



KENNETT

CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Winter 2010

Message From Our Board

We Can Weather the Storm: The Financial State of KCSD

Michael H. Finnegan, KCSD Treasurer and Finance Committee Chairman

It should come as no surprise to anyone that we are in challenging economic times. We are experiencing decreased revenues and increasing costs in all aspects of our lives. Our school district is no different. The KCSD preliminary budget for 2010-2011 is currently at \$71,927,080.00, which is \$1,902,957.00 over the final 2009-2010 budget, or a 2.72% increase. As is the case with many of the school districts in our area and beyond, we find trying to balance next year's budget to be the most challenging ever, with an expected shortfall of \$3.2 million in revenue to cover expenses.

In this article, I intend to explain as much as possible about why our expenses are up, why our revenues are down, and what we are trying to do to overcome the shortfall, both for this next budget year and in the several budget years to come, as the economic factors behind the situation will not improve overnight.

The revenue in KCSD, as in all 501 school districts in Pennsylvania, comes from three sources. For the budget year 2010-2011, we expect to receive \$1,182,000.00 from the Federal Government, which is 38.96% less than this year and will constitute only 1.98% of our total revenue. We expect to receive \$11,918,712.00 from the State of Pennsylvania, which is a decrease of 6.94% from this year, and will constitute only 18.52% of our revenue. The remaining 78.81% of our revenue must come from local sources, which includes investment income (almost nonexistent at this time) and property taxes

The recent slowdown in commercial property development has shifted a greater burden of tax revenue to the homeowner. Many of the major shopping centers, medical centers, hotels, and housing developments planned for our area over the past few years have been delayed until late 2011, or beyond. In Pennsylvania, school taxes are determined by the

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The District Welcomes Dr. Barry Tomasetti

The Kennett Consolidated School District warmly welcomes Dr. Barry Tomasetti to the community as its new superintendent.

Dr. Tomasetti comes to the Kennett Consolidated School District from central Pennsylvania's Mifflinburg Area School District in Union County where he served as superintendent for 10 years. While in the Mifflinburg Area School District, Dr. Tomasetti worked with the school board, teachers and parents to improve learning opportunities for all students. "Our goal was to enable students to become better critical thinkers and problem solvers," Dr. Tomasetti noted.

In the past, Dr. Tomasetti served as the Director of Elementary Education in Harrisburg's Central Dauphin School District, which has one of the largest student populations in the state with an enrollment exceeding 12,000 students. He also served as an elementary principal in both the Easton Area School District and the Fort Bend Independent School District in Texas. While in Texas he also taught in a school on the Mexican-American border.

Dr. Tomasetti earned his bachelor's degree in elementary education from the University of Iowa, and he holds a master's degree in instructional leadership from the University of Houston. For his doctorate, Dr. Tomasetti studied educational leadership at Indiana University of Pennsylvania.

In 2009, Dr. Tomasetti received the Pennsylvania Association of School

Administrators' Instructional Leadership Award. The association later appointed him as the chairperson for its staff development committee, which is responsible for providing learning opportunities for administrators in schools throughout the state.

Dr. Tomasetti's immediate goal is to develop an entry plan which includes becoming familiar with the people and community of the District. This process includes attending community meetings and interviewing key members of the community as well as the District's staff and faculty. His entry plan will introduce the community, the staff and faculty to his belief system, characteristics of which include:

- Instructional leadership that has a clearly defined school mission shared by school personnel and families
- A strong instructional focus, understanding the advancement of student learning
- High expectations for the performance of all students, presenting students with strategies to compete with their peers
- A safe and orderly environment for learning that includes community involvement, communication with parents and transparency at all levels
- Ongoing assessment of student



learning, which includes daily classroom assessments, PSSA and SAT scores, and the opinions of parents and staff

"I'm excited to be here in Kennett - a District that respects the educational process, with accomplished and committed faculty and staff, in a community that embraces its diversity. I feel that the Kennett Consolidated School District is an excellent fit for me and my family," Dr. Tomasetti said.

Dr. Tomasetti and his wife Linda have three boys who are enrolled in the Kennett Consolidated School District - Barry Jr. is a sophomore at Kennett High School, Cory is at the middle school, and Kerry in fifth grade. Besides enjoying quality family time, Dr. Tomasetti's hobbies include reading, exercising and riding his motorcycle.

Family Connection: A New Service for KHS

Last March, the guidance department at Kennett High School introduced Family Connection, a web-based service that assists students in the college and career decision-making process. The free service offers students and their parents an abundance of individually tailored resources.

Kennett High School guidance counselor Ms. Colleen Allen explains that her department implemented this

service to help students keep their information, academic history, accomplishments, and credentials well-organized so that they have the best chance of being accepted into the schools of their choice.

"Family Connection is a great tool for students and their families," commented Mr. Fran Ryan, guidance counselor. "However, it doesn't take the place of student/counselor communication. Many decisions regarding the future have very emotional components. Our job as counselors is to help students and parents balance the emotional side of decision-making with sound information and a reasonable approach to the future."

Ninth graders are introduced to Family Connection when guidance counselors

Continued on page 3

Community Input Sought

We need to hear from you!

The Kennett Consolidated School District (KCSD) Communications Committee is assessing the District's communication efforts and developing a comprehensive communication plan.

The District is now seeking the input of community members. An online survey will be available March 5 - March 22, 2010. Go to www.KCSD.org and click on "Community Survey" in the News and Features section.

The surveys will be kept strictly anonymous while providing everyone with an opportunity to express specific opinions.

The committee hopes you will take the time (15 minutes) to complete the survey. Everyone's thoughts and opinions are vitally important to the success of this important effort. Thank you in advance.

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District Directory

KENNETT CONSOLIDATED SCHOOL DISTRICT

300 East South Street
Kennett Square, PA 19348
610-444-6600
Fax: 610-444-6614
www.KCSD.org

Board of School Directors

Heather Schaeen, President
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Dr. Victoria C. Gehrt, Assistant Superintendent
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Nancy L. Tischer, Director of Human Resources
Sharon Bennett, Director of Special Education
Robert Perzel, Director of Facilities and Construction
Jane Pedroso, Curriculum Supervisor for Language Arts and Social Studies
Mary Lynn Vincent, Curriculum Supervisor for Mathematics and Science

Kennett High School (grades 9-12)

100 East South Street
Kennett Square, PA 19348
610-444-6620
Dr. Michael Barber, Principal
Raymond Fernandez, Assistant Principal
Dr. Tomorrow Jenkins, Assistant Principal
Jeffery Thomas, Athletic Director

Kennett Middle School (grades 6-8)

195 Sunny Dell Road
Landenberg, PA 19350
610-268-5800
John E. Carr, Principal
Joseph Lavelle, Assistant Principal
Karen Gerlach, Assistant Principal

Greenwood Elementary School

420 Greenwood Road
Kennett Square, PA 19348
610-388-5990
Tracey Marino, Principal

Mary D. Lang Elementary School

409 Center Street
Kennett Square, PA 19348
610-444-6260
Susan McArdle, Principal

New Garden Elementary School

265 New Garden Road
Toughkenamon, PA 19374
610-268-6900
Cathy Robine, Principal
Carla Horn, Assistant Principal

Non-Discrimination Policy

The Kennett Consolidated School District will not discriminate in its educational programs, activities, or employment practices, based on race, color, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, disability, age, religion, ancestry, union membership, or any other legally protected classification. Announcement of this policy is in accordance with state and federal laws, including Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972, Sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, and the American with Disabilities Act of 1990. Kennett Consolidated School District students and parents who have an inquiry or complaint of harassment or discrimination, or who need information about accommodations for persons with disabilities, should contact Dr. Barry Tomasetti, District Superintendent, 300 East South Street, Kennett Square, PA 19348, telephone (610) 444-6600.

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District News

Message From Our Board Continued from page 1

value of your property. The property tax is a regressive tax system that creates disadvantages for senior citizens, farmers, and low-income households. Our District, primarily through the Pennsylvania School Board Association (PSBA), continues to urge the State Legislature to provide more flexibility in the way we are required to fund programs, many of which are mandated but not funded by the state government. With the decline in home value assessments, this past year our distinct has seen an overall total decrease in home values of \$28 million. This represents a loss of \$650,000 in revenue this year, and a total loss of \$1,350,000 over the past two years. Stagnant home sales have also greatly reduced our income from interim taxes and transfer taxes.

Along with providing fewer funds for mandated programs, the state also passed ACT 1 of 2006, which sets a limit on the amount a school district can raise taxes over the previous year without going to a public referendum. The index set for our district this year is 2.9%. There are, however, exemptions that districts can apply for that allow them to exceed the index for a given year.

Add up the lost funds from the federal and state governments, as well as the loss of local tax revenue, and you can see that even if we had no increased expenses over this current year we would be far from able to fund our current programs next year. Unfortunately, several expenses are going up, and we have little to no control over them.

Under the current Collective Bargaining Agreement, our teachers' salaries will increase a total of \$577,570 (1.92%) next year. Our contribution to their benefits will increase by \$2,246,473 (23.29%) next year, which is caused both by the state-mandated contribution to the retirement account and rising health care costs.

Another rising cost beyond our control is the tuition we pay to charter schools for each of our District's students who attend them. The state defines the amount per student we pay directly to charter schools. We also have experienced increased transportation costs for all district students that attend non-public schools.

So, what steps have we taken to overcome the \$3.2 million shortfall for next year?

First, six budget advisory committees have been established with the collective goal of reducing expenditures by \$1.5 million. These committees cover the areas of technology, facilities and energy, personnel, curriculum, transportation, and special education. To date the committees have identified \$843,098 in potential cuts without the curtailment of staffing. Every building's budget will be decreased by 10% for the second year in a row.

Second, we will be appropriating \$1,182,000 from our fund balance.

Third, we will be contracting our electric service from an alternate provider, and switching to a self-insured health plan. The switch in electric and health care will not reduce those costs for next year, but they will prevent large increases expected with our current plans.

The remaining funds needed to balance the budget will need to be derived from increased taxes and adjustments in personnel. Our preliminary budget is calling for a 4.8% tax increase, or an average of \$220 per household. In order to keep the proposed increase to 4.8%, we need to realize an additional reduction in salary and benefits of nearly \$1 million. Of course, we need to find a way of doing this without affecting our instructional programs. For every one percent reduction we want to achieve under the 4.8%, we would need to reduce expenditures by an additional \$500,000.

One additional problem that will affect all school districts in the coming years is that the State Public School Employees Retirement System fund (PSERS) balance is ominously low on cash. As a result, and unless something dramatic is done, you will see large increases in your real estate tax just to bring the pension fund back to health in the coming years. We are mandated to make the state dictated contributions to this fund.

The PSERS account has been underfunded since 2003, but the state pushed back increased contributions until 2014, hoping for better market returns in the interim. The magnitude of increases needed to correct the fund is something that no school district can handle. It is something that only the PA Legislature can correct.

Everyone is excited about the plans for our new elementary school. But some are asking, why now in this current economy. Based on our current enrollment, and the Pennsylvania Department of Education's projections of enrollment increases of 2% to 4% each year, we are in dire need of a new school. We have experienced additional growth in our elementary schools in 2009, partly due to students returning to KCSD from private schools. Our reputation for quality education continues to bring new families into our district. This growth has forced us to convert music rooms, library rooms, and teacher work rooms into classrooms. We are also seeing increases in class sizes across the district due to the growing enrollment.

We currently lease portable classrooms at Greenwood and New Garden elementary schools, and a Kindergarten Center building in New Garden to accommodate our growing enrollment and limited facilities.

The new Bancroft Elementary School is something that we ultimately needed last year. By the time it opens in 2011, it will be long overdue. One of the few good things to come from the current recession is that it is an extremely cost-effective time to build. Our final construction bids were over \$2 million less than they were a year ago. We have been factoring in the debt of the new school opening for several years now, but even with not having to lease the portable classrooms and kindergarten center, there will still be some additional costs once Bancroft Elementary opens. It is expected by then that the economy will be on the right path, and commercial and residential development will resume.

So where does that leave us? Our primary goal is to provide the best education possible to our children while meeting our fiduciary responsibilities as a school board. We will continue to look for ways to reduce expenses wherever possible while trying to avoid cutting programs. Other districts in our area have been forced to cut programs, eliminate teaching and staff positions, as well as charge students \$100 or more to participate in activities in order to balance next year's budget. We are committed to turning over every stone to find expenditure savings before we need to turn our attention to personnel reductions and increased class sizes. Since most of our employees have contracts or collective bargaining agreements, any concessions would need to be negotiated and voluntary.

Our primary goal is to provide the best education possible to our children, while meeting our fiduciary responsibilities as a school board.

In closing, I believe we can weather this storm, though it won't be easy. No one likes increased class sizes, budget cuts, or increased taxes, but in the face of this financial storm, we will

all need to make concessions in order to balance the budget. The School Board has approached this endeavor with great concern and held many meetings to discuss solutions and alternative ways to responsibly reduce the budget. By working together in a cooperative spirit, all stakeholders will have to share a portion of this financial burden, a decision we have not taken lightly. I encourage everyone to attend our public board and committee meetings where all these topics and issues are discussed at length. There is a finance committee meeting the first Monday night of every month, always open to the public, where we will continue to discuss these problems and look for possible solutions.

The 2010-2011 preliminary budget is available on our website, www.kcsd.org.

Family Connection Continued from page 1

visit the required Introduction to Personal Finance course. Freshman year focuses students on career exploration. As sophomores, students explore their personality types in order to discover suitable career options for themselves. During junior year, Family Connection helps them to literally start planning for their futures. In their final year of high school, Family Connection guides students through the college application process.

“It creates a nice continuity from year to year,” Ms. Allen said about Family Connection. Family Connection’s career database is sourced directly from O*NET and the Bureau of Labor Statistics

from the U.S. Department of Labor. Family Connection maintains about 1,000 thoroughly extensive career profiles for students to peruse. Out of that number, nearly 600 have short videos detailing the careers.

While using Family Connection, eleventh grader Carlos Figueroa Valentin learned more about himself, and discovered a career he didn’t know existed - nutritionist. He found this valuable because he has an interest in health and food but didn’t know there was a specific career matching it.

Other features provided by Family Connection are an SAT preparation program, reminders for events such as college visits, and more in-depth activities and resources to guide students in better understanding what future pursuits are most compatible with their skills and personality types.

Eleventh grader William Garrett logs into Family Connection about once a week. He said a benefit he noticed from using Family Connection was seeing how he compares in his academic history to those before him from Kennett High School who have applied to certain colleges and universities.

Parents are encouraged to participate in Family Connection alongside their children, offering guidance and monitoring their children’s progress. Heather Dilcher, parent to eleventh grader Zachary Dilcher, logs into Family Connection about once a month to see what her son is doing and where he is on his time line of tasks. She considers the service a helpful way to keep track of his progress so that she can remind him to keep up with the continuing preparation for life after high school.

Now parents don’t have to call the high school to ask if their child’s transcripts were sent to their colleges of choice.

Through the Family Connection service, Ms. Allen explained that, after a family has established an account, verifying this kind of information is possible by just logging in, fol-

lowed by a few clicks.

Ms. Allen sees Family Connection as a wonderful tool to help both students and parents to prepare for life beyond the high school years. Students now have one place where they can keep track of their awards, honors, and accomplishments.

“They don’t always get that in other classes,” Ms. Allen said. “Whatever they complete is saved for the four full years of high school. It also allows counselors and teachers to send out emails about scholarships specific to students, such as those who have the GPA levels that might be required to apply for such financial assistance.”

To visit the Family Connection site, go to Kennett High School’s Guidance Department website and click the “Family Connection Service Is Here!” link. The service allows people to visit as a guest user, but to gain the most from it, parents should contact their child’s guidance counselor to learn how to set up an account.

Students now have one place where they can keep track of their awards, honors, and accomplishments.

Kennett High School Named Apple Exemplary Program

The Kennett Consolidated School District is excited to announce that Kennett High School has been named an Apple Exemplary Program. Apple recognized only 38 programs nationwide this school year for their implementation of technology in a way illustrates “best practice” qualities of a 21st century learning environment.

In a letter sent to the District, John Couch, Apple’s vice president of education, said, “I was especially impressed by how the school’s leadership team has enhanced student and teacher communication and collaboration through the use of wikis, Apple notebook computers, and iPod Touch devices.”

According to District Instructional Technology Coach Mr. Dan Maguire, it was the implementation of wikis by the high school social studies and English teachers that got Apple’s attention. “The wikis really break down the class walls, giving students a 24-hour resource for learning, as well as a way to collaborate. When implemented properly, wikis become an extension of the classroom.”

In selection of Apple Exemplary Pro-

grams, Apple focused “Best Practice” qualities, including:

- Visionary leadership;
- A learning workflow of “create-distribute-access-collaborate;”
- Engaging teaching and learning methods that capitalize on the qualities of today’s students who are mobile, collaborative and creative;
- Access to portable computers and/or mobile access devices (iPod) for all teachers and students;
- Evidence of ongoing professional development;
- A systematic approach and ongoing process for evaluation and assessment of results for education improvement and sustainability
- Program is viewed as innovative by other educators

An Apple representative made a formal presentation at the February board meeting.

Around the District

Be sure to visit www.KCSD.org for up-to-date calendar listings.

March

9	..... NG PTO Mtg 7pm
10	..... KHS Athletic Boosters 7pm
11	..... GW PTO Mtg 7pm
12	..... KMS Dance 7:30-9:30pm
13	..... SAT at KHS
15	..... Liaison & Communication Committee Mtg 7pm at DO
17	..... KHS Music on Parade 7pm
20	..... Jonathan Beech Memorial Concert at KHS 3:00pm
22	..... Curriculum Committee Mtg 7pm at DO
23	..... MDL Spring Pictures
25	..... KHS National Honor Society Induction 7pm
Mar 29 - Apr 2 NO SCHOOL	

KCSD Staff Presents at Technology & Education Conference

The Kennett Consolidated School District was proudly represented this past December at the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s 21st Century Teaching and Learning Institute in Hershey, PA by Kennett Middle School ESL Teacher Stephanie Sarosky and District Instructional Technology Coach Dan Maguire. The two presented an interactive presentation entitled “A Glimpse into a 21st Century ELL (English Language Learners) Classroom” to an estimated 700 conference attendees from across the state.

Ms. Sarosky’s presentation featured projects completed by her ELL students, and included an ongoing slideshow with

visuals of the students and quotes from them about their experiences in creating the projects.

“Our presentation represented original pieces of work from students performing at different English proficiency levels,” Ms. Sarosky noted, delighted to provide her direct insight as an English as a second language teacher. “We demonstrated how technology is being used by ELL students to improve their English language skills.”

Available for viewing were samples of student writing assignments, student-recorded podcasts both on the computers and iPod Touches, class blog

questions and responses, and student podcast portfolios. Many of the conference participants were impressed at the variety of projects created and that the projects were created by second language learners.

One aspect of Ms. Sarosky’s presentation that was unique was that it keyed in specifically on students, while other presentations tended to stray from keeping students as the focal point. Many participants asked Ms. Sarosky and Mr. Maguire if they could follow-up with them at later date to learn how to mimic their lesson-planning and success in the classroom using technology directly with students in order to advance student

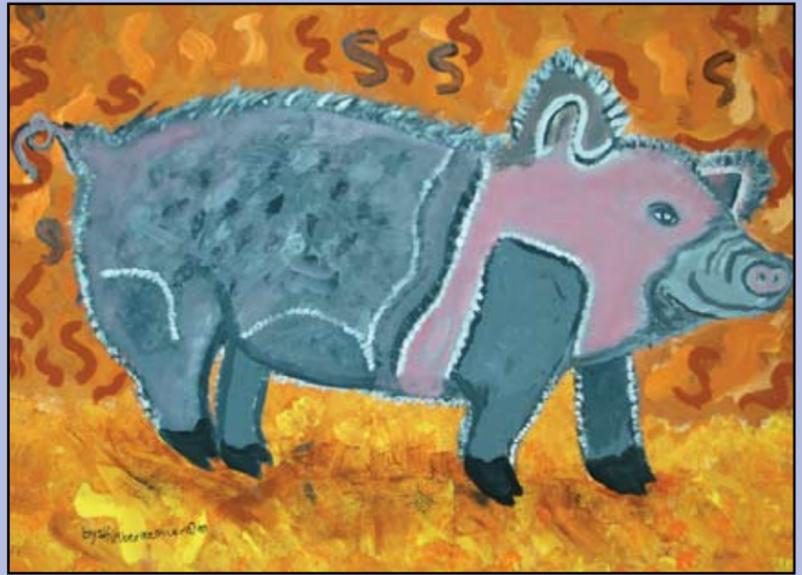
progress. Mr. Maguire pointed out that the presentation itself had an interactive blog set up so that audience members and other presenters could give feedback, which Mr. Maguire states was overwhelmingly positive.

“I think it is important to recognize that the students have embraced learning opportunities made available to them regardless of their language fears,” Ms. Sarosky said. “Using technology with my ELL students provides an exciting environment where the students are developing technology-based vocabulary, improving social skills, and acquiring another outlet for self-expression.”

Fine Arts



**Katie Calderon, 2nd grade
Mary D. Lang Elementary School**



**Kimberlee Rivera, 8th grade
Kennett Middle School**



**Tori Himmelstein, 10th grade
Kennett High School**



**Sharon Reyes, 4th grade
Greenwood Elementary School**



**Damian Bennett, 8th grade
Kennett Middle School**



**Alondra Gonzales, Michel Weir, Viridianna
Najera, and Pedro Zavala, 2nd grade
New Garden Elementary School**

All Around the Schools

Greenwood Elementary School Introduces Innovative Learning Model

A collaboration of 11 instructors at Greenwood Elementary School introduced an innovative learning model this year at the first grade level. Called the Response to Instruction & Intervention (RTI), the process is proving to be a major success to students and teachers in its usage during what is referred to as STAR (Strive to Achieve in Reading) Time. RTI is a multi-tiered approach to providing instruction paired with possible interventions to meet the instructional needs of students at varying levels of learning.

“Although the main focus of RTI is to support students who are having academic difficulties by increasing levels of instructional intensity,” explained instructional support teacher Mrs. Jill Keown Hertz, “we are focusing on all levels of student learning, including enrichment.”

Principal Tracey Marino detailed that this project has been in preparation for a year and a half since Mrs. Keown Hertz heard of a similar program and its success in the Owen J. Roberts School District. As it’s best to phase an RTI program in slowly, those who took the training and collaborated with the staff of the Chester County Intermediate Unit chose to implement one grade per year, with this year’s focus being on first graders and reading.



“We decided to start with first grade reading because we know that early intervention is the key to success in school,” Mrs. Keown Hertz said. “Research has shown that students who are reading on grade level by third grade will most likely continue to read on or above grade level for the remainder of their schooling.”

Students receive 40 minutes of STAR time each day. Students have been placed into groups based on their skill level and teachers provide instruction and either enrichment or remediation based on the skill level of the students in the group.

“Some of our more fluent readers may not need as much instruction in decoding, so their focus is on extending higher levels of thinking,” Mrs. Keown Hertz said. “On the other hand, other students need more work in reading decoding, so their STAR Time teachers provide additional instruction in basic phonemic awareness and phonic skills.”

All students are assessed at least three times per year. Occasionally, some students progress more quickly or slowly than others, in which case group changes may be made to better benefit these students.

“Typically, we see the students progress as a group, meaning, they are all progressing in reading at relatively the same rate within the STAR Time groups,” Mrs. Keown Hertz stated, noting that the STAR Time teachers adjust their instruction to match the groups’ increasing skill level. “We have seen reading gains with some of our students in the fall that we may not have normally seen until later in the year.”

Mrs. Keown Hertz is pleased with STAR Time’s impact on students. She said that one of the comments she hears from the teachers most often is how they and their students like the program and how everyone says it is really working.

“The parents seem to like the program because they are seeing growth in their child’s reading,” said first grade teacher Mrs. Lisa English. “The students love STAR Time as well, as it’s a nice change at the end of the day to see a new teacher and new friends from another class.”

Greenwood Elementary is hoping to implement the STAR Time program at the second grade level next academic year, as well as bring a version of the Response to Instruction & Intervention (RTI) process to fourth grade math.

The STAR Time program is sponsored in part by a grant from the Kennett Education Foundation.

Middle School Student Publishes First Book

Magic portals, worm-like creatures, and shape-shifters are just a few of the fantastic things that make an appearance in Claire Duckworth’s new book “Portal to Kiwi Wiki Tiki Planet.” Claire’s first book is the story of Olive, whose boring Saturday cleaning a museum turns into the adventure of a lifetime when she discovers a portal to another planet. Claire’s vivid writing and keen imagination carry the reader through the book, right up to the surprise ending.

Claire’s interest in writing began in Mrs. McCafferty’s class in fifth grade, with an assignment to write a story about a random picture. Claire finished the assignment, but kept writing – about a chapter a week – at the encouragement of her friends who were reading her work. After taking the summer off, she finished her first book over winter break.

Claire self-published her book using an online company called Lulu. She sent her manuscript in as a Word document, picked a cover design, and the company printed and bound the books. Claire gave the books as gifts to her family and



Claire Duckworth with a copy of her book “Portal to Kiwi Wiki Tiki Planet”

her friends who had encouraged and motivated her while she wrote.

Claire is hoping to continue writing, and is planning a sequel to her first book. Claire’s advice for other aspiring writers? “Stick with the story. It may not be perfect, but if you write it the way you like it, it will be a good story.”

SAVE THE DATE!

Kennett Education Foundation Annual Spring Fundraiser

**Honoring
Dr. Karkosak**

**April 21, 2010 at
The Mendenhall Inn**

**Including
Dinner and Silent Auction**

Money raised benefits the Kennett Education Foundation (KEF). The KEF is a community-based foundation devoted to enhancing the educational experience in the Kennett Consolidated School District by providing support and scholarships to students, and innovative grants to teachers and educators.



Kennett Elementary Students Working to be Published

At New Garden Elementary School, fifth grade teacher Mrs. Jennifer Braunstein is continuing a unique program which began last year. Twenty enthusiastic students who are enamored with the opportunity to write fiction outside of the classroom are proud members of the Young Authors Club.

Mrs. Braunstein had several students in her class last year who always finished their work early. Knowing that many famous authors such as S.E. Hinton, Mary Shelley, and Gordon Korman wrote or published their novels while they were teenagers, Mrs. Braunstein decided to see if she could help her ambitious students use such zeal to their advantage.

"When I was little, I wrote stories," said fifth grader Gemma Erickson. "When I heard about the Young Authors Club, I got excited about the possibility of being published."

Members of the Young Authors Club meet once or twice per week, giving up their lunch break and recess, to instead eat in the classroom where they work on their novels. "This is a no-stress club, if you call writing a novel no stress," said Mrs. Braunstein. "There are no official deadlines or requirements ... Students are allowed to write at their own pace and may make their novels as long as they wish. With that being said, most novels will end up being 100-150 handwritten pages."

In mid-December, these aspiring writers held their First Line Party. The First Line Party was a celebration of all they had learned to this point - the components of a novel, how to develop charac-

ters, plot, and setting, types of conflict, and how to implement sensory language to smoothly pull in their readers. At the First Line Party, club members received hardbound journals, which will be home to the novels. For the remainder of the school year, the group will continue to meet, supporting each other as they work on their novels and offering each other constructive criticism.

Fifth grader Madison Brown excitedly said, "There are no limits because whatever you want to write, you can."

Greek mythology characters make appearances in two novels but, despite their seeming mystical powers, are unable to coax cheese to fly.

In another novel, a boy forgets to do his homework and is caught mumbling under his breath. As punishment, he is sent to detention. He soon learns that a portal to another world exists in a supply closet of the room.

New Garden Elementary School's fledgling authors share their ideas and support each other outside of club meetings by logging into and contributing on their very own Young Authors Club Wiki. The students' writing will later be posted to the club Wiki so that others can read the novels online. Eventually, the students will record a podcast of one of their novel's chapters, and will invite teachers and a friend to hear the podcast.

Mrs. Braunstein is planning several author visits to help cultivate the students' creativity. For those authors who can't meet the students directly, she is arranging discussions via Skype. Expenses for the New Garden Elementary



School's Young Authors Club are being covered by a grant from the Kennett Education Foundation.

By the end of the school year, Mrs. Braunstein anticipates having each club member's novel completed and possibly even self-published.

Mr. Christopher Braunstein, a fourth grade teacher at Mary D. Lang Elementary School, took inspiration from New Garden Elementary School and started a Young Authors Club in his building. Mr. Braunstein's Young Authors Club consists of 15 students, representing each of the fourth grade homerooms.

"The members were identified by their teachers as exhibiting writing talents that surpass their classmates," Mr. Braunstein noted.

Mary D. Lang's Young Authors Club also meets once or twice a week during their lunch period. They just enjoyed their celebratory First Line Party in mid-January.

At Mary D. Lang Elementary School, the first pages unfold in one novel when a tornado brings tragedy to the life of a young girl named Riley. She is forced to survive on her own after losing her parents in the unruly storm.

In another novel, a soldier and his friends are held against their will while on vacation. They soon find that a secret organization is trying to pry information out of them, forcing them to use both their wits and their combat skills to make it out alive.

Club members at Mary D. Lang Elementary School are ecstatic to come together each week. Mr. Braunstein enjoys watching them feed off of each others' creativity and love of reading. "These students are constantly pushing each other to write a story that can't be put down," Mr. Braunstein said. "It is great to see students in an environment that fosters their creative growth while they have a blast."

Regional Student Conference Inspires Leadership

This past fall, students from Kennett Middle School and Kennett High School attended conferences hosted by the Delaware Valley Minority Student Achievement Consortium (DVMSAC) which is sponsored by the University of Pennsylvania's Graduate School of Education. The consortium, which is made up of 28 school districts and four county intermediate units, strives to decrease disparities in academic success while increasing school and community involvement among students.

"The leadership conferences are primarily motivational," explained the DVMSAC's director, Dr. Robert Jarvis. "Throughout the students' time on campus, the hope is that the workshops will enable students to gain a better grasp of their ability to take on serious leadership roles in their schools and later in their communities as they become adults."

Ten middle school students visited the Ivy League campus for their conference "Dreams, Determination, Destiny: You Have the Power to Make It Happen," and four students from the high school traveled to the campus for a conference titled "Career Choice, Your Choice: There's No Limit."

Seventh grader Tania Rodriguez attended the conference for the second year and said she was excited to experience it again. After participating in the consortium as a sixth grader, Tania

set the goal of earning straight A's in all of her classes. She succeeded and even received an award from Kennett Middle School Principal John Carr for her accomplishments.

This year, Tania is striving to boost her grades in more difficult classes and also plans to become more involved in group activities like the soccer club and cheerleading. She is also a member of GOLD (Girls Only Leadership and Development) as well as Girl Talk, a group that meets monthly to discuss topics concerning female middle school students.

Seventh grader Yannick Roth also attended the conference. Having only lived in the U.S. for two years, German is his first language. Yannick had no previous experience with the English language prior to moving to this country. Today, he speaks English considerably well.

After exploring stories of experience and promise at the conference, Switzerland native Yannick said he found the whole event fulfilling as well as interesting. He most appreciated the explanations speakers gave at each of the workshops as well as during the keynote address.

"Many of these students often feel invisible or try to go unnoticed, and we try to flip that around," seventh grade reading and language arts teacher and co-chair of the consortium Ms. Alyse Halpin explained, noting that the positive

insight and motivation given through the consortium plays a role in making these students realize what they're capable of if they believe in themselves.

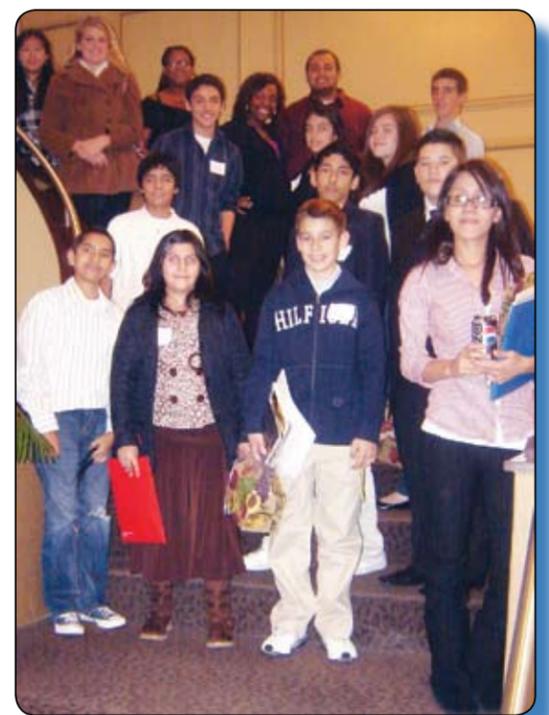
At the high school conference, Kennett High School Assistant Principal Dr. Tomorrow Jenkins said her students were excited, interested, engaged, and inspired.

Of the conference, tenth grader Kathleen Rzuclidlo said she liked seeing different life perspectives and viewed the conference as an eye-opening event which she considered a privilege to attend.

Kathleen is a member of the JV football team, dabbles in guitar club, and volunteered with an arts camp in Delaware this past summer. Kathleen is striving toward her recently set goal of breaking down racial barriers in her school with the help of members of the administration.

The idea behind the consortium is to "broaden the understanding of diverse topics as well as increase students' understanding and awareness about opportunities for advancement and leadership," Dr. Jenkins said.

Dr. Jarvis commented that many of the



Middle school and high school students take a break from the DVMSAC Conference.

students who were a part of the consortium in past years have committed themselves to amazing tasks and have even organized service learning and tutoring.

"The conference empowers them to make good decisions," Mrs. Halpin said. "They inspire me by the end of the day."

Local Author Visits Kennett Middle School

Eighth grade language arts teacher Mrs. Judy Jester, along with art teachers Mrs. Juanita Gaspari and Mrs. Maryanne Uhl, recently sought out several dozen middle school students for a unique opportunity that fused reading, writing, and art.

The very special program began with 45 students reading Jen Bryant's book *Pieces of Georgia* this past fall and ended with an author visit and a gallery-like reception showcasing the students' artwork.

"Pieces of Georgia is set in our locale," Mrs. Jester said. "For this project, students were asked to think about the book from the perspective of Mrs. Bryant's protagonist, Georgia McCoy, a 13-year-old who writes mostly in free verse telling the experiences of her

life and the feelings in her heart to her mother who died six years earlier."

In the book, Georgia ventures to the Brandywine River Museum as an escape, but also to understand her and her father's grieving through experiencing the art surrounding her.

As part of this project, the students followed Georgia's footsteps and took a tour of the Brandywine River Museum. The museum's associate educator, Ms. Jane Flitner, joined with Mrs. Bryant to organize the tour specifically for the students at Kennett Middle School. A grant from the Comcast Foundation covered the cost of bus transportation and admission to the museum.

While at the museum, the students did sketches like Georgia. Upon return-

ing from their trip to the museum, students created their own art inspired by what they'd read in the book and their sketches. From this, they crafted artist statements for what they created, reminding them of Georgia's trials. Several students took inspiration for their final works from paintings by N.C. and Jamie Wyeth, just as Georgia did.

Then in mid-November, Mrs. Bryant visited Kennett Middle School. At a gallery-like reception in the main hallway, she mingled with the students, viewing their artwork and praising their talent and insightfulness. Families were also invited.

After the reception, everyone convened in the cafeteria, where Mrs. Bryant spoke to students about her creative process when she is writing a book. She

told the crowd that she loves researching about people and places, and explained that she especially has an affinity for writing fiction about what is familiar to her. This includes the scenic attributes of Chester County, where she currently resides with her husband, daughter, and Springer Spaniel.

Students were especially pleased with their projects, and the process. "I liked being able to have freedom to express our emotions artistically," eighth grader Mary Transue said.

"Some kids wouldn't have had the opportunity to go to the museum on their own," Mrs. Jester said, happy that so many students took advantage of the project. "We're very pleased with how everything turned out."

Mary D. Lang Elementary Students Invited to Technology Conference

In 1606, some 105 adventurers set off from England to try and establish the first permanent English colony in the New World. They settled in what is now the state of Virginia and called the colony James Towne, in honor of James I, the King of England. The early years of the colony were nearly a total disaster. Almost half of the settlers died due to poor choices in settlement location, management of resources, and quarrels with the indigenous Powhatan Indians.

Fast forward 400 years. After learning about the history and failure of Jamestown, Mary D. Lang Elementary

School fifth graders in Mr. Ray Schwab's class were challenged to work in pairs to create their own Jamestown survival plans.

Mr. Schwab's class is part of technology pilot program through a Title I grant. Through this grant program, Mr. Schwab has introduced technology into all aspects of his teaching and this project was no exception. After creating their Jamestown survival plans, the students posted them to their Wiki where other members of the class were able to review and post comments. Student teams also created marketing brochures, posters and podcasts to persuade 17th

century British residents to move to their Jamestown.

"I was pleased with the way in which the students took this project," Mr. Schwab commented. "This was the first time the students used the Wiki to interact with each other and they embraced the technology, giving each other constructive feedback and producing creative podcasts."

Mr. Schwab's students' hard work and integration of technology was recently recognized when their project was chosen to be showcased at the Pennsylvania Educational Technology Expo and

Conference in February. Four students accompanied Mr. Schwab and the District's instructional technology coach Mr. Dan Maguire to the conference. At the conference, the team of students walked visitors through the steps of their project using Ipod Touches to play their podcasts.

The conference was sponsored by the Pennsylvania Association of School Business Officials, Pennsylvania Association for Educational Communication and Technology, Pennsylvania Department of Education, and Pennsylvania Intermediate Unit Instructional Materials Services.

New Garden Elementary Shines with Random Acts of Kindness

Students and staff at New Garden Elementary School decked the halls with yellow paper stars during the month of December in honor of the random acts of kindness performed by their peers. The project stems from the concept of doing good deeds and performing kind acts "just because" while expecting nothing in return.

Organizers for this event, third grade teacher Beth Conrad and guidance counselors Kourtney Humphreys and Jenna Reinheimer, credit the Random Acts of Kindness Foundation with some of the creativity of the event which had students keeping an eye out for the caring and compassionate actions of their peers. A "star bucket" located in the front lobby served as a collection bin for the yellow paper stars on which students would write the kind acts they witnessed. Later in the day, each star was taped throughout the hallways, inspirationally trailing onward to remind those in the school

of how important and simple it is to recognize the kindness of others. It's true that sharing is caring!

Some examples of the random acts of kindness noted by New Garden Elementary School students were "Lauren made me laugh when I was sad and didn't have a friend;" "Abby invited new friends to join our recess game;" "Juan helped me clean out my desk and look for a missing paper;" "Sebastian held the door for our class;" and "Soraya helped me find my way to a new classroom."

"In the beginning, teachers were really leading this project and pointing out examples of kindness to get the ball rolling," Mrs. Conrad commented. "After a few days, the teachers were able to step back and let the students take the lead."

Students read the words of chosen stars during the daily announcements to spread goodwill and recognize others. "We are working to keep the fun spirit



First graders (L-R) Michael Norris, Sandy Galan-Lopez, and Skyler Stella pose with just one of the walls covered by stars celebrating Random Acts of Kindness.

of community growing and thriving even with our large student and staff population," Mrs. Conrad added.

At the end of the Random Acts of

Kindness period, more than 1,000 yellow paper stars lined the elementary school's hallways, a monument of school-wide appreciation for the kindness of others.

KCSD Students Shine at District's First Science Fair

On January 29, the Kennett High School cafeteria was alive with the sights and sounds of science as 25 elementary and middle school students from across the District competed in the Kennett Consolidated School District's first science fair. Organized by the District's curriculum council, the goal of the science fair was to ignite students' interest in science while enhancing their academic experience.

Community volunteer and curriculum council member Mrs. Ceil Sheffy was one of the key players in getting the Kennett Science Fair off the ground. "It has been my dream for the Kennett Consolidated School District to be involved in the Chester County Science Research Competition," Mrs. Sheffy commented. "I am excited at everyone's level of involvement, from the teachers to the local businesses to the parents, who helped to make this a reality!"

Instrumental to the success of the District's first science fair was the kick-off event that was held in October. Students in grades four through eight were introduced to the concept of the science fair when local businesses visited Kennett Middle School to exhibit scientific experiments and demonstrations pertaining to their area of expertise. At the kick-off event, students moved from booth to booth talking to scientists and working through small experiments. Mrs. Elizabeth Munson, another curriculum council member, was the organizer of this extremely successful event.

Students who chose to enter the science fair were challenged with developing and designing scientific experiments, solving engineering problems, or exploring other technological areas that interested them. To assist fourth and fifth graders with the development of their projects, Mrs. Sheffy and Ms.

Pam Eppinger, student support specialist for the Chester County Intermediate Unit Migrant Education Program, worked with students after school.

Middle school students could choose to work on their science fair project during an After-The-Bell activity specifically designed for this purpose. After-The-Bell is an after-school program run by the Kennett After-School Association at the middle school. Mrs. Sheffy volunteered her time to run this session at After-The-Bell. Elementary and middle school students could also choose to work on their projects at home with the help of their parents.

Science fair projects ranged from investigating the best tilt for solar panels to generate electricity to how the angle of football effects the distance it travels when kicked. New Garden Elementary School fifth grader Araian Ruiz entered a science fair favorite – the exploding volcano. However, Araian's volcano project had a twist. She compared whether vinegar or lemon juice was the best acid to use, and found that vinegar was the better choice.

"We were excited with the caliber of projects the students brought to the competition," stated Ms. Mary Lynn

Vincent, curriculum supervisor. "The students dedicated hours to hands-on research and preparation for this event. Their projects represented a depth that was eye-opening."

The Kennett Consolidated School District applauds everyone who entered



Sixth grader Magnus Murray explains his project to KHS science teacher and competition judge Michael Anastas

the Kennett Science Fair. "I think it was exceptional that students were motivated to take on this challenge outside of school," Mrs. Sheffy commented. "I would like to offer my personal congratulations on a job well done!"

Seven students representing five projects have advanced to the Chester County Science

Research competition, and winners of this competition will move on to the Delaware Valley Regional Competition.

The District would like to offer special congratulations to the following students on their winning projects:

Grade 4

1st place was awarded to Megan Appleby for her project called "All About Newts" and Beatrice Murray for her project called "Fruit Power." Both girls are from Greenwood Elementary School.

2nd place was awarded to Caroline Maroko from Greenwood Elementary

School for her project called "Super Sun Power."

3rd place was awarded to Samantha Sullivan from Greenwood Elementary School for her project "Curious Craters."

Honorable Mention were awarded to the team of Jose Cruz and Charlee Acuna from New Garden Elementary School for their project called "The Throw Guy."

Grade 5

1st Place was awarded to Cindy Serato from Mary D. Lang Elementary School for her project called "How Astronomers Find the Distance to the Stars."

2nd Place was awarded to the team of Jesus Flores, Luis Flores, and Christopher Castaneda Escobar from Greenwood Elementary School for their project called "Speedy Balloony Cars."

3rd place was awarded to Tej Vaddi from Greenwood Elementary School for his project called "Effect of Angle Between Football and Tee on the Distance Travelled by the Ball."

Grade 6

1st place was awarded to Magnus Murray from Kennett Middle School for his project called "Wind Power Blade Design."

2nd place was awarded to Dylan Munson from Kennett Middle School for his project "Are Fingerprint Patterns Inherited?"

Grade 7

1st place was awarded to Michael Stephens of Kennett Middle School for his project called "Chilled Out."

Greenwood Elementary Students Gear Up For Stellar Learning

Third graders at Greenwood Elementary School have started to look up at the night sky with a new-found appreciation for the twinkling lights they see. These students are taking part in an exciting astronomy project called Project ASTRO through a partnership with West Chester University of Pennsylvania.

Sponsored by the Astronomical Society of the Pacific, Project ASTRO originally began as a pilot program in the San Francisco Bay Area in 1993 and has since expanded to more than a dozen sites throughout the United States. During the summer of 2009, Greenwood Elementary School third grade teachers Mrs. Lauren Farrell, Mrs. Jennifer Miller, and Mrs. Sarah Thorne-Locke participated in a two-day training at West Chester University.

One of the main goals of Project ASTRO is to put students into the roles of scientists so that they can investigate concepts through various classroom activities and experiments. In addition,

astronomers visit the classrooms four times during the year to complement the students' work around the solar system, and the students will visit the college campus for a planetarium showing. Mrs. Farrell and her students coordinate astronomy lessons and experimentation with Dr. Marc Gagné, while Mrs. Miller and Mrs. Thorne-Locke work with Dr. Carolyn Sealfon.

Some of the planned activities include building scale models of the solar system, creating three-dimensional models of the earth and its moon—adjusting the relative size of each, crafting comets, and acting out the moon phases and eclipses.

To learn scale sizing in Mrs. Farrell's class, Dr. Gagné substituted an eight inch wide volleyball for the sun. At this size, the students learned that the earth would be no larger than a peppercorn (which is smaller than a pea!), and its moon would be the size of the head of a pin.

In Mrs. Miller's class, students started

out by predicting the proportionate sizes for each of these interplanetary masses and explained their thinking to everyone. The scale model showed that the earth would be 49 times the size of its moon.

The moon would only need to be two and a half inches away from the peppercorn-substituted earth, while in the hallway, students were shown that the earth would have to be 26 yards away from the sun (volleyball). At this scale, the nearest star would be at least 4,200 miles away, Dr. Gagné explained.

"Hopefully, the students came away from the lesson with a better sense of the vastness of space and the distances of astronomical objects," Dr. Gagné said. "The philosophy behind Project ASTRO is that students learn best when using hands-on inquiry-based activities in combination with a constructivist approach to teaching."

What's being fittingly called a Star Party

is scheduled for all third grade students and their parents in March. A local astronomical society, the West Chester affiliated astronomers, and Kennett High School teacher Mr. Dan Folmar who is involved with Project ASTRO will be helping more than 100 stargazers look through telescopes on Greenwood Elementary School's back soccer field to see the planets and nebula that decorate the winter sky. The Star Party's date was specially picked for its anticipated excellent visibility of the nighttime sky and certain constellations, with students being able to show their parents and siblings exactly what they're learning in the classroom.

"Learning about astronomy demonstrates the power of the scientific method that stays with and gets carried over to other science courses," Mrs. Miller said. "Astronomy captures the students' attention, and this program is a great way to tap into their enthusiasm and propel their learning."