Montour School District

Montour accepted into National Network of Innovative School Districts

Montour School District was accepted into the League of Innovative Schools in October. The league is comprised of forward-thinking school districts from across the country and organized by Digital Promise, a nonprofit organization with the mission to accelerate innovation in education and improve the opportunity to learn for all through technology and research. Montour was selected from a competitive national pool of applicants based on its leadership, evidence of results, innovative vision for learning and commitment to collaboration.

"Montour is fortunate to have great educators and leaders who strive daily to provide a world-class educational experience for all students," says Dr. Christopher Stone, Montour’s superintendent. "We encourage sound risk taking and outside of the box pedagogical strategies to keep students motivated and engaged. It is a real honor to be accepted into the League of Innovative Schools!"

The League of Innovative Schools was launched in late 2011 and accepts new members through an open application process once per year. With its newest members, the league now includes 94 school districts in 33 states. The full list of members can be found at digitalpromise.org/districts.

"The League of Innovative Schools works to improve outcomes for students and solve the challenges facing K-12 schools through powerful and smart use of learning technologies and research," said Kim Smith, executive director of the League of Innovative Schools. "We’re excited to welcome our new League members and further amplify the collective voice of the league to advance positive change in public education."

League members are represented by their superintendent, who commits to:
- Attend biannual league meetings that feature classroom visits, collaborative problem solving and relationship building with peers and partners;
- Participate in league challenge collaboratives on a broad range of topics relevant to the changing needs of school districts;
- Support Digital Promise research and provide feedback so it translates easily into classroom experiences and expands what we know about teaching and learning;
- Engage with entrepreneurs to advance edtech product development steeped in the latest learning science and meets district needs; and
- Participate in the league’s professional learning community by connecting with other members online, in person, and at each other’s school districts.

Thank you, Montour community!

I would like to personally thank Montour School District community members for a wonderful opening of the 2017-2018 school year. From the first day of school to the open house events, your support of our schools was very evident. We welcomed thousands of community members into our schools in September and the feedback has been phenomenal.

As superintendent, it is my job to put the spotlight back on our students and staff. Our teachers have wonderful curricular and programmatic opportunities prepared for our students this year. I’m certain they will come home nightly with an exciting story about what is occurring in their classrooms.

It is certainly an interesting time to be a Spartan. All signs point to continued growth and excitement for the Montour School District. Beyond the “walls” of Montour, word of the great things happening for our students is spreading fast. Perhaps most importantly, whenever I visit schools and classrooms I see miles of smiles from our students - and ultimately, that is most important!

Thank you for all of your support!

Dr. Christopher Stone
Superintendent
AIU ranks Montour’s tax rate among lowest in Allegheny County

Montour School District has the fifth lowest millage rate in Allegheny County, according to a report by the Allegheny Intermediate Unit. The AIU ranked Montour’s millage rate among those of 41 other school districts in Allegheny County in its annual report, which places Montour just behind Duquesne City with a millage rate of 17.9638.

According to Anna Borsos, Montour’s business manager, that millage rate has stayed the same from last year. She also points out that Montour only raised school taxes two times in the past 10 years.

“It wasn’t always this way,” Borsos writes. “Four years ago, the district’s expenditures were outpacing revenues. The countywide reassessment resulted in numerous tax appeals, which caused significant refunds to taxpayers, some in the neighborhood of $1 million. Coupled with increased costs of educating students with special needs, charter school tuition costs and state pension costs, like many districts in the commonwealth, we found ourselves in a precarious position, dipping into reserves on an annual basis. The board of directors and administration knew that to continue to operate this way was unsustainable. Many services were outsourced, departments reorganized and building expenditures scaled back while we embarked on a major construction project, the building of our new elementary school. Those few years were particularly challenging but, I am pleased to report that, coupled with increased growth in Robinson and Kennedy townships, we have weathered the storm. Our core values remain to be the focus of our operations... Putting Children First, Supporting a Growth Mindset and Creating a Learning Culture. We are...Montour Proud!!

Montour recognized again as Common Sense District

Common Sense, the national nonprofit organization dedicated to helping kids and families thrive in a world of digital media and technology, has recognized Montour School District as a Common Sense District. This marks the third consecutive year that the district has been recognized with the designation.

Montour has demonstrated its commitment to taking a whole-community approach to preparing its students to use the immense power of digital media to explore, create, connect and learn while limiting the perils that exist in the online realm such as plagiarism, loss of privacy and cyber bullying. The recognition acknowledges the district’s commitment to creating a culture of digital learning and citizenship.

“We applaud the faculty and staff of Montour School District for embracing digital citizenship as an important part of their students’ education,” said Liz Kline, vice president of education programs for Common Sense Education. “Montour School District deserves high praise for giving its students the foundational skills they need to compete and succeed in the 21st-century workplace and participate ethically in society at large.”

Common Sense Education’s innovative and research-based digital citizenship resources were created in collaboration with Dr. Howard Gardner of the GoodPlay Project at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. The resources teach students, educators and parents tangible skills related to Internet safety, protecting online reputations and personal privacy, managing online relationships, and respecting creative copyright. The free resources are currently used in more than 90,000 classrooms nationwide.

“We’re honored to be recognized as a Common Sense District,” said Dr. Christopher Stone, Montour superintendent. “By preparing our students to use technology safely and responsibly, we are providing them unlimited opportunities to maximize and personalize their learning.”

To learn more about the criteria Montour met to become recognized as a Common Sense District, visit www.commonsense.org/education/recognition-districts.
Montour teachers present at National Autism Conference

In August, two Montour teachers stepped outside of their comfort zone of a classroom and accepted an invitation to speak at the National Autism Conference at Penn State University. Life Skills teacher Sheri Sumpter and autistic support teacher Erin Ritchey have been working closely in conjunction with the PaTTAN Autism Initiative for several years. Both teachers run programming based on verbal behavior, a subsection of Applied Behavior Analysis. This language and behavioral program covers direct instruction, natural environment teaching, intensive teaching covering all verbal operants, and teaching students to access their environment through requesting - all of this while using a variable ratio schedule of reinforcement. The program also utilizes the sensory room and attends monthly community-based outings to practice generalization of skills.

Through their work with the program, and consultation from PaTTAN, Sumpter and Ritchey were asked to present their model of staff training at the National Autism Conference this past summer. The presentation was part of a breakout session that approximately 35 people from across all realms of education attended to learn how proper staff training has a direct correlation to student success. The title of their presentation was “Using Evidence Based Applied Behavior Analytic Procedures as a Conceptual Framework for Classroom Staff Training.” The presentation included an overview of their bi-weekly trainings, student growth and the development of a true classroom team.

Fifty years at Montour and counting

After polling 20 different students between grades K and 12, 11 of them said their favorite part of the day was lunchtime. Their reasons varied but all shared the same theme: lunch is a time to relax, be social with their friends, laugh, have fun and eat pizza. For those Montour students and others over the past 50 years, Betty Langman has been an indelible part of that lunchtime experience.

Langman currently serves pizza in the Montour High School cafeteria but she started her career with Montour in 1967 at Burkett Elementary.

“It wasn’t my idea to be a cafeteria worker, my neighbor got me into it,” says Betty. “I loved working with the little ones.”

Betty and her husband, John, who also worked in the district as a custodian, raised their three children on Aiken Road. Over the years, they got to know many Montour students and families. Betty stayed with the elementary schools through many transitions, remodels and reorganizations, but in 1981 - after her daughter graduated - she transferred over to the high school cafeteria.

“She said I couldn’t be in the same building as her;” Betty said with a smile speaking about her youngest daughter, “so the teachers couldn’t tell me things.”

Today, Betty loves serving pizza to the older students in the district. When she is not in the cafeteria, she enjoys shopping, gardening and relaxing at home. Betty, who doesn’t like to be in the spotlight, will humbly tell you, “It’s just a job,” but to those whose lives she has touched throughout the years, they will tell you it’s so much more.

“Betty is one of the most pleasant and productive cafeteria workers I’ve ever had the privilege of knowing, both as a student and colleague,” says Eric Sparkenbaugh, director of 5-12 academic achievement and K-12 support services for Montour.

He says he remembers Betty serving him lunch when he was in kindergarten at Burkett in 1974. So, as the generations have changed, and the landscape of the district with them, Betty has remained a constant. To date, she is the first employee to work in the district for 50 years and she has no plans of retiring anytime soon.
Montour headlines

Girls Rock Science event

Montour once again participated in the Girls Rock Science event at the Carnegie Science Center, which this year was sponsored by Williams and took place Sept. 23 and 24. Montour, whose booth has regularly been a popular draw at the event, was also selected as an ambassador to 12 other area schools. The schools worked together to plan hands-on STEM activities for the weekend-long event intended to acquaint girls with a wide range of STEM careers and get girls of all ages excited about science and technology.

Montour students once again helped attendees make their own lip balm, have a virtual reality learning experience with zSpace and investigate atomic emission spectra. Students made over 600 lip balms at Montour’s booth.

Montour National Honor Society students also worked alongside event coordinators by greeting families and talking with students about STEM professions.

Five girls from Montour participated in the ambassador program, which was led by Heather Abraham, KDKA anchor and host of the morning show “Pittsburgh Today Live.” They were highlighted as leaders in their schools and volunteered their time to interact with kids and families, visit each booth, and promote the event live over social media. As the ambassador school representatives for educational partners, Montour Elementary School STEM teacher Amanda McDermott and David E. Williams student Mia Pravlochak were selected to promote the event on “Pittsburgh Today Live.”

After participating in yet another successful Girls Rock Science event, Montour looks forward to continuing participation in both it and Pittsburgh’s future STEM endeavors.

Price attends national conference

High school principal Todd Price, who earlier this year was named the 2017 PPAESP Principal of the Year, traveled to Washington, D.C. in July for a conference hosted by the National Association of Secondary School Principals. There, Price and 49 other principal of the year honorees were recognized, had the opportunity to network and met with lawmakers.

“The opportunity to sit and talk with distinguished educators from across the country, it’s just an amazing experience,” he says. “You have your local network but when you get the opportunity to talk with a principal from Alaska, Wyoming and Montana...we all face some of the same challenges and we all have different challenges.”

While at the conference, Price met with Sen. Bob Casey and his staff in order to discuss policies at the federal level that are a priority for local educators. An awards banquet was also attended by U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos.

On Oct. 15, Price was honored at an awards banquet hosted by the Pennsylvania Principals Association. Price is currently in his 11th year as high school principal and previously served as assistant principal at David E. Williams Middle School. In addition to his duties at the high school, Price has held a position with the Allegheny Intermediate Unit’s Math and Science Collaborative since he relocated to the area from Philadelphia in 2005.

Homecoming

The high school student body once again selected their homecoming court this year in the weeks leading up to Montour’s annual homecoming game and dance. Members of the court were recognized during Montour’s home game against Knoch on Sept. 29. The homecoming dance took place the following evening on Sept 30.

This year’s homecoming court was as follows: (back) Nolan Hutter (king), Nicholas Sauer, Kavon Morman, Byron Payne, Brayden Jones, Jaxon Schreiner, Ebrandon Wagner, Brandon Bobak, Luke Trohaugh (prince), (front) Samantha White, Jacqueline Moore, Taylor Smith, Morgan Polloco, Taylor Bobak, Tiaja DiClemente (princess), Emily Tkach (queen), Gina Wegring and Jessica Santuolo.

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Schiffhauer recognized with KDKA
Extra Effort Award, completes
Speak to Me Room

Senior Cassie Schiffhauer was presented with the KDKA Extra Effort Award by KDKA-TV sports anchor Bob Pompeani during an assembly at the Athletic Center in October.

A standout student at Montour, Schiffhauer has maintained a 4.0 GPA since her freshman year and last year was inducted into the National Honor Society. Her rigorous load of courses includes AP European history, CHS chemistry, and CHS anatomy and physiology. Schiffhauer has also completed advanced PLTW biomedical courses since freshman year and most recently joined the concert choir.

These past three years, Schiffhauer lettered as a member of the varsity soccer team. She was a member of the WPIAL-winning 2014 team and a member of last year’s team, which finished second in the WPIAL. Schiffhauer has also played for the local Riverhounds Development Academy soccer team for the past three years.

In addition to her athletic and academic achievements, Cassie has been a member of various clubs making a difference in her school community. She has been a member of Students Against Destructive Decisions since she was a freshman and held the role of president since her junior year. She has completed the Women’s STEM program and throughout high school has committed herself to the Global Leadership Certificate Program.

This past school year, Schiffhauer was also one of four students chosen to attend a two-day human-centered design training program at the LUMA Institute in Pittsburgh. Held in collaboration with The Pittsburgh Foundation, the Change Agents in Education Social Justice cohort has challenged students to develop an idea to confront a social justice issue in their school community since 2013. Last school year, Montour students developed an idea for a room at the high school that promotes mental health by giving students a safe place to decompress from stressors during school.

“We didn’t even have the idea of a room when we went there,” says Schiffhauer. “We just knew we wanted to tackle the social justice of mental health.” She says that the group felt that, “Mental health is something that society as a whole doesn’t accept that well in the first place. And our school could be something that we could change for the better.”

Schiffhauer says the group was influenced by an interview they conducted during the training with a person who had gone through high school with an undiagnosed bipolar disorder. The four students then wrote an essay on the topic of treating mental health in a high school setting. The Pittsburgh Foundation awarded the students with a $10,000 grant. Since the other three students who attended the training program graduated, Schiffhauer oversaw completion of the room and presented it during a ribbon cutting ceremony in October.

“It’s mind-blowing that we have young adults who take on the initiative to really be a change agent,” Montour superintendent Dr. Christopher Stone said during the ribbon cutting ceremony. “In reflective of, what does it mean to be a change agent, you’re looking to change the lives of other people. So, it’s certainly commendable.”

Stone described the work that Schiffhauer and the other students who had developed the room had done as “breathtaking.”

The new room, called the Speak to Me Room, has been painted with calming colors and furnished with couches and other comfortable seating. Schiffhauer says the intention was to stray away from the typical classroom environment. It has a nook for storing mobile devices to help students disconnect from work and social media. iPads around the room will have art, music and mindfulness apps for student use. Teachers will be able to volunteer during their planning period.

After graduation, Schiffhauer says she is interested in attending college and majoring in biology while pursuing a career as a physician’s assistant.

Want more good news about Montour? Search #MontourProud on Twitter.
Boys' basketball team wins Holy Trinity tournament

The David E. Williams eighth grade boys’ basketball team won the Holy Trinity Summer Tournament this past summer. The team finished the tournament with a perfect 11-0 record. Coach Dave Powers said, “The boys worked very hard all summer and gave their all in every game. They whole-heartedly deserve this trophy.”

He also said, “The kids made significant strides as a team. By the last game of the season, they worked seamlessly.”

Eighth grade travels to Fort Pitt Museum

Submitted by Eighth Grade Teacher Angela Fazio

On Sept. 15, the eighth grade class took a field trip to the Fort Pitt Museum and Point State Park in downtown Pittsburgh. There, they learned about the French and Indian War and the American Revolution. They went from station to station learning new facts. Inside the museum, there were many stations where students had opportunities to experience what life was like back in the 1700s. Each station had a different guide who took a group from the beginning of the French and Indian War, which started because of fur trading, up to the American Revolution, which occurred in the aftermath of the French and Indian War. They learned fun facts such as where the expression “bite the bullet” comes from and why Native Americans dressed the way they did.

Outside the museum, students were entertained with games such as nine pin and hungry-sack. They also observed a rifle and musket being loaded and shot. In a small building, known to many as the “Old House,” students discovered more about living during that time period. This tiny old house, referred to as “The Block House,” held up to three families at a time. The building has been flooded multiple times and is now protected as a historical landmark. After going through the house, students visited Point State Park. There, they stood where Fort Pitt once stood and had a class picture by the fountain.

Cross-country team wraps up successful season

By Student Writer Alakna Gasparovich

David E. Williams’ varsity and junior varsity cross country teams both had outstanding seasons. Led by coaches Phil Morrow and Robert Naylor, the teams compete from June until the month of October. Athletes put a lot of hard work in all summer, practicing four to five days each week to prepare for meets.

The last meet of the season took place Oct. 10, when the team competed against about 400 other runners and finished second place overall. The boys’ team also achieved its first sectional victory in school history while two members of the varsity boys’ team qualified for states.

Fun in the Field Day

Submitted By Student Writer Sarah Lugaila

Fun in the Field Day is a celebration for all fifth-graders for surviving their first week of school in a whole new building: David E. Williams Middle School. Students participated in many enjoyable teambuilding activities. Each of the fifth grade homerooms used teamwork to gain more points. The homeroom with the most points won. One of the many games was called “digging for coins.”

Speaking of winners, the scores were announced at the end of the day, leaving the students in suspense. The homeroom which placed third overall was Pamela Muha’s homeroom. Dennis Earls’s homeroom placed second and the champion of Fun in the Field Day was Kelly Butera’s homeroom.

Though there were scores and it was a competition, not every student chose to make it that way. Either way, it was a fun break from everyone’s busy schedule and new adjustments. One student, Cody Lugaila, described the day as “fun and competitive.” Another student, Derek Lugaila, said that it was “an awesome experience with lots of fun games.” Overall, the students had an amazing reward day playing fun games and hanging out with their friends.
DEW Student Council names new officers

Submitted by student writer Nick Zessa

The new head representatives of the David E. Williams Student Council have been selected! These four students have been elected by their peers in the 44-member Student Council and proved to be the best of the best. Student council is responsible for organizing events such as the talent show, school store, pep assemblies, theme weeks, Olympic Day and more.

President:
Olivia Lysick has been elected president of the Student Council. Lysick decided to run for her office position because she thought it would be fun and give her more experience to run for a higher position such as in High School Student Council or a college club. This school year, she hopes to have straight-A grades and excel in the sports she plays, including basketball, volleyball and track. In her free time Lysick has, she likes to sing, read, play sports and hang out with her friends. In the future, she sees herself being a research scientist and dreams of owning a bakery. She believes that this position will help her academic career by motivating her to procrastinate less by giving her a substantial amount of work, which in turn benefits the entire school.

Vice President:
McKenna Robinson has been elected to the position of vice president of the Student Council. She chose to run for vice president because she “wanted to do more in student council than just be in a committee.” Though she thought all the candidates would make formidable VP’s, Robinson believed she was the best choice because she is very organized, hard working and capable of solving problems. Her goals for this year include keeping at least an A average in geometry, improving at volleyball and organizing a good pep assembly. In a perfect future, she would go to Stanford University, become a surgeon and live in California. She hopes to use what she learns being vice president later in life to get into High School Student Council, which would make her more attractive to colleges and a potential scholarship.

Treasurer:
Sophia Trevenen has been elected treasurer of the Student Council. Trevenen wanted to run for her position because she believed student council would be a more fun and valuable experience when she was more involved in the planning. This year, Trevenen hopes to make high honor roll at least one term, be prepared for the Biology Keystone, and have an organized and structured student council. She enjoys swimming, running cross country, singing and hanging out with her friends during her spare time. In the future, she could see herself going to the University of Pittsburgh, working as an FBI agent, and performing on Broadway. She thinks that being in student council will help her academic career because she hopes to get into High School Student Council, and when looking for their members they view being in Student Council here in DEW as an important component to acceptance.

Secretary:
Sophia Bookwood has been elected secretary of the Student Council. Bookwood decided to run for secretary because she “likes to take initiative in things and know that [she’s] helping and organizing projects.” She figures she won her office position by being such a social person, in that she developed enough relationships to get herself elected. Her goals for this year include getting more students involved in theme days, getting more programs for fifth- and sixth-graders, and achieving high honor roll. In her free time Bookwood has, she likes to read, swim, play tennis, and spend time with her family and friends. In her dream future, she would like to go to Princeton University, start her own media production company and be all-around successful. She sees her membership in Student Council as beneficial to her academic career because she thinks it will get her more involved within the school and keep her organized through the school year.

Wear a Hat for Cancer Day

Friday, Oct. 6 was Wear a Hat for Cancer Day at David E. Williams Middle School. Students were able to wear their favorite hat for a $1. A total of $500 was raised for The Cancer and Blood Disorders Auxiliary of Children’s Hospital of Pittsburgh Foundation.

Follow David E. Williams Middle School on Twitter
@DEWMiddleSchool

Kyllie Ross, Lilly Ketzel and Olivia Lysick show off the hats they wore for Hat for Cancer Day.
Creating tomorrow's moonshot thinkers

Submitted by Director of Innovation Justin Aglio and Esther Wojcicki

This school year, over 1,100 kindergarten through fourth-grade students at Montour entered an exciting new school building. The new Montour Elementary School shares a campus with the Montour High School and focuses on what Montour superintendent Dr. Christopher Stone describes as "creating a culture of moonshot thinkers."

What are moonshot thinkers?

As John F. Kennedy eloquently stated in a 1961 speech about space travel, "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard." Moonshots in education involve goals that are difficult, perhaps seemingly impossible, to achieve. However, we need these now and in the future to prepare our students for success.

The first step in this process is encouraging student agency and achievement in the classroom. In order for these two aspects to soar, the role of the teacher needs to change from the lecture model to the mentor/coach model. That is, the teacher needs to change from the "sage on the stage" to "the guide on the side." The more a teacher does for a student in the learning process, the less empowered the student is.

Montour believes that every child deserves to be taught in a way that enriches their minds, unlocks their true potential and provides them with the skills to flourish in today's world. When educators change their classroom culture into an environment where students have more control over their own learning, truly anything is possible:

Get ready for takeoff

Today's students are the first generation who had a mobile device in their hands before taking their first baby steps, and it is a generation where Saturday morning cartoons now take a backseat to creation on Minecraft.

With these caveats in the foreground of our planning, we've created a new elementary school environment that is shaped by the literate practices and social contexts relevant to the lives of children. Montour has established several unique learning spaces throughout the new school, including:

- A full Minecraft Education Lab
- Upcycle Makerspace
- Human-centered design areas
- An outdoor amphitheater.

The entire school was customized through a teacher leadership steering committee that selected creative furniture to engage group discussions and accommodate individual comfort. The furniture selection includes desks for small group instruction, optional seating for students with stand-up desks, ball seating for additional movement and, of course, traditional chairs.

Teachers have selected teacher desks that are smaller than the traditional model and are equipped with wheels to allow for movement throughout the rooms while encompassing unique storage areas for their necessary materials. In addition, each classroom will possess a 75-inch Promethean Interactive Display Panel using Classflow, along with several whiteboards and cabinetry to serve as writable surfaces. Finally, every K-12 student will have a Chromebook, including special touchscreen Chromebooks for students in grades kindergarten through four.

Another learning centric space in the new elementary school is a LEGO Makerspace. Students will work alongside teachers to create LEGO learning opportunities that will come to life in a full LEGO-themed space equipped and decorated with LEGO learning tools.

Jason Burik, co-principal at Montour Elementary, is excited about the possibilities of working with the LEGO company. Burik is a world-renowned LEGO artist who has created LEGO masterpieces for organizations such as Nationwide, University of Maryland, Baltimore County and Cisco.

"LEGO has always been a passion of mine, and now I am excited to not only share my love for education with everyone but also to showcase how LEGOs are used to support learning," said Burik.

In addition, the LEGO Makerspace will be the home of the Novel Research-Based Intelligent Lifelong Learning Apparatus, or NoRILLA. NoRILLA is part of the Carnegie Mellon University Learn Lab, Montour's on-campus research center which operates in partnership with CMU. This mixed-reality educational system bridges physical and virtual education to improve children's science learning.

Going to the moon together

Montour recognizes that the future of education will depend upon very strong local and global partnerships. The district is proud to partner with so many organizations for the new school, including the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh, Fred Rogers Center, Remake Learning, Carnegie Science Center, Robinson Township
Library, and Schools That Can. Knowing students today also need opportunities to develop global citizenship skills, the district has also partnered with a variety of global organizations, including Minecraft Education.

“The power of districts like Montour continuing to redefine and reimagine student experience via using Minecraft: Education Edition is undeniable. We are so excited to be part of the conversation and transformation happening there and hope to share what we learn together with other districts and schools around the world,” said Moacan Rami, manager for Minecraft Education at Microsoft.

Though the many partnerships will serve as a strength for the school, the biggest available resource is found within the district itself. Google Sites and Google Classroom are used as a community to communicate and collaborate with each other. With a district-wide focus on participating safely, responsibly and respectfully online, the district will also continue as one of eight partner districts with Common Sense Education, which offers a comprehensive kindergarten through grade 12 Digital Citizenship curriculum.

Today’s students will enter an automated economy to do jobs that may not yet exist. By joining millions of educators around the world, and encouraging students to become moonshot thinkers, they will become successful.

Esther Wojcicki is an education consultant and journalist. Follow her on Twitter: @EstherWojcicki.

A version of this article was published on gettingsmart.com. It can be read at: www.gettingsmart.com/2017/09/creating-tomorrows-moonshot-thinkers/.

Book fair breaks fundraising record

The Scholastic Book Fair is always a favorite among Montour elementary students because it provides them with the opportunity to touch and preview a variety of books that they can purchase for their home libraries.

For the past two years, in conjunction with the fall book fairs, Montour has participated in the All For Books program offered by Scholastic by sending donation bags to home with students. The school can then use those funds to purchase books from the fair for another worthy cause. For every $1 raised, Scholastic donates a book to schools and organizations across the country.

This year, Montour broke its own fundraising record by collecting $2,000 for All For Books. With these donations, the school was able to purchase new books for the LEBO Makerspace, Minecraft room, the school library and, most importantly, a new book for every child in Montour Elementary School. Book fair volunteers helped sort over 1,120 books for students into appropriate age and gender categories. Books were then placed in classroom boxes and homeroom teachers distributed the books to students.

Montour’s efforts also resulted in 2,000 books being donated by Scholastic to schools and organizations in need.

“Our goal as a book fair committee is to make sure every student walks away with a book from the book fair, and we have been able to achieve this awesome goal for the past two years,” says Jamie Lynn Conrad, who chairs the book fair committee of the Elementary PTA. “Furthermore, Scholastic is matching our donations to provide books to schools affected by the recent hurricanes, so it is a win-win for Montour Elementary School and schools around the nation.”
The new innovative spaces at MES

Montour teachers, faculty and parents have wasted no time getting several STEAM areas opened at the district’s new elementary school, which opened the first day of school in September. Here’s a breakdown of some of the different rooms:

Upcycle Makerspace

Among the many cutting-edge features and rooms inside the new Montour Elementary School building, the Upcycle Makerspace is second to none. Created by a group of PTA volunteers with no budget and only resources found within the building, the space - filled with items such as building blocks, pipe cleaners, popsicle sticks, markers, paints and glue (to name just a few) - is a creator’s heaven. With the maker movement in full swing, it is no surprise that the space has become popular with students.

“The makerspace gives teachers new ways to inspire children. It allows for creativity, critical thinking and problem solving,” said first grade teacher Holly Rippole after her class’ first visit to the Upcycle Makerspace.

Maker activities are a means to integrate hands-on learning through experimentation, building and collaboration.

Rippole said that her students’ first class in Upcycle Makerspace exploring the space and getting familiar with it. In the future, the class will tie activities into the curriculum.

“Students were so excited to create with their friends,” said Rippole. “While leaving the makerspace, I even heard a student say, ‘That was better than recess!’”

Other students in Rippole’s class were excited to share their thoughts on the space as well.

Students Kaitlynn Hawk and Aubrey Lemasters said they in particular enjoyed an activity that challenged them to build a castle using 3D shapes. They said that they “got to fill our brains with amazing stuff in the makerspace!”

One of the many benefits of having a makerspace is that students can learn, explore and create at their own pace, skill level and interests. Life skills teacher Laura Showman says that her students benefit from the active, hands-on learning environment.

“They have the ability to use their imaginations to drive their individual learning experience,” says Showman. “It is wonderful to see our students collaborating and learning from one another.”

In March of 2016, Montour was nationally recognized for creating their first makerspace at Forest Grove Elementary School. As the district’s makerspaces continue to grow and improve, so do accolades for the district. In October of this year, the district was accepted into the National Network of Innovative School Districts.

Minecraft Room

Minecraft software allows users to create massive structures and environments in cyberspace. Users can piece together a digital replica of an existing structure or construct an environment completely from their imaginations. Though the Minecraft experience doesn’t involve any tangible objects to manipulate, there is a serious hands-on element to it that encourages experimentation with STEAM concepts, including architecture and engineering.

At Burkett, teachers began experimenting with the education application of Minecraft’s pocket edition by having students build structures and environments depicted in reading material. Over the past couple of years, the Montour Summer STEAM Camp allowed elementary teachers to formulate engineering lessons that engage with the curriculum using Minecraft. Teachers Beth Hobbs, Amanda Mascellino and Jim Latch met with a manager at Minecraft Education and the lessons they developed during the camp have since been published on Minecraft Education’s website.
Other teachers can now download those lessons and use them in their own classrooms. Teachers at Montour Elementary will also be able to download other teachers' lessons plans using Minecraft. When they want to teach those lessons, they won't have to battle for computer lab time. In September, the school opened a room with 28 laptop stations dedicated entirely to the software program. The room features large wall decals depicting the kinds of pixelated characters and environments for which Minecraft is known. The school even installed faux torches like the ones seen in the software to encourage the room's theme of exploration and discovery.

Elementary students, along with elementary principals Jason Shof and Jason Burkh, celebrate the opening of the Minecraft Room at Montour Elementary School with teacher Beth Hobbs. RIGHT: Students pose for a picture in the new room.

LEGO makerspace – Coming soon!

The ubiquitous colorful building blocks that most people grew up playing with are now an educational tool, thanks to the current maker movement. The simple plastic blocks of yesteryear are now being used in conjunction with programmable robotics kits. There's even a lab at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology's School of Architecture and Planning that is developing new learning tools using LEGOs.

At the start of the school year, Montour put out a call for LEGO blocks and monetary donations to start its own LEGO makerspace. The response has thus far made the concept a true community project as Montour educators bring the idea to fruition. School board solicitor Ira Weiss donated to the project, as did Robinson Township. Parkway West Career and Technology students custom-built a work station with built-in storage. Barnes & Noble donated shelves' worth of LEGO books. Carnegie Mellon University is working with Montour educators to develop a mini movie-making lab where students can make stop-motion movies using a smartphone. High school engineering students built a racetrack for LEGO boxcars and the Carnegie Science Center has donated a solar-powered racecar.

The room is also where Montour Elementary is keeping its 3D printers and laser engraver, so students will be able to make their own customized blocks and figures. In addition to movie-making and racing stations, there also will be stations for engineering and architecture. Like a lot of STEAM activities, these LEGO activities will blur the line between play and learning.

The room is still a couple of months away from being completed, but is coming together nicely.

Montour Elementary School's LEGO Makerspace is still a couple of months away from being completed, but once it is complete it will feature stations for engineering, architecture, movie making and more.
Athletics
Fall teams wrap up stellar season

Each of the Spartan fall athletic teams closed out their seasons by qualifying for the postseason. The Spartan football, boys soccer, girls soccer, boys golf, girls tennis, co-ed cross country and girls volleyball ball teams all qualified for the WPIAL playoffs.

“This is a great accomplishment and shows all the hard work and dedication that the coaches and student athletes put in on a daily basis,” said Lou Cerro, Montour’s athletic director and head football coach.

In addition, the girls volleyball team also won their section and the girls tennis team not only came in second in their section, but also won the MAC tennis tournament for the second consecutive year. Isabela Paixao came in first place in section singles and finished fourth in the WPIAL playoffs. Paixao and Isabella Sadowski also qualified for the state doubles finals in Hershey. Members of the team were Bailey Barrett, Alexis Bruscemi, Isabella Paixao, Isabella Sadowski, Leah Hess, Kate Miley and Ni-Ni Careione.