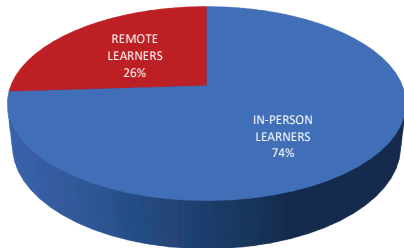


# THE DrumBeat

## PIQUA SCHOOLS ADJUST TO COVID-19

### How Are Students Learning This Year?



Last March the Piqua City Schools were preparing for state testing as students in grades 3-12 were gearing up for the April assessments in social studies, language arts, math and science. It also marked the time when spring break traditionally takes place with a long-awaited pause for students and staff. Then, ironically, on Friday, March 13,

**“The human spirit is resilient.”**

Ohio Governor Michael DeWine abruptly shuttered the state’s schools with a ‘stay at home order’ due to the arrival of a worldwide pandemic identified as COVID-19. As the PCS students went into quarantine during their vacation break, PCS administration were given one week to reinvent the school system and to “get technology into everyone’s hands,” according to Teresa Anderson, director of curriculum and instruction in grades K-6.

She and her counterpart, Scott Bloom, director of curriculum and instruction in grades 7-12, actively scoured the district with the help of the technology department for available Chromebooks since students would be learning from home vs. in person at school. The duo and their colleagues pulled together nearly 1,300 devices on short notice and distributed them to all grades at drive-in sites at Piqua Central Intermediate School and Piqua Junior High School within a week’s

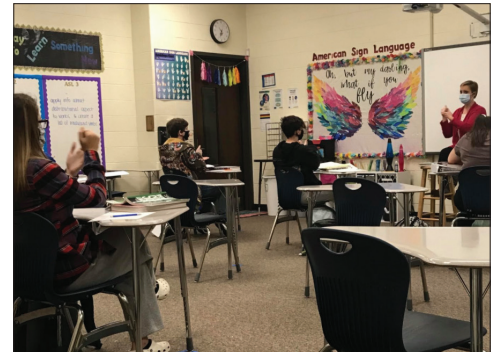
time. Bloom recalls the fast pace required to switch all teachers to on-line learning and instruction with many staff cancelling their spring break plans to focus on the task at hand.

Teachers used a variety of platforms to communicate instruction with students and their parents. The district subsequently redesigned part of its website and built a platform for special directions, on-going updates, and supplemental lessons for art, music, and physical education. Both Anderson and Bloom also recall copying and printing hundreds of instructional packets and preparing mailings for parents to explain essential modification for the remote learning process. Teachers, they say,

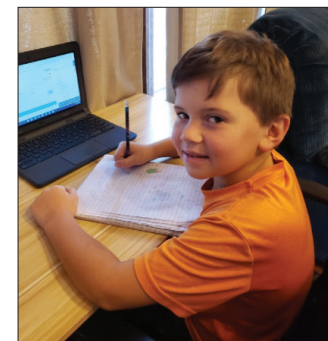
“did a fantastic job and were very creative with necessary adjustments.”

Bloom was even present when one teacher did a virtual frog dissection that was “almost as good as being there in person.” He added, “The enthusiasm was still there for the teacher and students.” Throughout the remote learning phase students were encouraged to submit documents to be graded and workloads were “kept flexible and manageable for kids and parents”, they observed. “Hats off to all caregivers,” applauded Anderson.

While the majority of PCS students have returned to the classroom in the fall of the 2020-2021 school year, Anderson and Bloom report that 24 percent of the district’s enrollees remain at home as remote learners due to the on-going pandemic. The remote learners in grades 4-12, they add, are



PHS students practice Sign Language in Ms. Bensman’s ASL class.



Jackson, a second-grade student from Springcreek Primary School works on his assignments remotely from home.

provided with a program called Odysseyware, a virtual on-line instructional tool which is synchronized with their required curriculum and has the same courses each semester that their peers engage with in-person learning while at school.

Remote learners are still considered as PCS students and are invited to participate in school sports, clubs and arts activities.

The district has joined a consortium with other Miami County schools identified as the Personalized Learning Platform which focuses on a virtual curriculum for grades K-3. “Participation,” suggests Anderson, “has enabled the district to get a program which is cost effective yet rigorous.” Both Anderson and Tina Watts, reading specialist for the district, have absorbed roles as district liaisons for families of students in kindergarten

(Continued on page 2)

*You never know how strong you are until being strong is your only choice.*  
~ Bob Marley

## Message from the Superintendent

A short year ago, no one could have imagined the unprecedented events of last spring with the arrival of COVID-19. This required that we quickly shift to a remote learning system and a new way to provide food and other important services for our students. As we transitioned to this school year in September, many more changes were necessary to meet the needs of our diverse student population. I am proud of the flexibility and creativity that our staff, students, and their parents have demonstrated. Additionally, our community has remained enthusiastically committed and engaged with our schools and the students we proudly serve. On behalf of the Piqua Board of Education and school staff, I would like to express our sincerest gratitude for your tremendous support. Our work with the children of our community is not possible without you!

Dwayne Thompson, Superintendent

*(continued from page 1)*

through third grades needing support. Bloom and a team of instructors respond accordingly to families of students in grades 4-12.

Licensed intervention specialists are provided by the district to help students on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) at the elementary and secondary levels. While students have adapted to both classroom and remote learning this school year, Anderson and Bloom also credit staff such as bus drivers, custodians and kitchen staff for helping with the new protocols established by the Ohio Department of Education.

Students are assigned seats on school buses and everyone is mandated to wear masks while riding. Classroom desks have been reconfigured to provide social distancing and schools are utilizing space such as the cafeterias, stages, gyms and open-air outdoor space for instructional purposes to expand distances. Desks and high-touch areas are cleaned and sanitized frequently throughout the school day.

Lunch and recess periods are staggered and staff use technology to communicate to one another and parents as much as possible to maintain dialog while still socially distancing.

“Everyone has really stepped up to the plate,” observed Anderson. “The human spirit is

resilient.” She added, “We have had lots of wonderful donations from the community for everything from face masks to cleaning supplies and hand sanitizer. And, all summer long, kitchen staff were present to provide breakfast and lunch for all children in the community whether they attended PCS or not.”

When asked how they would characterize this pandemic time in history, Bloom responded with, “We have learned a lot.” Anderson added, “It has been evolutionary... consistently evolving as we learn new requirements and ways to address the pandemic. We are proud to be a part of a community that values education and has gone beyond the extra mile to ensure there’s been a continuum of safe learning for all students in Piqua City Schools.” ■



Third-grader, Aisha, uses technology to assist with her learning. Each student has a Chromebook assigned to him/her in case the district is required to transition to remote learning.

## LEVY PLAN SUCCESSFULLY REDUCES TAXES

A Permanent Improvement (PI) Levy for Piqua City Schools was successfully passed in May 2019 and, to date, has realized an annual savings of \$426,174.25 to city taxpayers, according to Treasurer Jeremie Hittle.

The elimination of 2.2 mills -by refinancing the Piqua Junior High School bond to pay it off- and the passage of the levy has allowed PCS to properly take care of aging school buildings while still reducing property taxes by 1 mill.

For just 30 cents a day for a median house valued at \$100,000 the district has been able to complete much needed work to its facilities and provide maintenance for years to come.

Once again, PCS is proving itself to be good stewards of taxpayer money and demonstrate how monies accrued from the property tax levy is actually saving taxpayers money in 2020. ■



A new road at Springcreek allows for parents to wait on school property vs. on St. Rt. 36, making pick-up and drop-off times safer.

# #Wearepiqua

## SAFETY PROTOCOLS

Keeping Piqua City School students and staff safe from the COVID virus has been an extraordinary feat. Just ask Assistant Superintendent Tony Lyons and City of Piqua Health and Sanitation Director Amy Welker, R.S., who have worked tenaciously to ensure a smooth back-to-school transition.

As mandated by the Ohio Department of Public Health (DPH) and Center for Disease Control (CDC), those individuals diagnosed are confirmed with the Piqua Health Department and isolated for a 10-day period at home while continuing their education remotely via Google Classroom.

The district, explained Lyons, might receive a call from a parent or guardian confirming a family diagnosis. Or perhaps an alert comes from Welker who files case documentation with the DPH on a weekly basis. While phone confirmations are vital links identifying who is confirmed positive, Lyons says the task of tracking individuals who have been in close contact to those with COVID is paramount. School nurses are responsible for tracing a student and/or teacher's schedule from the time s/he arrives at school on a school bus to each class period of the day. Each student is assigned a seat on the bus, in classrooms and at lunch enabling nurses to trace other students who may have been in close contact with a positive case. Close contacts by the health department's definition are then required to quarantine.

Lyons credits the staff for their great work which has resulted in the limited number of individuals who have had to quarantine. To date no COVID transmissions have been recorded in a school setting within the district. Along with distancing, all students and staff are required to wear masks as protection. In addition, hand sanitizer stations are located throughout the district facilities and handwashing is reinforced regularly.

Documentation on all cases is constantly shared between Lyons and Welker who speak on a daily basis. Lyons characterized the behind-the-scenes pandemic operation as "life changing" noting "It's forced us all to make adjustments in our lives and to make things work differently. We've gotten our students and staff back (to school) and we're doing it safely." "It (the pandemic) has forced us to look at things critically and find ways to do things better."

Welker praises the district for its great relationship with the local health department. "We talk every day and work through cases as they have come up. I feel like we've been on the same page and schools are working hard to do everything they can to keep everyone safe."

"I'm extremely pleased how they've handled the situation. They have a good plan in place and are sharing information as needed and working together." ■

## NEW STAFF

Piqua City Schools is pleased to welcome 13 new staff to the district during its 2020-21 school year.

Newly-hired staff and their respective assignments are as follows:

Andrew Grewe, mathematics, Piqua Central Intermediate School; Makenna Geise, 8th grade math, Piqua Junior High School; Abbey Jacobs, Spanish, Piqua High School; Molly Magoteaux ELA 6th grade, Piqua Central Intermediate School; Hayley Hoss, choral music, Piqua Junior High School; Logan Shimp, intervention specialist, Piqua Central Intermediate School; and Shelby Sharp, intervention specialist, Springcreek Primary School.

Also Jayne Evans, psychologist, Piqua High School/Piqua Junior High School; Liza Platfoot, French, Piqua High School; Maggie Bergman, English, Piqua Junior High School; Brady Hill, 2nd grade, Washington Primary School; Dontay Hodge, paraprofessional, Springcreek Primary School; and Robin Myers, administrative assistant, Washington Primary School. ■



Curriculum Director, Scott Bloom, facilitates a discussion with new teachers at their orientation prior to the start of the 2020-2021 school year.

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**Our students receive tremendous support from local businesses and organizations. We appreciate this great tradition. Please help us return the support shown to us by shopping local every chance you can. Thank you Piqua!**



# Other Significant 2020 Milestones

- Piqua High School Celebrates 40 years (opened 1981)
- Piqua Jr. High School Celebrates 20 years (opened 1999)
- Washington, Springcreek and PCIS Celebrates 5 years (opened 2015)
- Alexander Stadium/Purk Field Celebrates 20 years (opened 2001)

## WERTZ CELEBRATES 100 YEARS



Wertz Field 100th Anniversary.

Jamie Powers considers himself a history buff so it came as no surprise when he began researching the former Roosevelt Stadium-now Wertz Stadium-located on East Ash Street which recently celebrated 100 years.

A 1993 Piqua High School graduate, Powers has had sufficient time to ponder the stadium's existence while seated in the grandstands watching his sons - Skyler, Jarret and Kadin - play soccer on the traditions-worn field below. The inquisitive father of three has amassed lots of information from perusing local library files and on-line property titles.

"It (research) has been fun," explained Powers. "I didn't know a lot of information about the stadium so I'd go to the former Flesh Public Library and nose around."

History reveals the athletic complex was dedicated in May 1920 and became Roosevelt Park in honor of former President Teddy Roosevelt who visited Piqua during the 1912 campaign. The land and rights were originally owned by Sam Davies Sr. beginning in 1858 and after a succession of family members passed on, those remaining on the deed sold the land for \$1 to the Piqua Board of Education. "It started as an athletic field in 1883 with baseball and

was founded by the Piqua Baseball Co. which allowed Piqua High School athletes to play there." However, the 1913 flood destroyed the field, player benches, scoreboards and more elaborate wooden bleachers. The result was that the athletic teams still needed a place to play.

Powers credits the Piqua Rotary Club for playing a major role in making the field home grounds for Piqua High School athletics. "The Rotary Club made things happen so the school board could assume ownership."

Powers revealed a fundraiser was held citywide to "raise money to make all the improvements and renovate the property to include a baseball diamond, graded football field and a track. It remained as Roosevelt Field until 1940 when the Public Works Administration (PWA) built concrete grandstands. The adjacent fieldhouse was also constructed with PWA monies in 1935 to accommodate sports such as wrestling, volleyball and basketball."

Powers says Don Gentile Day was celebrated at the Roosevelt stadium in 1945 after the Piqua native and celebrated flying ace was "pinned with high honors from General Dwight D. Eisenhower and the community welcomed him home with a huge parade."

The Roosevelt stadium was renamed as the Wertz Stadium in 1968 to honor the late George Wertz who arrived in Piqua in 1925 as a biology teacher and also as a track, basketball and football coach and later as athletic director. "That fall (1968) the stadium was renamed in honor of his service." Wertz Stadium continues to serve as the PHS soccer stadium for the boys and girls high school teams. ■

## BUDGET BALANCE

Piqua City Schools anticipates a balanced budget for the 2020-21 school year despite the unanticipated arrival of COVID-19.

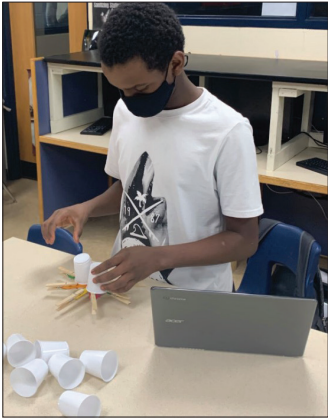
In reaction to the anticipated revenue reductions, the district reduced expenses by nearly \$1 million in cuts through staff attrition, implementing a reduction in supplies, and eliminating substitute teacher costs, field trips, and utilities while being closed. Nontraditional funding sources have provided much-needed relief to the district as well since March when schools were forced to close. District Treasurer, Jeremie Hittle, notes that Corona Relief Funds (CRF) amounting to \$168,933.65 have since been received from the U.S. Department of the Treasury and used for cleaning supplies and disinfectants as well as personnel needed to clean "high touch" areas routinely throughout the school day. CRF funds are also being utilized for additional hours for teaching staff in grades 4-12 to monitor and score on-line course work for those students who are learning remotely.

The district has also received an \$80,882.93 grant from Broadband Ohio Connectivity to purchase Chromebooks and update internet connections to the exterior of the district's five schools. These additions will allow for better access to high-quality internet for our students if the district is ordered to close again.

Finally, \$782,225.09 was received from the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Funds to help cover a decline in local income tax revenue due to a 15 percent unemployment rate in our area. These funds help to support the general fund and prevent further cuts in programming at this time. "We are committed to making dollars last and are in a good place at this time," said Hittle. "With the funds we received and the reductions we had to make, we hope to break even this year". ■



*“Discipline with love, apologize when needed and allow for dreams as no dream is too big to reach.”  
 ~ Macarena Studebaker, Teacher of the Year*



Amin uses careful strategies to accomplish a task in Mr. Koth’s STEM class at PJHS



PHS students successfully control drones as part of the PHS Success Bound course, “Launching Into Aviation & Exploring Aviation and Aerospace”



PHS Marching Band plays Piqua Pep Song for the football team after another victory. The Varsity team ended the regular season undefeated.



Beginning in March, Piqua City Schools provided 94,888 breakfasts and 93,693 lunches to community children, whether they attend in the district or not, and remote students continue to have access to meals throughout the week.



Officer Walters engages students in an investigation of a mock car accident in PHS’s new Law Enforcement Pre-Apprenticeship course.



After 20 years of use, the girls tennis team plays a match on the newly surfaced tennis courts.



PCIS students enjoying Hartzell Farm Day. Instead of travel to a farm, Hartzell brought the farm experience to the PCIS garden site on Nicklin Avenue.

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The Drum Beat is published and distributed by the Piqua City Schools for district residents, and is also posted on the district website.

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# TEACHER OF THE YEAR

Macarena Studebaker’s aspirations to become a teacher can be traced back to a very early age. A 2009 Piqua High School graduate, she credits the numerous teachers, tutors and staff members who have inspired her since moving to Piqua from Mexico with her mother at the age of eight. When school resumed this Fall, Macarena received a standing ovation from her peers as she gave a virtual acceptance speech thanking those individuals who have impacted her life along the way.

“I have sat in some of your classrooms as your student and kept mental notes of some of the most wonderful things you do for your kids on a daily basis,” she told her colleagues. “I have in my heart, imprinted life lessons that you taught me that now I teach my own students.”

The popular teacher challenged the district teachers to “continue to make those same impacts in the lives of your students because you are making a difference. Every child that is on your roster, was placed there not by accident, not even on purpose, but by fate. You were meant to change that specific

child’s life in one way or another. Take on the challenge just like you do every other year.”

She encouraged others to 1) discipline with love; 2) apologize when needed and 3) allow for dreams as “no dream is too big to reach.”

Superintendent Dwayne Thompson describes Studebaker as “one of the most genuine people I know and have had the pleasure to work with. She volunteers countless hours to staff events and after-school activities. Macarena makes learning fun for her students with her creative lessons, caring heart and her role modeling and is proof that with a positive attitude, motivation and a willingness to dream that you can do anything and be anything.”

This past spring each school within the district selected one teacher to receive the Outstanding Educator of the Year award. Studebaker’s application was selected by the Piqua Teacher of the Year Committee.

Others receiving recognition included: Kelly Snider, secretary, Springcreek Primary School, “Support Staff Member of the Year”; Tom Fry, long-time Piqua music department supporter,

“Friend of the School”; Piqua City Schools kitchen staff, “Friend of the School”; and Pat Williams, veteran substitute teacher, “Golden Apple Award” ■



Macarena Studebaker delivering “Teacher of the Year” acceptance speech.