



The Wallingford-Swarthmore District Newsletter

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HSAs and PTOs Define and Refine Support of Schools

The acronyms differ, but the purposes are similar. HSAs (Home & School Associations) and PTOs (Parent Teacher Organizations) provide vital support to the students, faculty and mission of each one of the five schools in the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District.

"These nonprofit organizations harness the energy and vision of parents and school staff to make things happen in our schools that otherwise would not happen," said Superintendent Rich Noonan. Though the character and priorities of the groups vary from school to school, the HSAs and PTOs have considerable influence on the priorities for enrichment of the learning experience, and on developing funding sources to realize them. They are crucial to communications among parents and school staff. In addition, as SRS PTO copresident Jennifer Fleming points out,

"Parent involvement is an important part of an effective school experience for children."

Convened by Superintendent Noonan, leaders of the groups meet during the school year to review the District's goals, discuss concerns and issues, develop best practices and share ideas which can help realize these goals on a school-by-school level. HSA and PTO representatives got together in December and plan to meet again in February and May. What's on their minds? At the December meeting, group leaders ranged freely across several areas, sharing best practices across school organizations regarding communication, projects, membership participation, and fundraising.

Communications: Every HSA/PTO

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During the week preceding Martin Luther King's birthday, **Swarthmore Rutledge School's** Home & School Association's *Dimensions in Social Studies* led a week of service projects at the school. At the all-school assembly culminating the week, these dancers interpreted "Bridge Over Troubled Waters." **Photo by Vippy Yee.**



WES artists came together to help NJ students. **Photo by Sarah Ryan**

Elementaries Embrace Sandy Relief

In **Wallingford Elementary School's** Giving Project, the Parent Teacher Organization and WES art teacher Sarah Ryan collaborated with students to create a work of compassion and inspiration for the students of Lavallette Elementary School in Lavallette, NJ, who were displaced by Superstorm Sandy. Inspired by Jasper Johns' painting "Three Flags", WES art teacher Sarah Ryan and WES parents assembled sections created by each WES student into a piece of art, which was presented to the Lavallette students in December. "The pieces fit together perfectly," said Sarah Ryan. "We chose this painting because the flag represents coming

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Special Education in the District Stresses Inclusion

Dr. Megan McCullough -- in her first year as Director of Secondary Special Education -- and Gina Ross, Director of Elementary Special Education, have brought energy and fresh perspectives to the crucial work of WSSD's Office of Special Education (OSE). The team aims to better understand District students' needs, refine special education services and improve student progress documentation. The District is looking to build internal capacity in order to provide services through in-house resources rather than looking to outside sources. And perhaps most important, OSE leadership is making affirmative moves to empower students and their parents to identify priorities and help shape the direction of programs and services.

Nearly 20 percent of students in the Wallingford-Swarthmore School District are involved in the District's special education programs (a stable level, consistent with nearby districts.) Federal and Pennsylvania law requires that each student receive an appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment possible. Pennsylvania is mandated to comply with "Child Find" regulations by offering screening and evaluation processes designed to identify children with disabilities and refer them to intervention services and special education programs. WSSD provides screenings, evaluations, and appropriate programs for students who require these services.

Starting Early, and Following Through Mrs. Ross says: "We are aggressive at identifying and addressing needs early on. Children of any age are eligible, and parents as well as teachers can initiate the process of testing and

evaluation." Each child with special needs has an Individualized Education Program (IEP), which will provide a roadmap for the supports and services a student needs in order to make meaningful progress, with review and adjustment at least annually. Every student with an IEP is assigned a case manager, either a special ed teacher or a speech therapist. The case manager serves as the single point of contact for parents and other IEP team members.

Students receive a customized mixture of learning, autistic, emotional, and life skills supports and instruction. Their



IEPs lead to specific goals, and progress is continuously evaluated, though there is always room for improvement, Dr. McCullough says. "We are working to improve documentation so goals, academic standards and progress will be easier to understand and monitor."

The philosophy in WSSD has long been to ensure that even students with the most significant of disabilities have real opportunities for inclusion in regular activities with their peers. "Keeping students in the mainstream is recognized as a beneficial approach, and we do it in a meaningful way," Dr. McCullough says. At Strath Haven High School, the majority of supported students are in regular classes for most of the day, with sched-

uled access to support. An in-class support model is typical, but there is also a self-contained model for students needing research based interventions, Dr. McCullough says. "In these, students will receive intensive intervention in a short period in order to increase reading and math levels." Accountability for student performance levels has become especially critical in classes where state testing is administered under No Child Left Behind provisions.

If resources are not available within the District, the OSE must find and pay for an outside resource and provide transportation if necessary. The OSE and WSSD administration are looking to bring these capabilities in-house where possible, in the interest of cost savings and efficiency and to make sure students are receiving services in the least restrictive environment. "We use a variety of community based resources, and the ultimate goal is to build the capacity of our own staff and utilize the expertise of the staff members already working in the district," Dr. McCullough says. "We'd like to begin to use our own staff to provide social skills groups, social cognitions labs, emotional and behavioral support."

Crucial Intervals and Transitions

Before school age, children are served by the Delaware County Intermediate Unit, whose early intervention services transition into school-based programs as children enter kindergarten. (This transition time is beginning right now for next fall's kindergarteners.) Each transition throughout schooling is

an opportunity to assess and adjust programs serving a child. For instance, Mrs. Ross says, as students move through elementary school and prepare for middle school, some will go through more intensive instructional support “to close any achievement gaps in learning of the elementary curriculum.”

As a student with an IEP nears age 14 and the end of middle school, the high school transition process begins, says Mrs. Ross. “Apart from curriculum, we set goals for acquisition of life skills – responsibility and accountability -- as well as learning and work skills. Transition planning involves the school and the family in selecting among colleges based on supports offered.”

Dr. McCullough adds: “Just as college counseling is built into the Strath Haven culture, we have a transition coordinator who explores postsecondary and vocational options with special education students.” Some students are ready to graduate at age 18, while others continue to benefit from a mixture of services. A student who has turned 18 may spend half a day in functional reading and math classes, for instance, and the other half at a job, or in job training.

Empowering Students and Parents

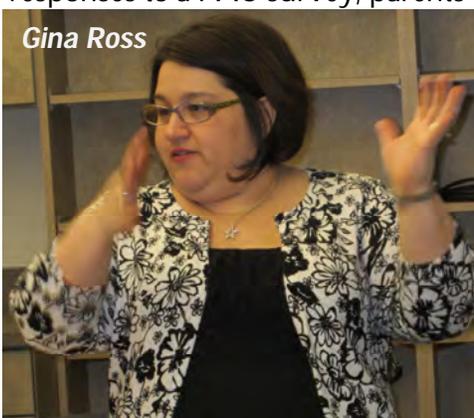
The OSE reconvened the Parent Advisory Council (PAC) last year as a forum to discuss responsibilities, values, goals and action steps. To get the ball rolling, the OSE shared four “Visions” including:

- Improving compliance and content quality of special education documents
- Increasing student achievement through a systematic assess-

ment, intervention and progress monitoring

- Improving parent engagement
- Developing emotional support programs for elementary and middle schools

“At the PAC meeting and in survey responses, many parents felt that we get the learning part of their disabilities, but reminded us that those disabilities don’t end when they leave the classroom, and that families need more training and knowledge too,” Dr. McCullough says. In nearly 100 responses to a PAC survey, parents



Gina Ross

expressed views on their children’s school life, selected areas in which training might be beneficial, and constituted several focus groups to recommend and institute changes in the way services and learning are delivered.

Mrs. Ross says: “These focus groups are an action-oriented collaboration, initially facilitated by OSE staff, with ongoing missions and duration up to the members of the groups.” Parent training sessions, too, initially will be led by District administration and staff, with the PA Education for All Coalition (PEAC) assisting, and parents ultimately leading training on parent-selected subjects. (See sidebar for session dates.)

“We know extracurriculars are so important to middle and high schoolers – not just being present but taking an active part,” Mrs. Ross says. “And at the PAC meeting in November, some parents said ‘Our kids have the same issue at the elementary level.’ That interest led to one of the focus group topics – Beyond the Classroom.”

Another community resource, Self-Advocates, are former special education students who will work with WSSD schools to speak with the PAC, faculty and students about life outside school, accessibility, and other realities of living with disabilities. Dr. McCullough says “Self-Advocates share what worked to help them mesh with their school’s cultural and extracurricular life.” She sees potential for Self-Advocates to influence students’ attitudes through involvement in Diversity Training and Diversity Days at the Middle and High Schools.



Upcoming Parent Training Sessions in the SHMS Library, 6:30 – 8 PM

March 18: Understanding psychosocial evaluations and building IEPs based on the findings

May 20: How to speak with your child about his or her disability

Upcoming Focus Groups in the Office of Special Education at SHMS, 4 – 6 PM

February 5: Maximizing the use of assistive technology in the classroom

February 6: Post-secondary transition

February 19: Beyond the classroom: Improving the school experience for students with disabilities

Training and Focus Groups are open to all, but please RSVP ASAP to pbrubaker@wssd.org

HSAs, PTOs Share Agendas, Ideas

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has a news vehicle of some type, and the trend is toward online delivery to parents. Email distribution has the advantages of being green, immediate and low-cost. It's an essential component of the emergency communications system, along with phone trees and text messaging. However, recent analysis showed that among SHMS and SHHS families, webmail messages from the HSAs were read and responded to at a very low rate, reminding us that for near term, at least, other communications channels have value. "The bulletin board at NPE is still important," said NPE HSA Co-President Meghan Whalen, even though NPE distributes a monthly newsletter and *This Week at NPE* emails to all households.

As the Middle and High Schools' websites at shmshomeandschool.org and shhshomeandschool.org have adopted a similar website format, plans are afoot to create a "family look" for the three elementary schools' websites, now at npepto.blogspot.com, srskids.org and weskids.org. The sites will also link to the existing Facebook pages for each school's PTO.

Fundraising: Each school produces an annual directory as a convenience for families and a fundraiser for HSAs/PTOs. By consolidating ad sales efforts and production/printing orders for all directories, the groups can improve cross-selling to realize more income, reduce costs and improve efficiency. On the production side, all directory editors can easily learn to use the free Mailchimp utility as a means to aggregate directory information, confirm listing information and ensure that families have opted into electronic communications.

Recognizing the threat of donor fatigue, leaders are reviewing the number and scale of fundraisers produced by PTOs and HSAs. The first step in optimizing the overall fundraising effort is underway: collation of a master calendar for schools across the District.



(L to R) Jennifer Fleming of SRS HSA; Jess Mudrick and Meghan Whalen of NPE PTO. **Photo by Colin Purrington**

Participation: With students constantly moving through the schools, engaging parents in the groups is a continuous recruitment challenge. Colin Purrington, a member of both the SHMS and SHHS HSAs, points out that HSAs may be overlooking half the potential talent among District parents. "We want to do more projects that get dads involved," Colin says. He aims to mobilize crews for work days on Grounds & Greens projects such as the siting of benches at WSSD gathering areas, which began recently with the installation of three in front of the High School. Colin suggests that parents can easily keep up with service opportunities and what's happening overall in the HSAs by signing up for email bulletins at the websites or by liking their pages on Facebook.

Members of the HSAs/PTOs serve on the District's Wellness Committee, which is translating its healthy eating initiatives into food service decisions by advising on the development of the request for proposal which will be the basis for catering contracts after 2013-2014.

The **NPE PTO** is integrally involved with administrators in planning school pickup and dropoff procedures during the impending construction project, which will begin in March and continue through next school year. With this initiative joining more than two dozen existing programs, fundraisers and activities, NPE's dynamic PTO has a continuing need for parent energy and expertise.

Following author visits by Daniel Handler and Adam Gidwitz last fall, the **WES PTO** is planning a third in May, to be paid for by the PTO's Dimensions in Art program — one of the many beneficiaries of WES fundraising. Co-chair Kelly Caulfield said: "We're having a family night at Oasis on February 13 and another at Rita's Water Ice in April. PTO member Celeste Sheehan edits a monthly newsletter, and we send a weekly WES Times email."



Got a bit of time to give? Help SHHS HSA's Grounds & Greens install more benches like these. **Photo by Colin Purrington**

Through the **SRS HSA**, parents are encouraged to offer professional and personal expertise in serving the as HSA officers, grade representatives and room parents, and to volunteer in the classroom, library and in enrichment programs. These enrichment opportunities for students include "Dimensions" programs in Art, in Sustainability, in Science, Technology and Math, in Social Studies and in Foreign Language. This last program, also known as Globetrotters, is fee-based and offers weekly classes in Spanish, Mandarin Chinese and French, before and after school, with up to three sequential levels of study available to SRS students. SRS parent Vippy Yee produces regular e-blast communications on news and special events – like the January 26 Spirit Night at IceWorks and February 8 Family Bingo Night fundraisers.

The **SHMS HSA** keeps parents connected to their children’s educational experience even as the classroom involves them less frequently. SHMS HSA co-chairs Marj Hatzell and Tracy Federico lead a team that operates events and other familiar fundraisers like Box Tops for Education. It also has innovated programs like the Parent Welcome Center, where HSA members welcome parents and staff to the Middle School for cookies and conversation, and the upcoming May 22 Dimensions in Living career day, which seeks parents to share insights and stories from their careers.

With the help of very active High School parents, **SHHS HSA** is organized into task-specific committees supporting such facets of the High School as ABC Scholars, Grounds & Green, and Hospitality. Committee and class representatives run specific activities per graduation year, networking with parents and students via Facebook pages. “Our monthly meetings are enhanced by the programs we plan in conjunction with Dr. Yannacone and her team,” said SHHS HSA President Sara McCullough. Open to all, coming programs include “The Ins and Outs of Course Selection and Scheduling” February 13 and “Finding the Right Balance in Raising a Teen...and Strategies for Looking Ahead to Summer” March 14.

Helping Sandy Relief Efforts? It’s Elementary.

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together as a whole to make things happen, and as a WES community we are coming together to support a school just like ours that is in need.”

Also at WES, Mrs. Sujata Gaur and her second grade class held their 7th annual charity Milk Stand before Thanksgiving. WES students were able to buy snack of a cup of milk and a chocolate chip cookie for \$1, with the proceeds (\$1,500) sent to help reestablish Hugh J. Boyd Elementary School in Seaside Heights, NJ, which was ruined by Sandy. Cookies were donated by WES parents, and the milk was donated by the school’s faculty and staff.

Photo by Celeste Sheehan.



As part of their learning about "Nutrition: The 5 Basic Food Groups", second grade classes at Nether Providence Elementary have designated a “Fresh Food Friday” every month, and are sponsoring a schoolwide Healthy Snacks Fundraiser in the fall and spring. In the first fundraiser, the children raised \$400 for the Hurricane Sandy relief efforts of the American Red Cross, which they presented to American Red Cross representative Michelle Wigante, who reciprocated with a certificate of the ARC’s gratitude. **Photo by Lois Galli.**





Members of the cross-country team shivered together at the recognition night for Haven's exceptional girls sports teams this fall.

Junior Sharay Barnes (9) spiked while seniors Bailey Woods (13) and Kelsey Leddy (6) covered the volleyball court.

Photo by Caroline Foley



SHHS Girls Teams Dominate Central League

Last fall, the central story in the Central League was the dominance of Strath Haven High School girls teams. Toward the end of this extraordinary autumn, the four teams were celebrated between games of the (then undefeated) soccer and field hockey teams at George L. King Memorial Field...

Hockey coach and SHHS psychology teacher Amanda Lawson said: "I put the girls' recognition night together to honor the four teams. We don't always celebrate our athletes publicly, beyond the awards given out by the local newspapers. Such success among all four female teams from a school our size is really remarkable."

Ironically, the hockey team lost in overtime that night, but finished the season second in the Central League, and was awarded the #10 seed in PIAA District I AAA playoffs. The Panthers made it to the second round, losing again in overtime to Haverford HS. Several players were honored at the end of the season: Jessica Borbee was named first team All Central League, All Delco and All Southeast PA (the first Strath Haven player ever so named.) Rebecca Lucci was first team All Central League and honorable mention All Delco. Casey Oehler was second team All Central League and All Delco. Alex Bonser was honorable mention All Central League and All Delco.

Soccer coach Gino Miraglia said: "The girls had an amazing season, finishing with an overall record of 20 wins and 1 loss. We were crowned Central League champions for the third consecutive season. We won Strath Haven's first-ever AAA District Championship, defeating Downingtown West 6-0. Our only loss, 1-0, came in the first round of states, to state runner-up, Cumberland Valley."

Haven scored 66 goals and only allowed five, a school record, thanks to senior goalkeeper Krissy Welsh's 91% save rate. Senior Morgan Glassford led the county in goals 22 and junior Kristen Miller was third in the county with 18. Glassford was first team All Central League, All County, All State, All Region (PA, MD, NJ and NY) and was recognized as the Delaware County Times's Player of the Year. Welsh and Miller were also first team all Central League. They were joined on the All County team by senior Kirsten Wilhelmsen and juniors Allie Wilson and Sophie Murphy.



Field hockey and soccer teams went deep in post-season tournaments. Photos by Jack Huemmler (left) and Bill Carey (below.)



30 Years on the March to Excellence

A generation of Strath Haven marching band members celebrated Jack Hontz's career recently on the occasion of his thirtieth anniversary as band director.

"It was a fantastic surprise for Jack -- he had no inkling," said Strath Haven Middle School marching band director Henry Pearlberg, who conducted the stealthy operation to assemble eighty of Mr. Hontz's alumni musicians for a reunion following the Thanksgiving holiday.

As the marching band's annual Showcase for parents and students kicked off in the high school gym, 80 former drum majors and band members assembled in the gym lobby, filing into the gym after the first number as they were introduced by Mr. Pearlberg. The drum majors conducted the "Minnesota Rouser," with many of the returning band members joined in a jam session.

At an earlier reunion at the Middle School, the eighty band veterans from Jack's 30 year career at Strath Haven signed a photo, which was one of several gifts presented to Mr. Hontz at the Showcase. Perhaps the biggest gift of the day was announced by Principal Dr. MaryJo Yannacone: a collective gift of more than \$3,200 donated by band alumni and former administrators, which was given in Mr. Hontz's honor to the Team Up For Turf fundraiser. A plaque at George L. King Field will honor Jack Hontz, who has spent thousands of afternoons and evenings there building Strath Haven's Band into one of the best in the land.

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Cross-country coach Bill Coren's team had a superb season, defying the coach's pre-season expectations. Improving on last-season's second place finish, the team went undefeated in Central League competition, winning the league and repeating as Delaware County champions. The Haven harriers finished fifth at Districts, qualifying for the PIAA State meet and forcing Coren to make good on an early-season wager.

"The team rode to Hershey in a pink limo because I lost a bet we made in August, when I said that they wouldn't qualify," Coren said. It was worth Coren's investment in the ride to Hershey, as the team finished 16th in the AAA championships. Junior Samantha Snyder was named to the All County first team. She was joined on the All Central League first team by senior Hannah Herrera, junior Alice Puchalsky and freshman Maia Mesyngier.

The Strath Haven **volleyball** team continued its dominant play of recent years, finishing with a record of 21 and 5 and earning a top seed in the District One tournament, and a second consecutive trip to the State Tournament. From 2009 through 2012, the team has won 80 games and lost just 17, making the Central League championship match all four years and taking two league championships.

Coach Kevin Haney commented: "This season we had a long, arduous battle with injuries, but we are able to string together 19 consecutive wins and finished the season ranked #1 in the Daily Times 'Super 7'. Juniors Sharay Barnes and Alice Roberts were named to the All-state team, and Barnes was named Daily Times player of the year (the 3rd straight year that honor went to a Haven player.) I am proud of what the players were able to accomplish, and I am excited for next season. We bring back--and bring in--a talented group that knows what it takes to win championships."



Middle School Band Director Henry Pearlberg (l.) orchestrated the event honoring his High School counterpart Jack Hontz.

There were no red flags to alert Jack Hontz to the surprise celebration, featuring current and past members of the SHHS marching band and band front. Photos by Amy Kidd.



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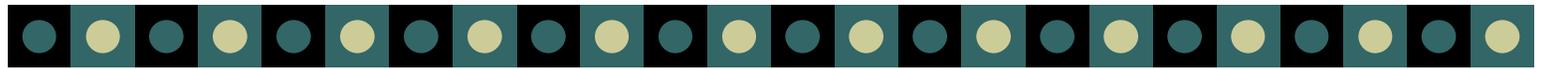
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Late last year, four distinguished alumni of Strath Haven, Swarthmore and Nether Providence High Schools were celebrated for their addition to the Wall of Honor at Strath Haven High School. Carin Ann Clauss (NPHS 1956) is a Professor of Law at the University of Wisconsin Law School and a longtime leader of the Labor Law Bar. Barbara L. Bird Paradine ((SHS 1960) is President and Broker of Record for Baird and Bird, Inc. Real Estate in Media. Calvin A. Coleman II (SHHS 1984) is an internationally known professional artist. David L. Buck (SHHS 2000) is Principal Flute of the Detroit Symphony Orchestra.

Above: Prior to the unveiling of their plaques on the Wall of Honor in the high school's Great Hall, the honorees were introduced by SHHS Principal Dr. MaryJo Yannacone and faculty members, and led in the SHHS Alma Mater by the Silvertones. *Right:* Honoree Calvin A. Coleman II browsed the plaques of previous honorees. **Photos by Lia Featherstone**



Are You Up 4 Arts4Smarts?

The Foundation for Wallingford Swarthmore Schools hosts its second Art4Smarts fundraiser on March 9, 7-10 PM at Clothier Hall, Swarthmore College. Parents and neighbors can help students in the District while they enjoy a lively evening out. For your \$25 ticket, you'll enjoy fine wines and local beers, cheeses and crudités, live music and lively companionship. Ticket sales and auction proceeds (last year, more than \$12,500) help the Foundation fund technology initiatives and grants for Wallingford-Swarthmore School District students and teachers. "Corporations, parents, teachers and administrators have contributed items and services to the silent auction, and have been really supportive,"



Members of the SRS Reading Olympics team dig into new books funded by a grant from the Foundation. **Photo by Eric McElroy**

Foundation President Frannie Reilly said. To order tickets for the event and check out featured live and silent auction items, visit arts4smarts.org.

The Foundation recently awarded its 2012-2013 cycle of grants to teachers in the District, funding special projects and teaching tools in the arts, music, science, reading, math, environmental science, physical education and technology fields. Thirteen awards totaling nearly \$12,000 will be made in time for programs to be carried out during the spring semester of this school year. Teachers from all three WSSD elementary schools, Strath Haven Middle and High Schools submitted a total of 24 grant applications. For more information on the Foundation and the grants, visit supportwssd.org.