



Meridian CUSD Newsletter

Winter 2015

OUR COMMUNITY, OUR SCHOOL, OUR STORY

A Word From Our Superintendent

By Mr. P.J. Caposey

The 2015-2016 school-year is nearly half over and I continue to be amazed at the work of our faculty, staff, students, and community. Tragedies, triumphs, and togetherness defined the first semester. Simply put, the strength and pride of our community is astounding. I am sincerely thankful to be part of a school system and community that comes together when it matters most.

When I wrote my beginning of the year message I promised we would continue to grow as a school district. I am pleased to note that growth and excellence were apparent in many areas throughout the first semester. While there were many examples of outstanding success, I want to acknowledge three particular students demonstrating exemplary performance and our Board of Education for continuing to choose growth in their very important role.

First, Paige Adams won a National Championship at the National Junior Horticultural Association Annual Convention for Extemporaneous Speaking. Paige is an active member of the Stillman Valley

High School FFA and currently serves as the Vice President. Next, Kenzie Flynn scored a perfect 36 on her ACT. A perfect 36 is incredibly rare. In 2014, there were less than 1500 students to achieve this score nationwide, or just 0.076% of all test-takers, earned a perfect score. Last but not least, Cristina Alvarez is a finalist in the very elite QuestBridge Program. QuestBridge is a program designed to help and recognize low income, high achieving students. Congratulations to all three elite performers and outstanding representatives of our school district.

Next, I would like to recognize our Board of Education (BOE). At the annual state conference our BOE was selected to present on two different topics to their peers. Our BOE spoke about the referendum passed last Fall and on the shared services agreement with Oregon CUSD 220. The annual conference takes place in Chicago every November. This year, nearly 10,000 educators were present and the two Meridian CUSD 223 sessions were well attended and showered with much praise. Congratulations to all involved.

Dear MCUSD Community and Families,

I hope that the beginning of this year has been engaging and meaningful for your student. As you may be aware, annually the state requires standardized testing of students in all districts to help measure student progress. Last year the assessment in the state of Illinois changed to the new PARCC assessment. PARCC is an acronym for the Partnership of Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. You can read more about PARCC at their website <http://www.parcconline.org>

Last year the district provided the PARCC assessment twice, as required by the state, to our students. We have just received the draft version of our school and district data. The data provided results lower than we have ever experienced on standardized assessments. That being said, we resoundingly bested state averages and are awaiting our comparative data to other schools and districts. As a district

it is our charge to continually work with our data and to make improvements based on the information it provides. We will attempt to do so with this data as well. Once final data have been reported, we will publicize our data for all to see and begin the learning process internally.

As a district we are committed to providing a first-class education for all of our students. We also believe that in doing so, standardized assessments are only one measure of our overall success. The district therefore remains focused on other goals as well. Namely, building a sense of commitment to the community and fulfilling our mission which is *“to educate students to be self-directed learners, collaborative workers, complex thinkers, quality producers, and community contributors.”*

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Mr. Caposey at 815-645-2230 or pcaposey@mail.meridian223.org

Major Building Work Being Discussed

For the past nine months the Health/Life Safety Survey and resulting building work has been discussed by the Board of Education. School code strictly outlines and governs this process as described below: Health, Life, Safety (HLS) is a process originating back to 1825, when the Free School Act charged local voters of districts to “...make such regulations for building and repairing school houses as they may think necessary...(as described by the ISBE website).” Since the installation of the Act in 1825, the process was revised and revamped after several other school tragedies. However, it was the tragic fire at the Our Lady of the Angels School in 1958 which led to the creation of the Health/Life Safety and Fire Prevention and Safety rules and regulations. These regulations were amended every decade through the 1990’s.

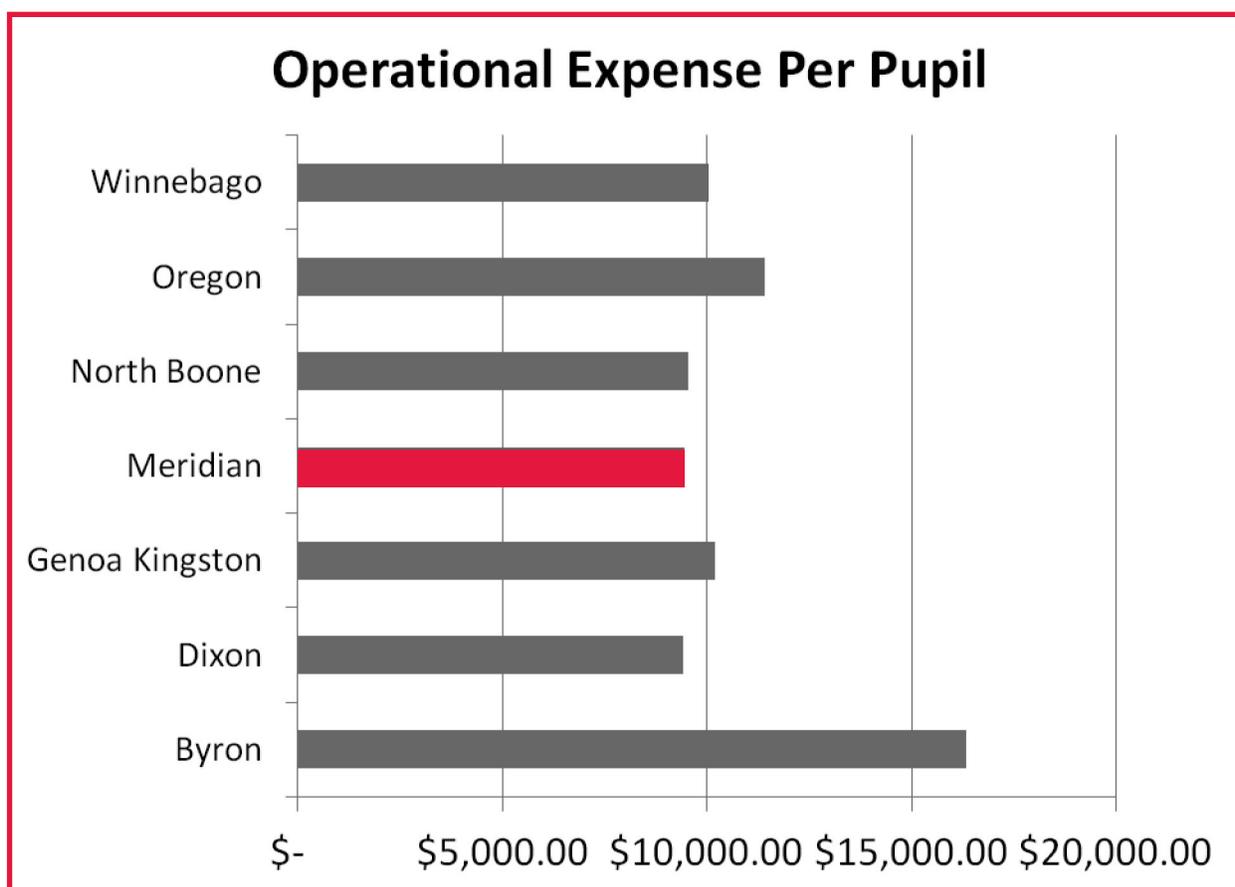
The work currently being discussed for our schools includes replacing roofs, abating asbestos, repairing the parking lot at Stillman Valley High School, and many other small projects. Given no complications, the work would begin in the summer of 2016. While much of the work is no eye-opening or “fun” - the result will be safer schools for our students and considerably less deferred maintenance. For more information, please follow along at each monthly meeting as detailed through BoardBook on the Meridian webpage.

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

Meridian Continues to Deliver Cost Effective Instruction

Recently, the Illinois School Report Card was released. The report card notes many data points for schools and school districts. One area which is explored each year is the cost to educate each student in the district. ISBE describes this as the Operating Expenditure Per Pupil and defines it as such: the gross operating cost of a school district (excepting summer school, adult educa-

tion, bond principal retired, and capital expenditures) divided by the nine-month ADA for the regular school term. As has become customary, Meridian again ranks at or near the bottom in this metric on the current school report card. Providing a cost effective, yet exemplary education is what Meridian CUSD 223 strives to do each and every day.



Highland School

Hello from all at Highland School. The staff and students have been totally engaged with our new Houghton Mifflin Harcourt Reading and Language Arts series and curriculum materials. The students are developing as readers and use these materials in many ways. The Smart board and online content is very impressive. Teachers will be sharing program materials and websites that you can access to help your child work on reading and language arts from home.

It was a great pleasure to see so many of our parents meeting with our teachers during conferences.
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WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

We had nearly 100% attendance. If you need to meet with a teacher again, please leave a message or email the teacher to schedule an appointment. Teachers are always pleased to meet with parents to keep the lines of communication open and to discuss academic and behavioral progress.

Thank you to all families that supported our fall fundraiser with the PTO. The PTO is very active with supporting students and teachers with materials, supplies, and programs. Be on the lookout for the Santa and Elves workshop coming up in December and the chocolate sale.

I am pleased to report that Highland School has a school counselor once again, Ms. Riley Appino. Please contact her if you have any social emotional concerns for your child that you would like to discuss. Our new music teacher, Ms. Rachel Mastalski, has children singing and has been getting the children ready to perform during the school year. Our Veteran's Day assemblies put on by second grade students were absolutely fantastic. The Veterans and parents that were in attendance were very impressed and honored by the songs and the singing of the children. You will want to attend your child's concert when they perform.

Teachers are finding ways to positively reinforce good behavior all through the school on a daily basis with our Positive Behavior Intervention and Support (PBIS). This helps us to develop and maintain an effective learning environment that promotes and supports student learning with a minimum of disruptions due to behavior. Teaching expected behaviors and rewarding and reinforcing positive behaviors is an important step in a student's education. We have monthly a quarterly incentive activities and programs to celebrate the good behavior of our students. Ask a Highland student about our PBIS program (Cardinal Code) and the incentives.

At this age it is so important to read to our young learners. Read to the children every chance you get. Grandparents can be great help in this area. Ask questions about what is read to help children develop comprehension skills. Education is a long term growth plan where incremental growth occurs each day.

It is a joy to watch the children grow continually all through the year and to see the great pride the teachers and staff take in working with our students. I am proud of our school community and thank you for your partnership of our students, teachers, staff, and educational programs.

Monroe Center School

Parents and Guardians,

It's hard to believe we are quickly approaching the end of the first semester. It's been quite a start to the school year! Thank you to those of you who were able to attend Parent/Teacher Conferences at Monroe Center in October. The faculty and staff appreciate your willingness to partner with us for the betterment of your son/daughter's education. Please continue to check the District's Facebook page, as well as Monroe Center's website. Pictures have been posted throughout the fall semester.

The third graders have been a busy group of learners! We are finishing Topic 5 (Multiplication Facts) in Math. Even though we have moved on to Multiplication, we want the students to continue to practice his/her addition facts in order to progress in Rocket Math. In Reading, we have been working on a variety of skills, such as drawing conclusions, making inferences, identifying text and graphic features, understanding characters, comparing and contrasting, and so much more. In Science, we are currently covering Plants in Ch. 3, and will be moving on to Living Things in Ch. 4 after our Thanksgiving Break.

This month, 4th grade students will be working with multiplication facts in Math and will be moving into multiplying 3 digit numbers by 2 digit numbers. Our Rocket Math will have some students soaring through multiplication and onto division. Practicing flashcards at home will lend a hand to our speed and confidence in these skills. Science has taken us to plant and animal life; how they reproduce and grow. In Social Studies, we will be exploring the East. AR goals are set for 2nd

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

quarter. Your child is required to read 4 books at his/her level and pass an AR test for each one. Please ask your child how that goal is coming along.

5th grade students have been working on multiplying and dividing with decimals. Students have been learning about the colonization of America, with some classes finishing up analyzing the causes and effects of the Revolutionary War. In Science students are investigating physical structures in living things, some life cycles, and how adaptations help organisms survive.

Last spring we administered the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC) test. This is the new statewide standardized assessment. We should be receiving our results in the upcoming weeks. These will be sent home for your review. If you would like to see what the parent report will look like, please visit

<http://understandthescore.org/your-state/illinois/>

Below you will find important dates to be aware of as we head towards Christmas Break.

- Thanksgiving Break is November 25th - November 29th. Enjoy!
- Monroe Center's Annual Dime Drive will be held November 18th - November 24th.
- End of semester is December 18th
- Christmas Break is December 21st - January 4th

Meridian Junior High

The staff and students at MJHS have been busy during the first semester. The year began with a Back to School Night with a new format. The active PTO at MJHS joined us that night with food and activities for the families and staff. This was a great way to kick off the year. The students settled nicely into their new schedules and classroom expectations. Many exciting lessons were observed throughout the first few months of school. Some of these lessons included using physics in 8th grade science by building a roller coaster, using the laptop labs to write blogs to be read and commented on by fellow students, and a band concert to demonstrate learning.

Meridian Junior High has become an even busier place during our first semester this year with all of our sports and activities up and running, again! We started our athletic season off with girls' volleyball. Over 60 girls participated in 6th, 7th, and 8th grade! It is great to have kids back in the building after the regular school day has ended. We are now busy with boys' basketball, cheer, and the academic team. Student council has also been active at MJHS this year. Students have been involved in helping with recycling, adopt a garden, PTO dances, class t-shirt design contest, and figuring out a way so students can be better informed of announcements. Upcoming athletic opportunities for students are wrestling and girls' basketball. These seasons start in early January.

Kelli Zitzke, our school counselor, has been busy forming new groups to help support the needs of our students. These groups include a boys group, girls group, study skills group, and a college and career group. These groups focus on social, coping, and study/organizational skills. If you think your student could benefit from one of these groups, please contact Mrs. Zitzke.

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Important Upcoming Dates and Information

- Book Fair: November 30 - December 4, 6
- PTO Vendor Fair: December 6th 10:00 a.m. - 4:00 p.m.
- Band Concert: December 7th 6:00 p.m. at SVHS
- Choir Concert: December 9th 6:30 p.m.
- December 18th: End of First Semester

WHAT IS TAKING PLACE IN OUR SCHOOLS!!

Stillman Valley High School

Dear SVHS Parents and Guardians,

Stillman Valley High School's Vision is to create a learning environment that empowers our students to take on the most challenging courses offered in an effort to prepare them for success at the college, career or military level. We truly want our students to be **Empowered to Excel**.

Thank you for continuing to partner with us to positively impact the academic, social, and emotional growth of our students every day. Please know that your involvement and support of your children at the high school level is essential. Students need to see that you play an active, key role in their high school success. One way you can stay connected is by reading the **SVHS Daily Announcements**, which can be found under the "Quick Links" tab on the high school website at www.stillmanvalleyhigh.org

We are pleased to share that our students can now earn Community Service Hours throughout their high school careers and be more recognized for their service as seniors during their graduation ceremony. Service hours can be completed by students outside the school day on their own time through various local organizations. Our students can also earn service hours in conjunction with SVHS clubs, teams, or classes. Each time your child completes service hours, please encourage him or her to stop by the Counseling Department to complete a one-page **Service Hours Form**, or they can complete the form online by visiting the "Quick Links" tab on our SVHS website at www.stillmanvalleyhigh.org. If you or your child would like to learn more about community service opportunities in our area, please contact Ms. Sarah Dyal, our SVHS Counseling Department Administrative Assistant, to review a list of organizations and contact information.

The Latin Honors Program at SVHS was established several years ago, and it serves to promote our District Mission and SVHS Vision. High School seniors can earn Latin Honors recognition upon graduation by meeting several criteria related to: ACT Benchmark Scores, Cumulative Grade Point Average (GPA), Good Citizenship, and Capstone or College-Level Courses. With our state's ever-changing high-stakes testing, it is necessary that we define what it means to be College/Career/Military ready at our local level. The specific requirements of Latin Honors can be found on page 5 of your child's SVHS Agenda/Planner and under the "Quick Links" tab as **2015-2016 Student Handbook** on our SVHS webpage at www.stillmanvalleyhigh.org. Please review the requirements of Latin Honors with your child in anticipation of the 2016-2017 course requests, which begin this winter.

Important Dates - 2nd Quarter:

- November 25, 26 & 27 - No School - Thanksgiving Break
- December 9 - SVHS Christmas Chorus Concert at 8:00pm (Auxiliary Gym)
- December 10 - SVHS Christmas Band Concert at 7:30pm (Main Gym)
- December 15-18 - SVHS Final Exams
- December 18 - End of 2nd Quarter
- Please visit our SVHS Activities & Athletics webpage at <http://il.8to18.com/StillmanValley> to check winter and spring team schedules, pictures, and more.

District Continues to Expand Social Media Presence

Meridian CUSD 223 continues to try to engage parents, students, and community members in any manner possible. Two years ago the district launched their Facebook page and the Meridian CUSD 223 page now has over 2,350 likes. Given the success of connecting with the community via social media, Meridian launched a Twitter account and YouTube Channel this fall. Please subscribe to the Meridian CUSD 223 YouTube page and follow @MCUSD 223 on Twitter.

As a reminder, our goal is to have safe and timely pick-ups and drop-offs of all students. We ask for a window of five minutes early and five minutes late bordering the shared pick up and drop off time. Please contact the Transportation Department if pick-ups or drop-offs do not occur within that window.

Davis Junction students (particularly Ogle Crossings and Harvest Glenn students and parents) - please keep in mind that it will be approximately 8 minutes for a bus to go around a different direction to get into your subdivisions to start the pick up or drop off process when stopped by a train. We thank you for your patience with this, as you know all too well how much of an inconvenience these trains can be.

TRANSPORTATION

If your student will be going home with another student after school, please be sure to write a note to inform the bus driver. This will be permitted as long as the space on the bus allows.

In an effort to continually provide the best possible service to our students and community, the district has entered into a recycling schedule with leased buses. MCUSD currently lease 24 of our 28 buses and by doing so the district has saved a considerable amount of money on auxiliary expenses such as fuel and repairs.

MCUSD is still welcoming applicants who would like to join our team. The district provides all necessary training. Join us in this very rewarding part-time job.

Meridian CUSD 223 Activities and Athletics

The fall seasons at Meridian Junior High and Stillman Valley High School have come to a close after each team finished their campaign. We've had several great performances on the courts, fields, in band/choir concerts, and other competitions such as the MJH Academic Team.

Some fall highlights: The MJH 8th grade volleyball team took 2nd place in the Route 72 Volleyball tournament, the SVHS volleyball finished 2nd at the Byron Varsity Power Classic, 2nd at the Forreston FR Jamboree, and took 1st place at the SVHS Sophomore Volleyball Classic. We had several individuals be recognized from the fall. Selected to the Big Northern Conference All-Conference teams - First Team members: (Football) Ethan Roberts, Zack Eastman, Conner Lewin, Noah Kutz, Hayden McCammond, and Jacob Frost. (Soccer) Evan Wenberg, Jack Iturbide, and Dyson Montgomery. (Volleyball) Macy Weaver and Stephanie Anderson. Honorable Mention athletes were Patrick Rhoades, Baily Rice, Bryce Miles, Aiden Blassage, Adrian Martinez, Emmitt Ugalde, and Kaitlynn Fitzsimmons. Congratulations to all the SVHS athletes.

Online registration for Stillman Valley High School athletics continues to be a success. This is a valuable tool to eliminate as much redundant paperwork as we can. Online registration will be available to MJH participants starting in the fall of 2016. You can find schedules for 6-12 by visiting the Athletics and Activity website at <http://il.8to18.com/StillmanValley>

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What's New ... Winter 2015

ISBE Presents John Smith with Statewide Honor at Education Conference in Chicago



The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) selected John Smith of Meridian Community Unit School District 223 as the 2015 recipient of the Thomas Lay Burroughs Award, which annually honors an outstanding school board president in the state.

Smith received the award during the joint annual conference of the Illinois Association of School Boards, the Illinois Association of School Administrators and Illinois Association of School Businesses Officials in Chicago. He was lauded as an exceptional leader who has helped Meridian set high performance goals, achieve financial stability, improve educational opportunities for students, and provide caring support to students and faculty during times of crisis.

“John Smith’s dedicated and passionate leadership has brought in a high standard of excellence and clear vision for how Meridian can create healthy, supportive learning environments to maximize students’ potential,” said State Superintendent of Education Tony Smith, Ph.D.

ISBE created the award for school board presidents in 1991 to honor Thomas Lay Burroughs, who served as chairman of the State Board of Education and the Board of Education for the Collinsville School District. The award recognizes extraordinary educational leadership at the local level, including leadership:

- on behalf of improved student learning and educational excellence;
- in resolving a crisis or major difficulty; and
- on behalf of equal education opportunities.