What’s your school district’s tagline for the new school year?

By Director of Innovation Justin Aglio and Superintendent Dr. Michael Ghilani

“Just Do It.” “Think Different.” “I’m Lovin’ it.”

Chances are you know at least one, if not all three, of the companies that came up with these taglines. They are Nike, Apple and McDonald’s, respectively, in case you’re grading yourself. Successful companies like these have a memorable tagline, which is simply a catchphrase or slogan. According to marketing consultant Laura Lake “a tagline should help the audience understand the bigger picture and leave them enticed and wanting more.”

How does this definition of a tagline relate to school districts? Not all school districts have taglines, of course, but those that have created a tagline know that it can be used to inform their target audience. And, what exactly do school districts want their audience to know? The easiest answer to these questions can be traced back the school district’s core values.

Test Drive

In the summer of 2015, the Montour School District reimagined the district by developing three core values:

1. Putting Children First
2. Developing a Growth Mindset
3. Promoting a Learning Culture

Now, for the 2016-2017 school year, Montour has developed a new Tagline: Student-Centered…Future-Focused.

The process used to design Montour’s new tagline is not unusual for the district. Montour’s entire administrative staff - every principal and a group of teachers - all participated in Human-Centered Design Thinking workshops at the LUMA Institute. The LUMA Institute believes that innovation is a growing social and economic imperative. It calls for more people to be more innovative, more often.

Student-centered is our statement of purpose of what we do, and future-focused is our desired future state and where we are going. The Student-Centered...Future-Focused tagline conveys the message of a movement that significantly impacts students by fostering curiosity and a sense of optimism. This, coupled with zero fear of the future and the will and drive to keep moving forward, is what sets us apart as a quality school district.

The rubber hits the road

What is Montour currently doing to model its tagline?

• Marketing students developed a business plan and presented it to administration to create and manage the district’s social media.
• Science classes are fully immersed in the district’s virtual reality lab through a wide variety of activities using zSpace technology. Students and teachers will continue to use virtual reality in chemistry in collaboration with Schell Games, using virtual reality lenses and a new augmented reality educational tool called Happy Atoms.
• Carnegie Mellon University Learn Lab at Montour, which opened in the fall of 2015, is now a national model for educational research and producing K-12, ground-breaking findings. Located within the district’s high school, this is a lab where students and teachers constantly work side-by-side with researchers on various studies, including the MARI Career App - a U.S. Department of Education Reach Higher Career App Challenge finalist - geometry studies, writing tutors, and more. The goal of the Learn Lab is to expand its studies at Montour, and share research findings and best practices with other districts.
• During the 2015-2016 school year, Montour was the first school district in America to earn Common Sense Education Certified District status. “The Montour SD is a great example of a district who started with a vision for digital citizenship. They viewed it as an important foundation in connecting students in the classroom and beyond,” stated Jennifer Ehehalt, Common Sense Regional Manager.
• Montour students and staff participated in The Global Moonshot campaign. Inspired by Esther Wojcicki’s Moonshots in Education, the purpose of the Moonshot campaign is to impact a generation of students so they feel inspired, empowered and globally connected every time they look at the moon.
• In order to support a learning culture, Montour has hosted multiple professional development conferences in 2015-2016, including the Western PA PTLW Summit, EdTech Team Google Summit, EdCampPGH and Design-Thinking in Action Workshop. Montour also opened transformED West, the region’s first Allegheny Intermediate Unit satellite digital playground, through the generosity of the Grable and Benedum foundations. Montour will host Pittsburgh’s EdTech conference, TRETC, on Nov. 8.

The road ahead

What are the future plans at Montour for modeling its tagline?

• Students and staff are working closely with a local television production studio, Steeltown Entertainment Project, to design and build a multimedia production studio. Graduating senior Georgia Fowke has worked with Steeltown for
Tagline, cont.
The past four years and is currently directing, producing, and starring in our own television show through Steeltown called “The Reel Teens” on Fox Network.

- Spartan Express students and staff are currently working with The Saturday Light Brigade Radio Youth Express to develop plans for a 24/7 radio station managed 100 percent by students. SLB radio is housed at the Children’s Museum of Pittsburgh and is a radio program featuring acoustic music and family fun broadcasts since 1978.

- Construction is underway for a new, versatile, state-of-the-art elementary school scheduled to open in the fall of 2017. It is located on the Montour High School campus and will serve K-4 students throughout the district.

Although we cannot predict the future for Montour, we will strive for continual improvement. We believe our new tagline will help us develop the needed growth mindset culture to optimize learning and preparation for the future. In addition to the initiatives and opportunities mentioned earlier, this growth mindset will continue to be strengthened by our participation in RemakeLearning, a perfect match for Student-Centered... Future-Focused.

A version of this article, “What’s Your School District’s Tagline for the New School Year?” by Justin Aglio and Dr. Michael Ghilani, was originally published on gettingsmart.com.

New program enhancements for grades 7-12
By Scott Milburn, Director of Secondary Education

Montour School District is excited to announce new curriculum and program enhancements for students in grades 7-12 that are being implemented for the 2016-2017 school year.

- Students in grades 7-12 will be issued Chromebooks to be used to enhance their learning opportunities, access to digital educational resources and overall educational experiences.
- David E. Williams will offer seventh and eighth grade students additional courses in nutrition and wellness through the family consumer sciences department.
- In partnership with the Parkway West Career and Technology Center, the Energy Innovation Center and Penn State University, high school students will be participating in a ten-week design challenge. Students will have the opportunity to create innovative solutions and present their findings to key executives and community leaders involved in the program.
- High school students will return to school to a new bell schedule and an extra period in their day. Montour High School will implement a 37-minute Spartan PLT, or Personalized Learning Time, in the middle of the school day. Teachers will be able offer innovative and creative programming, tutoring, and enrichment. Students will also be able to choose daily activities that meet their needs or interests.
- The Spartan Express Radio Station, in collaboration with Youth Express Saturday Light Brigade Radio Productions, will be launched this fall and will be run by high school students and faculty. Students will be creating, producing, editing and performing in their radio shows and multimedia productions.
- In partnership with Point Park University, Montour High School students will have the opportunity to participate in a broadcast journalism/television production course that will allow them to create and produce a variety of film and television projects.

- “Not Your Father’s Woodshop Class” - The technology education classrooms at Montour High School will begin a new era starting this fall. Students will have the opportunity to design, create, prototype and manufacture their projects. Students will have access to all of the technology education labs (engineering, manufacturing, video and graphics, robotics) to make their “ideas come to life.”

- The high school offers 25 college in the high school, or CHS, courses through partnerships with the University of Pittsburgh, Robert Morris University, Carlow University, Point Park University and Pittsburgh Technical College. Students have the opportunity to earn postsecondary credit while still in high school at approximately one-third the normal tuition rate. Also, the high school is beginning its fourth year as part of Robert Morris University’s First Semester in College in High School Program. Students in the program work in a two-year cohort and earn 15 undergraduate credits that they can apply to the first semester of their freshman year of postsecondary study.

- This year, high school students are engaging in a course that is all about project-based learning. The course is designed to enhance research and critical thinking skills. Throughout this course, students will explore authentic, relevant and meaningful questions that affect their lives. They will be expected to develop new projects that enhance their school and community. They will design new products and work with community partners to problem solve authentic, real-world problems.

Superintendent’s message
Dear Parents/Students,

It is my pleasure to welcome students and families back from what I hope was a relaxing and fun-filled summer spent with family and friends. I assure you that our administration, teachers, and staff are recharged and energized to have the best year yet. As the new school year begins, there is a renewed commitment to our district core values of putting students first, supporting a growth mindset and creating a culture of learning. It is our hope that these core values will continually guide all district decisions and become embedded systemically throughout all aspects of the educational process. In other words, we are maintaining our focus where it should be: on our students and their success.

You will notice many positive changes throughout the district this school year. More classes and programs that focus on developing 21st century skills have been added across grade levels in order to promote collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and oral and written skills. It is our goal to develop and grow learners and thinkers.

We are continuing to enhance the district’s technology and will be expanding our 1:1 Chromebook initiative to grades 5 and 6 this year. By continuously integrating technology into the classroom, it is our goal to not only increase the digital fluency of all our students, but also to transform our instruction to be more personalized and focused on individual student growth and achievement. We will also be building upon our digital citizenship curriculum in grades K-12 in order to ensure that our students know how to utilize technology in a safe and responsible manner.
Welcome back for a new year at the Hilltop

Dear MHS Parents/Guardian(s) and Students,

It is with great pleasure and excitement that I welcome you back for the 2016-2017 school year! The high school administration, faculty and staff have spent many long hours this summer preparing for the arrival of our students. We are extremely excited to welcome our students back and look forward to an outstanding school year!

The Montour High School administration, faculty and staff are committed to fully preparing our students for their futures. As we explore and implement new educational programming and develop and refine curriculum, we are doing so with a clear focus on being Student-Centered and Future-Focused. All Montour High School stakeholders are committed to Establishing a Learning Culture within all aspects of our work, creating and encouraging a Growth Mindset both for ourselves and within our students, and most importantly, Putting Children First at all times.

This year, we will introduce to our students the Spartan Personalized Learning Time, or PLT. Spartan PLT is a 37-minute block that will follow period four in our schedule each day. Spartan PLT will afford students the opportunity to engage in personalized learning time with teachers and peers. In addition, students will be able to engage in wellness activities, extracurricular activity meetings or just take some time to relax and reflect as they progress through the demands of their daily academic schedules.

During grade level student orientation meetings the first week of school, one of the many items of importance that we will review with our students is the MHS Student/Parent Handbook. Parents/guardians and students can access the handbook via the high school website under the Quick Links section. Please review this handbook carefully with your child. Please also be reminded that parents/guardians and students are required to sign off that they have received and reviewed the handbook. Additional parent/guardian and student sign-offs will be shared via email and the high school website. These sign-off documents are to be returned to your child’s homeroom teacher no later than Friday, Sept. 2.

We ask that all parents/guardians and students visit the high school website frequently, as news and information from Montour High School is updated under the News and Announcements section. Additional resources to support your child are available under the Quick Links and Counselors’ Corner sections of the website.

Parents/guardians will now be able to review their child’s attendance and academic progress via Skyward Family Access, our new student information system student and family portal. Should you experience any issues with accessing this portal, please contact the Technology Department:

Marc Smith, smithm@montourschools.com 412-490-6500 ext) 6502
Mark Hartwick, hartwickm@montourschools.com 412-490-6500 ext) 6503

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact the high school office.

Have a great school year!

Sincerely,

Todd M. Price - High School Principal

At the same time, we are continuing to move toward the goal of transforming Montour into a regional hub for innovation, best practices and action research. We will continue to build upon our relationship with the Carnegie Mellon University Learn Lab to study effective instructional strategies and practices, and to measure their true effect on learning. At the end of last year, we opened TransformED West, a regional professional development center for teachers and administrators operated by the Allegheny Intermediate Unit, at the high school. That means our teachers and administrators will have an endless supply of professional development opportunities to ensure that we continue to build upon our craft and grow as professionals. In October, we will be hosting the Three Rivers Educational Technology Conference, which is the largest conference of its type in the region. Last year, we were honored to host over 70 school districts from across the country to observe many of the great things that are occurring in the Montour School District.

We are extremely proud of our past accomplishments and embrace the challenge of preparing our students for a world that is ever-changing and highly complex. As always, we are grateful and appreciative of the tremendous amount of support and trust we receive from parents and the Montour community at-large. As long as we continue to work together for the greater good of ALL children, I am confident that we will continue to experience great success. I hope you will join me in celebrating what is sure to be an exciting and rewarding year for the students, staff and parents of the Montour School District. #Montourproud

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael Ghilani - Superintendent
Construction update

With about a year to go before the first students set foot in Montour’s new state-of-the-art elementary school, construction is moving along. Throughout much of the first floor, concrete masonry walls are nearing completion, and in the rear of the building, brick installation has begun. Plumbing, mechanical and electrical work is also well on its way throughout the entire building. The roof is also nearly complete and concrete slab is set to soon be poured in the center part of the building.

These photos were part of an update Massaro CM Services gave to the district on Aug. 19.

Welcoming a new year at DEW

David E. Williams Community Members,

It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 2016-2017 school year! We would like to extend a special welcome to our new families, students and staff. Our hope is that each child will experience tremendous growth as a student and person during the course of this school year.

We will approach the year with focus and energy to ensure that all of our students have an opportunity for success. It is our mission to sustain, support and embrace new learning to benefit all of our students. As a community of educators, we will be dedicated to assessing our students on a regular basis and using the results to tailor instruction to meet individual learning needs. We will also focus on life skills, including working as a team, oral/writing skills, organizational skills and being a great citizen.

As we continue to approach learning with a special focus on literacy, our professional teaching staff will be developing lessons to support writing skills across all content areas. Teachers will select PA Core writing styles and assign content-based writing assignments in all classes. Students will be challenged to synthesize information and make written arguments based on their findings as an example assignment. Activities such as the one referenced are designed to build higher level thinking skills.

Building on the “one to one” pilot, which provided students in seventh and eighth grades with Chromebooks last year, all students will be issued Chromebooks during the 2016-2017 school year. These laptops will be used to enhance educational processes in the following manners: more individualized instruction through school-purchased programs such as IXL/Study Island, opportunities to seamlessly share information through Google Drive, instant access to research and academic resources, increased student collaboration, and increased formative assessment, to name a few.

In closing, we hope that you had an enjoyable and relaxing summer. We can assure you that we have been extremely busy planning for an outstanding school year for your child. Our students and staff will have access to the latest educational tools, and our staff will continue to approach their jobs with the level of caring and compassion that we have come to appreciate.

We look forward to continuing the tradition of “Spartan Pride” at David E. Williams!

Sincerely,

Dominic Salpeck, Principal
Mike Marvin, Assistant Principal

Follow the district at @MontourSD.
Follow Montour High School at @hilltopspartan.
Follow David E. Williams Middle School on Twitter @DEWMiddleSchool
Welcome back, Burkett families!

It is with great excitement that I welcome you back for the 2016-2017 school year. The Burkett faculty and staff have spent much time preparing for the arrival of students. It is our mission to help every child feel welcome, connected and part of our learning community. We will challenge students each and every day and ask them in return to maintain a positive attitude while putting forth their very best effort.

All decision-making and planning will be based on the district’s core values of honesty, respect, integrity, putting children first, supporting a growth mindset and creating a learning culture. Regrettably, Candice Bostick, the principal at Burkett for the past three years, has left Montour. We wish Mrs. Bostick the best in all her future endeavors. Due to Mrs. Bostick’s departure, I have been assigned to take over as principal at Burkett for the upcoming school year. I previously served as a teacher, principal and assistant to the superintendent in the Montour School District.

The year ahead will focus on collaboration, exploration and innovation! Burkett will introduce a new Project Lead the Way course titled Input/Output: Human Brain. In this course, fourth grade students examine how the brain functions through the use of transmission signals. One part of the course will allow students to work together to create a video that promotes concussion awareness. Third-graders will explore the difference between genetically inherited traits and learned or environmentally influenced traits through a new biomedical science course called Variation of Traits.

Special thanks goes out to the PTA for their generous donation of a laser cutter for the Project Lead the Way classroom.

Burkett is also excited to begin a new program called the Legends Breakfast, during which retired Montour teachers will join current faculty and staff to share stories and tips.

This year marks our last at Burkett. Over the coming months, we plan to collaborate with students, staff and parents in planning the closing of Burkett and the opening of the new elementary school.

We are looking forward to a great year ahead!

Sincerely,

Jason Burik, Burkett Elementary Principal

Montour K-6 program enhancements 2016-2017

By Dr. Christopher Stone

In preparation for the exciting move to the new Montour elementary building in the 2017-2018 school year, several new program offerings are being implemented this school year. Below list various curriculum and program enhancements for students in grades K-6.

• New Project Lead the Way STEM courses will be offered in grades K-4. These programs will be offered in addition to courses offered last year in our STEM programing.

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<tr>
<th>Grade Level</th>
<th>Course</th>
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<tr>
<td>(K)</td>
<td>Animals and Algorithms</td>
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<td>(1st)</td>
<td>Animated Storytelling</td>
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<tr>
<td>(2nd)</td>
<td>Materials Science: Form and Function</td>
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<tr>
<td>(3rd)</td>
<td>Variation of Human Traits (Biomed Science)</td>
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<tr>
<td>(4th)</td>
<td>Input/Output: Human Brain (Biomed Science)</td>
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• To better support students in the area of mathematics, the new Montour elementary school will use federal Title I funds to support an after-school math tutorial club for second, third and fourth grade students. Information will be sent home to qualifying students in mid-September.

• In partnership with the Montour Elementary PTA and grant funding sources such as the Sprout Fund, Forest Grove Elementary School will be implementing “maker units” in grades K-2. Units will support the general English language arts, math, social studies and science curriculum. Students will have the opportunity to create and show their knowledge using creativity and imagination.

• At Burkett Elementary School, teachers will teach two groups of students in either English language arts, social studies or math/science for a total of 150 to 160 minutes in each content block. Students will travel to two different teachers for the subjects listed above (in preparation for the new elementary school structure).

• Also at Burkett Elementary School, there will be a migration to trimester grading and progress monitoring. Students will additionally be issued a “traditional” report card, which will include a mastery/evidence scale and a portfolio supporting PA Core Standards.

• Finally, Montour School District is excited to expand our one to one Chromebook initiative to students in grades 5 through 6. Utilizing pending Ready to Learn Block Grant funds from the Pennsylvania Department of Education, all students at David E. Williams Middle School will have personal devices to help augment learning experiences.
Burkett Elementary standards-based report card migration

By Dr. Christopher Stone

This school year, report cards will take on a different look for Burkett students. Similar to Forest Grove, Burkett will provide parents with a standards-based report card at the end of each trimester. Students will still receive a traditional “grade” in each subject area that will be reinforced by skill mastery ratings and evidence portfolios. The purpose of the standards-based report cards is to inform and provide more detailed and accurate feedback to parents regarding their child’s progress toward mastery of specific Pennsylvania Core Standards at their grade level.

There are several advantages and benefits to using the standards-based report card, including:

• Clear expectations so that teachers, students and parents know what is expected to achieve mastery.
• Consistency between classrooms and schools in terms of student expectations, up-to-date knowledge on what students know and are able to do.
• More detailed information about the actual skills and concepts the child has mastered.

Welcome back to an exciting year at Forest Grove

By Jennifer Kosanovic, Forest Grove Principal

It is with great anticipation that the faculty and staff at Forest Grove await the first day of school after preparing for the 2016-17 school year! The entire staff is excited and proud to be a part of the Montour community and to collaborate with you - the families and community - and to educate your children!

The summer was a busy time, as the building was cleaned, polished and shined by the custodial staff. Teachers organized their classrooms and prepared materials and activities to welcome our kindergarten, first and second grade students back for another exciting year of learning. This work was done while students are away from the building. We strive to create a warm and welcoming environment where our students feel safe, where they are excited about learning and where they enjoy coming, every day!

Initiatives of particular interest this year are the addition of Project Lead the Way: Launch modules in kindergarten and first grade. This will also be the second year for the Daily 5 Framework for literacy instruction. The PLTW modules being added are Animals and Algorithms in kindergarten and Animated Storytelling in first grade. These are aligned to the existing module taught in second grade, Grids and Games. Through the PTLW program, students become problem solvers. They use structured approaches, like the engineering design process, and employ critical thinking. They also apply STEM knowledge, skills and habits of mind, learning that it is ok to take risks and make mistakes.

Teachers have refined what they began last year within the Daily 5 Framework for literacy, and will provide more focused instruction during small group time and more enriching activities during student choice time.

We will continue to recognize students for exemplifying good behavior toward their peers and teachers, in the hopes that all students are “Caught Being Kind” throughout the year. All the adults at Forest Grove who interact with our students have the opportunity to catch them being kind and caring to another school community member. All students who are “caught” are recognized on the Kindness Wall and receive certificates to take home. We will also be adding three “Be” rules throughout the building for consistency. Students will know to “Be Responsible”, “Be Respectful” and “Be Safe” throughout the school community.

There will be many occasions for students to engage in co-curricular activities such as assemblies, art shows, science nights and book fairs, many of which are supported by the Montour Elementary PTA. The first event of the year will be a character education assembly called “The Josh and Gab Show,” which is filled with music, skits and dancing.

These are just a few highlights that will create a positive learning experience for all Forest Grove students! We are looking forward to another exciting year!

School begins on Monday, Aug. 29 for all first and second grade students. There is a staggered kindergarten start on Aug. 29 and 30, which has been outlined to parents. Students can begin entering Forest Grove at 8:30 a.m. and are late at 8:50 a.m. Dismissal begins at 3:15 p.m., with the last buses departing at 3:30 p.m. Please review the school calendar located on the main page of the district website for other key dates. Check the district and school webpages frequently for updates and important information.

Stay up to date at www.montourschools.com!
Athletics

Sleva stands out at summer pro-am

A familiar face returned to the Montour Athletic Center in July to play in the annual Pittsburgh Basketball Club Pro-Am League.

Dustin Sleva, a 2014 Montour graduate, averaged 22 points and 13 rebounds per game during the pro-am. It was a performance not unlike the one he recorded his senior season at Montour, when he averaged over 20 points per game for the Spartans.

This time, though, Sleva was going up against some of the best college talent in the area, including players from Robert Morris University, Duquesne University and the University of Pittsburgh. Johnstown, not to mention Pitt stars Jamel Artis, Mike Young, Sheldon Jeter and Cameron Johnson.

Sleva, who finished the pro-am with all-star honors, is currently coming off his sophomore season at Shippensburg University, where he has at times led Division II players nationally in double doubles. This past summer, Sleva says he was working on his ball handling skills and pro moves with an eye on the next level after college.

“I have a coach at Shippensburg who, even though I’m 6’8”, he lets me create,” says Sleva.

That Sleva would eventually reach the level he is currently at, and seem to be trending upward, wasn’t always obvious. He says he didn’t even make the junior varsity team his freshman year of high school and hit a snag his junior season due to injury. After a standout senior season, he considered entering prep school first to allow himself to develop. Instead, he went right into college and hasn’t looked back. He’s grown four inches since graduating high school and started on the team at Shippensburg his freshman season. According to the Shippensburg Raiders website, he is easily the largest player on the team.

“It was one of the best things I did,” he says about entering college.

In addition to the annual pro-am at Montour, the PBC also hosts a hall of fame banquet in January, with an induction ceremony at the Doubletree by Hilton in Moon Township on the morning of Jan. 28. Games are also held that night and throughout the following day.

For more information, see www.pghbasketballclub.com.

Sixth grade basketball team claimed championships in spring

Montour’s sixth grade basketball team earned dual championships in the spring while recording a tremendous 31-4 overall record. The team claimed the Pittsburgh Basketball Club’s AAAA title by defeating Hopewell, 35-22, and then backed that up with a 46-23 victory over South Fayette in the Char Valley Youth Basketball Association.

Head coach John Giammarco was assisted by Ron Stevenson, Mark Sike and Kevin Craver.