, Ms. Sisson took a turn at playing piano in the pit. The pit orchestra, under the keen eye of Mr. Falvo, both set the tempo for the show and played continuously throughout this rock opera, which meant that the entire show was sung to musical accompaniment. Traditional musicals have musical lulls during which the actors are engaging in dialogue.

Auditions

Students who are interested in being on stage must audition. Students are assessed on their vocal ability, stage presence, and how they will fit with the material. This year, lead roles were held by senior Joseph Helinski, as Jesus; Ben Jones, in the role of Judas; and junior Sarah Chelli, who played Mary Magdalene.

"I've worked with these seniors since seventh grade," said Ms. Sisson. "In the middle school production of 'Godspell,' Joe played Jesus and Ben played John the Baptist, so this has a certain déjà vu quality, but they are so well suited for their roles, I love it!"

In all, 38 students took the stage. Because of the nature of the production (Jesus is never without his apostles), all actors spent much time on stage.

Lighting / sound

Mr. Montini oversees the control booth, located in the back of the auditorium. Due to a lightning strike last year, the light board is new and features the latest in light and sound technology. It is the same board that can be found at the Benedum Center for the Performing Arts or Heinz Hall for the Performing Arts, so Canon-McMillan students are uniquely prepared for post-secondary educational pursuits in this field. As equipment breaks beyond repair, their replacements are greener. It is estimated that the new lighting in the auditorium will save 29 megawatts per year. Under the tutelage of Mr. Montini, students learn the intricacies of lighting and sound and will run the board during rehearsals and performances.

▲ Musicians for the production include, from left: Tyler Engel, Jonah Trout, Jake Dahl, Casey Peel and Mike Burschesky.
Set design / stage management

Mrs. Berg oversees the students who manage the action behind the scenes. They move props into place, ensure that curtains rise or fall at the proper time, assist in painting the sets and ensure that the actors are on their marks.

“Our goal is to utilize the student body to its utmost. We strive for students to run the show,” explained Mrs. Berg. Students took the positions of being stage manager, Jennie Brancho, and running crew chief, April Currey. While students who have taken Technical Drama or Drama II/III are more knowledgeable about the intricacies of the work, any student who is interested is welcome to become involved.

Bringing it all together

Once the students have been identified for each of the areas, the serious work begins. To hear the teachers describe the process is akin to watching a dance—the individual preparation for each of the four areas must ebb and flow, allowing each group precious time in the auditorium as is needed. While Ms. Sisson is working with students on the music, Mrs. Berg works with the set designers, creating the artistry that will help to set the mood of the musical. When she needs the actors to block, which is also significant for Mr. Montini for lighting and sound, Ms. Sisson will work with smaller groups of actors on the music. Throughout, Mr. Falvo prepares the musicians not only for the instrumental technique but also helps to strengthen their stamina for playing for extended periods.

“I don’t think many people realize how much time our teachers devote to us and to our musical,” says Joseph Helinski. “Mrs. Berg and Mr. Montini often stay after school until 10 or 11 at night, painting sets or working on lighting and sound, and Ms. Sisson and Mr. Falvo often come in on Saturdays and Sundays to work on music with us. We are truly fortunate that they are as invested in us as they are.”

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<th>Musical Planning Schedule</th>
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So, how do the students get from the beginning stages in January, where they are learning the show and understanding their unique responsibilities, to a full production in just eight weeks. Through long hours, hard work, late nights and an uncommon commitment to being involved in something bigger than themselves, the students will create a synergy that is palpable to the audience. “After six years, we all have chemistry and work very well together,” added Joseph Helinski.

Ben Jones shared, “As seniors, we understand that our role is to mentor the younger students and help all of us to be the best performers that we can be. We all try to learn from each other. It was so meaningful to us as younger performers to have the support of the older, more seasoned students. Now, it is our turn.”

As Mr. Montini asserted, “Students learn the interdependence of their roles. Every student, no matter their job with the musical, understands that if they do not carry out his/her task that a lot of other people are let down.”

“The fact that the many hours of rehearsal fly by and we are never quite ready to leave when it is over, is a testament to our teachers,” continued Joseph Helinski.

The entire High School staff and administration support the faculty and involved students. According to Canon-McMillan High School Principal Dave Helinski, “The High School staff and administration are thrilled with the musical choice this year. It is a timeless story with classic music that moved and amazed several generations of theatergoers.”

After several weeks of rehearsal, the cast, crew and pit of “Jesus Christ Superstar” assembled for their final dress-run-throughs of the show as if they had an audience. The air was filled with nervous giggles and excited laughter as they began.

New lights, ordered from China, were delayed in arrival and were not installed until the day before the show was to go live - that meant that students were not familiar with lighting cues or their visibility on a decorated set. Add to that, speakers blowing in the final dress rehearsal. To say that it was stressful was an understatement, but the adults and students handled the crisis with ease, symbolic of the mantra, “The show must go on.”

The performance showed a powerful story told eloquently through song. Nothing seemed amiss - lights, sounds, the orchestra, the voices, the set - all forces came together to evoke the emotion of the piece.

Now that the curtain has closed on another musical, students reflect on lessons learned and the inevitable and exciting growth that comes from creating art.

“Trying out really stressed me out, but once that was over, practicing was the highlight of my day,” said junior Dan Buker. “I hope to continue my acting and singing career in next year’s musical as a senior!”

Junior April Currey, who served as running crew chief this year, shared, “It’s a great feeling of accomplishment when you are part of a successful show. My job may not be on stage, but I know that I still play an important role in the overall success.”

As for the four faculty members responsible for bringing musicals and other performances to life, their attention is already turned to the next event, a fall production of “A Midsummer Night’s Dream.” Stay tuned for more opportunities to see the impressive students of Canon-McMillan High School take on new challenges!

The first-grade students at Muse Elementary School were very busy reading and writing for the month of March. Each day a different student chose a book to read to the class. The children loved listening to the stories that other students have practiced. Students also completed writings for the PBS Kids Writing Contest. This contest asks the students to write an original story with illustrations. The students are very excited to submit their creative and original stories! Muse students love to read and write!!

▲ Top: Holding up their PBS writings and illustrations are, from left: Mason Fixx, Samantha Booher, Rachel Bastos and Providence King.

Bottom: Gabby Lucia is seen reading to the class.

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Muse students like reading and writing
Budding scientists on the seventh-grade Knights Team at Canonsburg Middle School had the opportunity to hone their investigative skills during a week-long, inquiry-based laboratory experience in science class with their teacher, Ms. Stephanie Kubik.

The investigation was conceived and piloted by the University of Pittsburgh Department of Biological Sciences Outreach Program in collaboration with Dr. Tia-Lynn Ashman’s lab and funded by a grant from the Grabel Foundation.

The goal of this collaborative effort was to provide cutting-edge technology and pilot a new technique for incorporating that technology into the science classroom. In doing so, the Canonsburg Middle School continues to successfully strive to provide ample STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics)-based learning opportunities.

To effectively bring current science to the classroom, Knights Team students completed hands-on examinations of both the outward appearance (phenotype) and the genetic make-up (genotype) of the strawberry plant in an inquiry-based investigation.

Students were presented with the following scenario: a small-scale, organic strawberry farmer stole his prize-winning strawberries from a neighboring large-scale strawberry business. Using their knowledge of heredity, students had to determine if the organic

continued on next page
farmer really did steal the original plant that resulted in prize-winning strawberries.

To study both the outward appearance and genetic make-up of the strawberries during the investigation, students experienced the use of a variety of current techniques. Calipers and a digital scale were used to make phenotypic comparisons. Histograms (bar charts representing frequency distributions) were constructed to visualize comparisons. Micropipetteors were utilized for all small-volume measurements. DNA (deoxyribonucleic acid) extraction was performed to harvest genetic material from the strawberries for analysis. Polymerase chain reactions (PCR) were completed to amplify the specific segment of DNA needed to determine genetic similarities or differences amongst the different brands of strawberries. Finally, the students had a chance to practice using gel electrophoresis. This technique separates the resulting DNA molecules according to size and electrical charge by applying an electric current to them while they are in a gel. Visible bands specific to the organism’s DNA were produced and used by students to compare the genetic make-up of the different brands of strawberries.

With the help of Rebecca Gonda, Ph.D, who facilitates the outreach program, Knights Team students experienced a unique and successful hands-on application of the scientific method.

PMEA Elementary Sing
Carlynton School District, April 27
Participating students:
Cecil Intermediate School students:
Lauren Hodges, Agape Kapelonis, and Maggie Veres
North Strabane Intermediate School students:
Jessica Fortunato, Alexis Graves, Alia Jones, Jaiden Williams.

PMEA Elementary Band Festival
Burgettstown High School, May 4.
Participating students:
Cecil Intermediate School:
Clarinet - Katie Blanock, Megan Bowers, Jessica Cadez, Serafina Samosky
Flute – Lauren Naylor
Trumpet – Maria Katz, Agape Kapelonis
French horn – Cambria O’Grady
Trombone – Jeff Kim, Tyler Eckels.

North Strabane Intermediate School:
Bass clarinet - Emma Minnis
Clarinet - Katelyn Greaves, Grace Majestic, Riley Schinkovec, Samantha Sonnet
Flute - Emily Trew
Tenor saxophone - Faith McClendon
Trumpet - Ryan Fulton, Jessica Ray, Nathan Weese.
Second-graders at Borland Manor Elementary School read the story “Bruno the Baker” by Lars Klinting, which tells a story about two friends. It is Bruno’s birthday and his friend Felix stops by to wish him a Happy Birthday and to give him a bouquet of flowers. Bruno invites Felix to stay for cake, but first they have to make it.

The story relates the step-by-step procedures they perform to bake the cake and then tidy up the kitchen. They set the table and sit down to eat. The doorbell rings and two more friends arrive to wish Bruno a Happy Birthday. Bruno invites them in and they all eat Bruno’s Happy Birthday cake!

Bruno’s cake recipe is at the end of the story. Mrs. Peggy Billingsley challenged her students to bake the cake using the recipe. Connor Borsch, and his sister, Emma Borsch, fourth-grader, took the challenge and baked the cake. Connor then decorated the cake. It was yummy and they all had a good time. We challenge you to bake the cake.

Connor Borsch, second-grader, and his sister, Emma Borsch, fourth-grader, bake Bruno’s cake recipe.

**BRUNO’S CAKE RECIPE**

- 8” x 2” cake pan
- 5 1/8 Tbsp. butter or margarine
- 1 Tbsp. plain bread crumbs, finely ground
- 2 large eggs
- 1 cup granulated sugar
- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour, sifted
- 1 ½ teaspoons baking soda
- 1 Tbsp. confectioners’ sugar (or 1 teaspoon vanilla extract)
- ½ cup milk

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Melt the butter in a pan over a low flame.
3. Brush the cake pan with some of the melted butter.
4. Pour the breadcrumbs in the cake pan. Shake it carefully so that the crumbs stick to the sides of the pan.
5. Beat the eggs and sugar together in a large bowl until the mixture is fluffy.
6. Combine the flour, baking soda and confectioners’ sugar (or vanilla extract) in a small bowl. Stir well. Make sure there are no lumps.
7. Blend milk, remaining butter and combined flour, baking soda, and confectioners’ sugar with the egg and sugar mixture in a large bowl. Mix until smooth.
8. Pour the batter into the cake pan. Bake for 35 minutes. Stick a toothpick in the center of the cake. If it comes out clean, the cake is done.
9. Let the cake sit for one hour.

To serve the cake as Bruno did: Place a paper doily on top of the cake and then place a large plate facedown over the doily. Slip one hand under the cake pan and hold onto the top as you flip the cake over. Lightly wiggle the pan free. Sprinkle the top of the cake with confectioner’s sugar.

(Yields 8 pieces of cake)
To celebrate Read Across America Day and Dr. Seuss’s birthday on March 2, fourth-graders at Cecil Elementary School planned a day full of learning and fun for the students and teachers! Students, in pairs or small groups, chose a book written by Dr. Seuss and were assigned a classroom that they would visit on Read Across America Day. Students developed lesson plans, activities and projects that went along with their book and that were appropriate for the classroom they would be visiting. They also created bulletin boards outside of the teachers’ classrooms and read the book to the class. The fourth-graders worked very hard and did an excellent job of getting Cecil Elementary excited about reading!

▲ One Fish, Two Fish, Red Fish, Blue Fish - Student-created bulletin board for Mrs. Karen McMullen’s second-grade class.

▲ Top Left, Carson Calabrese works with Mrs. Diane Byers’ kindergarten class on letter sounds after reading “The ABC Book.”

Bottom Left, Logan Mizenko, left, and Danny Garver read, “Oh the Thinks I can Think,” to second-graders.

Top Right, Taylor Caldwell, left, and Chase Caldwell, right, celebrate with The Cat in the Hat while Hannah White, center, looks on.

Bottom Right, Reading “I Wish I Had Duck Feet” in Miss Ashley Knizner’s first-grade class are, from left, Kolton Black and Brenden Stilwell.