Community committee to evaluate facilities needs

District receives $685,000 PSE&G grant to replace aging boilers and HVAC

A community facilities committee has been formed to examine the physical condition of the district’s schools and make recommendations for improvements. As part of its work, the committee will evaluate the buildings’ needs due to age and normal wear and tear, and consider the educational priorities of the district.

The community facilities committee will meet and tour the schools later this summer. Recommendations are expected to be presented in the fall.

More than 40 people volunteered to participate on the committee. An email inviting residents to serve was sent to community organizations (town council, police department, PTAs, etc.) and invitations were posted on both the district’s and the town’s social media.

Efficiency grant money from PSE&G

Extensive heating and ventilation work won’t be part of the committee’s recommendations: District administrators and representatives from an energy efficiency company worked to secure grant money from PSE&G to replace some energy-inefficient infrastructure. After discussions, PSE&G is awarding the district $685,000 to replace aging boilers and other heating/ventilations units. The remainder of the cost of these improvements will be paid through the 2022-23 school budget. The work is slated to be completed this summer.

The boiler/HVAC replacements were included in the school improvement plan turned down by voters in December. At the core of that plan were building renovations and the addition of prekindergarten classrooms necessary for the district to take advantage of state money for free universal pre-K. (Currently, the district offers a limited tuition-based pre-K program on a first-come, first-serve basis. The half-day program costs pre-K parents $3,000 per year and is aligned with the New Jersey Department of Education’s Preschool Standards.)

In honor of Teacher Appreciation Week, all School No. 2 staff members received fish keychains with a card that read “Our school is offishally awesome because of you.” The keychains were made by STEAM teacher Shana Opdenberg using two 3D printers purchased in January by the PTA. All students had an opportunity to see the new printers in action.

SAYING GOODBYE

On June 17 in a moving-up ceremony, 89 eighth-graders said farewell to the Little Falls School District. As the newly minted high-schoolers exited School No. 1 after removing their mortarboards and gowns, they were “clapped out” by family members and community residents in attendance.

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A weekend of pure imagination

The most famous candy man in the world came to Little Falls when School No. 1 presented “Willy Wonka Jr.” The show is a musical theater version of the classic Roald Dahl novel, “Charlie and the Chocolate Factory,” and its 1971 big screen adaptation, “Willy Wonka & the Chocolate Factory.”

The magical story of the world-renowned confectioner and his quest to find a worthy successor was performed for three nights in late April. All the film’s popular songs were included such as “Pure Imagination” and “Oompa-Loompa-Doompadee-Doo.”

The 70 students in cast and crew rehearsed for three months to bring the production to life. The cast featured Kira Giron, Abbie Mugleston, Cary Friedrich, Kashane Morrison, Samantha McGinn, Stella Ostrowski, and Adam Stuber.

A trio of teachers coordinated the efforts of the kids. Keri Brown directed the show, Tiffany Studzinski served as assistant director, and Matthew Schmidt was musical director. “Wonka” was choreographed by Francesca Focella, a parent with a daughter, Luisa, in the cast.

Growing and glowing at No. 1

Black lights and fluorescent colors don’t help kids with their math skills, but they certainly make learning more fun.

School No. 1 was recently bursting with electric pinks, greens, blues, and yellows when math teachers held Glow Day. Bathed beneath black lights and the neon glow from classroom decorations, students in grades 5–8 completed fun math activities and math problems. The special day transformed what could have been a rote math review to prepare for state testing into an engaging and colorful learning experience.

Grant money from the Little Falls Education Foundation was used to purchase supplies for the event. Each math classroom received four blacklights, neon tape, neon paper, yellow highlighters, party packs for decorating, and glow sticks for students.

“Glow Day built school spirit and enthusiasm for math,” said Lindsay Lafferman, math interventionist. “It was a powerful and memorable way to engage students. And when students are engaged, they can remember more, and are more successful learners.”

The math teachers hope to make Glow Day an annual tradition.

Famous figures come to School No. 3

Celebrities past and present recently were seen at School No. 3 when the fourth grade presented a living “wax” museum. Students in costume appeared as famous contemporary and historical figures, informing museum visitors about their alter egos’ contributions to the worlds of science, human rights, the environment, sports, politics, entertainment, art, and literature.

The event was the culmination of a month of reading, research, and writing. Each fourth-grader read a biography about a famous figure and compiled key events in that person’s life. That information was used to create a biographical summary, then was further distilled down to a speech of two minutes or less that could be easily memorized.

Among the luminaries chosen were Milton Hershey, Sally Ride, Jane Goodall, Martin Luther King Jr., JK Rowling, George Lucas, and Rosa Parks.

New curriculum initiatives for 2022-23

Changes are coming to the district’s curriculum.

At School No. 1, two new classes will be offered. Computer Science Design Thinking will teach computer coding and system design - essentially the nuts and bolts of hardware and the coding needed to program it. Civics will cover a citizen’s rights and duties. Civics instruction is a new state mandate for the upcoming school year.

In an effort to boost student proficiency, the district is revising its math curriculum and methodology in grades K-8. Teachers have been working with math consultant Nancy Schultz from Conquer Math in Wayne to develop new instructional strategies and create new lesson plans and activities.
HESE middle-schoolers are shrewd business pros. Seventh- and eighth-graders in Personal Finance classes at School No. 1 recently participated in TREP$, a program that teaches kids the nuts and bolts of entrepreneurship by walking them through product development, from concept to final sale.

TREP$, which stands for entrepreneurs, teaches very concrete business fundamentals. The 54 students learned different business skills over the six weeks of the program. One day students wrote business plans and identified their target customers; another day they learned about marketing and effective advertising, and another it was salesmanship and customer service. They also learned the process of cost analysis – a key to deciding which product to manufacture for sale.

The young entrepreneurs put everything they learned to the test at the TREP$ marketplace, the program’s grand finale. Here, students sold their products to parents, family members, teachers, and friends who turned out to see their creativity and ingenuity. Among the items for sale were flowers in decorative cones, Little Falls-branded coasters, jewelry, candles, soap, candy, and bubble tea.

“It was great seeing how many people were there,” said eighth-grader Sabrina Stuber. “You can really make money if you put your heart into something and have the right motivation.”

Entrepreneurship has always been a hallmark of America’s growth and history. But with reality shows such as “Shark Tank” and entrepreneurs such as Elon Musk and Mark Zuckerberg regularly in the news, students have never been more interested in innovation and business ownership.

“This is a great program for the kids,” said Jim Simmons, one of the two Personal Finance teachers (along with Vincent Plateroti). “It allows them to take pride in the ownership of their business. The marketplace, though, is just as exciting for me as it is for the kids. There is nothing more satisfying than seeing their creativity come to life and watching their passion as they sell their products.”

TREP$ was started in 2006 by two New Jersey teachers and its popularity has spiraled since then. The is the third year in which School No. 1 has run the program.
FOURTH-GRADERS in School No. 3 dream big. They recently completed projects that challenged them to imagine themselves as kid-preneurs. The students created fictional businesses or developed ideas for products, then detailed the best ways to design, manufacture, and price their products and services. Working with partners, the budding businessmen and businesswomen created restaurants, cars, an automatic pool cleaner, and a museum of natural history for kids, to name just a few.

“IT was really amazing watching the students come up with designs and plans,” said teacher Kelly Gonzalez. The project spanned about two months. During that time, the students studied different kid entrepreneurs across the globe and learned the process of designing an invention or business.

“This was fun because you get to make stuff with a partner and share ideas,” said Logan Aristizabal, a student in Alexis Cust and Kristyn Toohey’s class. “And you get to learn about the business you’re doing.”

After the fourth-graders had completed their work, they presented their sales pitches to their classmates. The project was completed as part of Genius Hour, a time each week when kids are in the driver’s seat of their own learning. During this period, students explore topics that interest them. In the first few months of school, students were able to engage in different activities such as building with tangrams, practicing cursive, typing practice, building puzzles, and coding—really any activities that sparked their curiosity and creativity.

The fourth-graders also invented their own amusement parks. The project was broken into different weeks. Students first studied models of existing theme parks and then brainstormed the elements they would like to include in their own amusement parks. Next, they were asked to develop themes for their parks as well as design the unique look of them. This included creating a mood boards, mascots, the locations of the amusement parks, and ticket pricing.

In the final stage, the planners created maps of their parks that included rides, restaurants, snack stands, bathrooms, and gift shops. (You always need a gift shop!)

Autism Acceptance Month

ALL district schools celebrated Autism Acceptance Month with activities designed to inform and promote acceptance of autism.

At School No. 1, once per week during April students shared facts about autism on the video morning announcements. They also highlighted contemporary figures who are on the autism spectrum. These included mixed-media artist Morgan Harper Nichols, writer and comedian Dan Aykroyd, and Jordyn Moore, a girl with autism who helps assemble her own autism awareness tee-shirts with the help of her family. Language and literacy development teacher Adam Quazza coordinated the students’ efforts.

At School No. 2, behavior analyst Kimberly DeLia showed classes a 10-minute video called “Meet Julia.” Julia, first introduced in 2015, is a Sesame Street character with autism. In the lessons, DeLia also engaged students in a game that highlighted their similarities and differences to show that everyone is unique.

In addition, each student decorated a puzzle piece, the international symbol for autism; all the pieces were displayed on a bulletin board in the main hallway to signify togetherness.

A fond farewell

THE district gave a heartfelt send-off to Chief Steven Post to celebrate his retirement from the Little Falls Police Dept. Superintendent Tracey Marinelli surprised Post with a bus tour that visited all three schools. Students and staff lined the sidewalks and held signs with messages of appreciation and thanks.