



Community Digest

Building a foundation for learning, leadership and life

Winter 2022



Dates to remember

See <https://www.sd735.org> for up-to-date information. See <https://www.sd735.org/calendar> for all events.

May 2-6—Staff Appreciation Week, all schools.

May 11—Meyer Showcase, 6:30-7:30 p.m., Meyer School, 8100 Tripp Ave.

May 16—All bands concert, 7-8:30 p.m., Niles North High School, 9800 Lawler Ave.

May 21—8th Grade Graduation Dance, 7 p.m., McCracken School, 8000 East Prairie Rd.

May 23—Stand Against Racism Student Unity Rally, 3-4 p.m., McCracken School.

May 25—5th Grade Farewell, 6-7 p.m., Middleton School, 8300 St. Louis Ave.

May 26—8th Grade Graduation, 7-8 p.m., Niles North High School.

Board meetings—The Board of Education meets at 7 p.m. on the second Tuesday of each month at McCracken unless noted. All community members are invited to attend. Meetings also are live-streamed via YouTube with links posted in advance at the district web site. Public comments emailed to contactboe@sd735.org will be made part of the public record.

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McCracken's boys' junior varsity basketball team won the Niles Township "Little 9" championship in March. Coach Bill MacBeth is shown with the team.

Students develop multiple skills through clubs, sports, music

It's natural for families and the broader school community to focus on academics when thinking about what students are doing during their school day. Teaching and learning are certainly critical, but there are a host of activities outside the regular curriculum that District 73 1/2 students engage in, enjoy, and learn from.

Sports, music, clubs and after-school programs augment the school experience for many youngsters, from Pre-Kindergarten through 8th grade. Teachers who oversee these activities say their students build skills that will help them now and in the future.

For example, they learn the value of teamwork. "We have really encouraged collaboration," said Lisa Repp, who shares robotics coaching duties with Allison Acevedo, director of innovation and technology. "Each student knows that their team is representing our middle school, so there's a deeper willingness to help other groups on our broader team."



Middleton fifth graders engage in a STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, math) project.

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Student skills

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Repp also teaches STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math) classes at McCracken Middle School. Teamwork plays a role there, too. “We focus on collaboration, being kind, and getting back into how school works (post-pandemic restrictions),” she said. “As a class, we have developed boundaries to help students know when it is appropriate to advocate for themselves and their ideas, and when it is appropriate to listen to their peers.”

At Middleton School, fifth-grade teacher Anne Bond works with drama teacher Stephanie Anderson and vocal music teacher Angela Merrier on the annual musical theater production. “We want our students to be people who are collaborative, and there’s so much collaboration that has to go

during the kindergarten ‘gingerbread’ unit in December, students decorated their own paper gingerbread people and were asked to draw plans and then create a house for them out of straws, paper-towel tubes, foam craft sheets and tape. The students loved collaborating with a partner to design and then build a house.”

The disruptions of the past two years mean some students have had to work to build up their skills. Middleton STEAM teacher Anthony Cho noted, “Since we do a lot of group projects, it was difficult for our first graders at the beginning of the year to learn how to work with others, whether it is having a specific role on the team or learning to combine ideas together.”

Leadership

The various activities the district offers also help students develop as leaders. Joy

Justice Club. Of the latter, Learning Center Director Tori Gammeri said, “The club is focused on encouraging students to use their voices and discover the power of civic engagement.” She added, “I hope it helps them see themselves as leaders and change-makers. Empowerment is the ultimate goal.”

There are many ways to encourage leaders. Katelin Magnuson, a seventh-grade ELA teacher who coaches McCracken’s cheerleading team, said the team “gives students a platform to use their voice and a place where they belong, feel safe, and can develop leadership skills. I have several students who are on the quieter side when they are in their academic classes, but are the most vocal on the basketball court.”

Students at Middleton can find their voices as well. Principal Nikki Tammaru leads SOAR (Students Organized Against Racism), in which more than 100 students in grades one through five participate. “We discuss real issues in the world that are currently not being solved, like racism and discrimination,” she said. “When you talk about things like that, they don’t get resolved in a 30-minute meeting. It requires students to work together to act, to speak out.”

The elementary school also has its own student council. In the past, students ran for election as members and officers. But emerging from the pandemic, staff members decided to make a change this year. Any student who applied was accepted.

“We didn’t want to exclude anyone who was interested,” said Dr. Tiffany Voight, school psychologist, who serves as student council advisor along with Anne Bond. “We wanted to focus on all students being seen as leaders.” Through activities such as planning monthly “spirit days” and organizing charitable fund-raisers, the students “learn how to use their voice, how to advocate for something they want to happen,” Voight said.

Bond added, “They learn a lot about what effective leaders do. Sometimes the leader is the person who’s talking, sometimes it’s the person who’s listening.” In planning their activities, students must keep fairness in mind. “When they’re brainstorming, they have to ask, ‘What are things that bring our community together, that everyone can do?’ They have to think about others.”

Activities also build resilience. “Student athletes learn how to face and overcome adversities and challenges,” said Mark Petriko, basketball coach and PE/Health/EE/Fit-



Meyer School students work on their “gingerbread” unit, a makerspace activity.

on” for the play to succeed, Bond said. “They really have to think about each other when they’re there. We say ‘We’re a team.’”

Teamwork is prominent in athletics as well. Sean Gormley, who teaches seventh-grade science and coaches the sixth-grade boys basketball team, said, “The students learn how to run a five-man offense that requires playing a specific role, finding the open man, making assists, cutting after the pass. This type of offense requires a lot of collaboration and synchronicity.”

The spirit of cooperation is developed even among the youngest students. Amy Kelley, Meyer School’s librarian, offers makerspace activities for preschoolers and kindergartners. “Many of our students are very hands-on learners,” she said. “For example,

Di Zillo, a seventh-grade ELA teacher, advises the McCracken student council. “Student council is an opportunity for students to practice their leadership skills, so they do things such as help school administrators to plan and conduct special activities,” she said. “Our main goals are to promote school spirit, host social events, and do service projects to give back to the community. For example, after Thanksgiving we hosted a winter coat drive. We probably collected 40 large trash bags full of items — enough to set up a coat closet for McCracken students in need, donate to a women and children’s shelter, and donate to Connections for the Homeless.”

Other McCracken activities that promote leadership include the Diversity Club, the Gay Straight Alliance and the Social

ness teacher at McCracken. “I believe they also improve their self-confidence.” Bill MacBeth, McCracken fine arts teacher and basketball coach, said, “Players definitely benefit from sports — developing physical fitness, learning about teamwork, facing failure, overcoming obstacles and experiencing success.” He added, “As players develop their athletic skills, I see their self-esteem improve.”

STEAM

In the classroom, “Students learn resilience, problem solving, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity from STEAM,” said Anthony Cho. “Students learn the engineering design process and growth mindset in every lesson that I teach. They learn that perseverance is especially important towards tackling a challenge.”

STEAM classes offer opportunities for students with a range of abilities. “I have noticed the students who succeed the most in my classroom are the ones who struggle with literacy or other more basic academic skills,” said Lisa Repp. “We have two students who are from a special education classroom, and they have done an amazing job collaborating with their peers and showing their creativity. I also have a student who is gifted in Romanian, but she doesn’t yet speak English fluently, and she has very successfully created each app with customization and creativity. On the flip side, students who are used to every subject coming easily to them have found motivation to work hard at some of the softer — yet still critical for life — skills.”

At Meyer, the makerspace allows youngsters to experiment. “They are encouraged to try different things and if they fail, to try again by coming up with a different idea,”

said Amy Kelley. “They may find that they are not able to do something — yet. There is always room to learn and grow.” She added, “Perseverance is constantly being built up during makerspace activities.”

A similar spirit exists in Meyer’s after-school enrichment program. Special education teacher Rachel Douglas said the program “gives students an opportunity to work with other peers who are not in their class. It allows them to explore topics that are not covered during the school day.”

Arts

At McCracken, Bill MacBeth oversees an enrichment program called “Art Crew,” where students time can express their creativity through art. “Students can experiment with materials and techniques in Art Crew’s relaxed environment,” he said. “I am always excited to see someone persevere through artistic problems and challenges and develop pride in their work.”

Many district students have found their creative outlet in music programs, including the symphonic and concert bands, choirs, and musical productions.

“Band, and really all the fine arts, are critically important for students because these classes teach students how to create and appreciate beauty,” said Chip DeStefano, the district’s longtime bands director. “Middle school is a rough time for many kids socially and emotionally. This has been amplified due to the pandemic and the forced isolation. Music is social and music is emotional. Feelings that are difficult for kids to put into words are very easy to express and get out into the world through the arts.”

Cesar Mendoza, concert band director,



Students from all three district schools had their artwork publicly displayed at Oakton Community College as part of the Skokie Fine Arts Commission’s Student Outstanding Artists Recognition (SOAR) program. Shown here are works by Middleton students.

seeks to provide participants with an outlet for expression, help them appreciate music, and encourage them to work toward a common goal. “Being in the same class on a daily basis is something that helps achieve these goals,” he said.

Amy Keipert, McCracken vocal music and chorus teacher, said “Choir is a home — a place where students feel safe and heard and valued. In choir, we learn that every voice matters.” She added, “These students learn what it takes to work hard to grow and to achieve great things, and they learn how to be driven and self-motivated. They learn how to express emotions and celebrate music from diverse heritages. They learn how to collaborate in a group and how to take on their own leadership roles.”

McCracken students have an additional musical opportunity outside the established music programs — the Global Music Club. EL teacher Sally Alvarado uses her prior music training to bring new experiences to interested sixth, seventh and eighth graders, with the help of guest artists. She said, “Students benefit from the club by sharing about their own cultural backgrounds and exploring music from their own cultures, but also learning about music from different cultures around the world.”



Students in Molly Domingo’s second-grade class read books donated by families, friends and alumni of Middleton School.

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Let's litter less

Editor's note: Middleton School fifth grader William Naidas authored this plea to residents to keep our village clean. We're happy to comply with his request to publish it.

Imagine that litter is controlling our world, making our lives disgusting and super unsafe. That's what could happen if we continue to litter! Litter can harm your body leading to all sorts of things, diseases, infections and even death. It can also ruin nature; with all the litter in the world, it destroys the beauty of the Earth. People should stop littering because it harms the water, destroys the environment, and most of all, harms the air we breathe.

Water pollution is when harmful chemicals or garbage get into the water, and it's very harmful. Many children die because of water pollution. Over 1,000 infants die due to diarrhea, which happens from water pollution. Many diseases and effects in the water often come from humans. Diseases like dysentery come because of all the plastic and harmful chemicals created from places like landfills. Animals get hurt, too. They can get tangled up with plastic put into the water, and if they eat it, they could die. According to 'The Equation,' 'Gallup's annual Environment Poll found that 63 percent of Americans worried a great deal about pollution of drinking water, and 57 percent have a similar level of concern about pollution of rivers, lakes and reservoirs.' This shows that people really do care and worry about the water, but they don't realize how we can stop it from happening.

Also, garbage put into the land can destroy the environment and people. Land pollution can create wildfires. According to an Above Green award winner, Rinkesh Kukreja, when land areas are polluted, they become dry. The dry conditions then can cause strong wildfires. The soil can also be hurt to chemicals leaking into our water.

Mining can cause erosion by making huge holes in the ground, which affects the air and soil. Also, without you realizing it, farming can do it ,too. The waste from animals and litter contaminates the soil



and water. Since we know how chemicals leak to the soil, I can tell you how it leads to skin cancer. The fruits and vegetables grown from the polluted soil consequently lead to skin cancer and other harmful diseases. This shows that garbage all around the world can harm us badly.

Harm not only comes from litter but also air pollution. Air pollution can be created by engines, litter or electrical systems. It can penetrate lungs, which leads to death. Smog and soot created by engines, and lots of anything that comes from electrical systems, can penetrate the air and lead to penetrated lungs. It can also irritate your eyes and skin. Most of the air pollutants are created by gasoline and the incineration of litter. And all of the gasoline and litter you breathe irritates your eyes and skin. And like I said, electricity can become a big problem to the air we breathe. Refrigerators or air conditioners create chemicals in the air that could possibly lead to death. That's how litter can lead to air pollution.

I think that Skokie should stop littering because it harms the water, destroys the environment and most of all, harms the air we breathe. Thank you for reading and please do something to stop this from happening.

District 73½ guiding principles

- ◆ Our schools will support and inspire our students
- ◆ Our students will be critical thinkers and creative problem solvers
- ◆ Our community will demonstrate integrity and respect
- ◆ Our graduates will help make the world a better place