education news

an official publication of the Little Falls Township Public Schools

LITTLE FALLS TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

April 2020

School budget at 2% cap

Spending plan allocates funds for added instructional space, repairs, and better tech

THE Little Falls Board of Education tentatively adopted the district's spending plan for the 2020-21 school year at its meeting on March 17. The 2020-21 budget is at the 2% spending cap levy set by the state and includes funds for instructional and facilities improvements. The final budget hearing will be held April 28.

"This budget keeps costs down but makes important upgrades to all three schools," said Tracey Marinelli, superintendent of schools. "We've had a great deal of academic success in the past few years. We need to maintain our focus on providing students with what they need to grow and learn, and ensure they're ready to take on the challenges of high school when they leave our doors."

Elle DiNardo and Bobby Barraco lean on cans donated in the recent food drive

Souper Bowl helps those in need

Students and staff members at School No. 3 collected nearly 600 cans of soup and other canned items in their annual Souper Bowl drive. The collection, organized by the school council, lasted three weeks and ended on the Friday before the big game. The food was donated to St. George Antiochian Orthodox Christian Church.

Budget Highlights

- **one math teacher** added at School No. 1, allowing the school to double the amount of time that students spend in math class per day
- new **Chromebooks and computer tablets** to replace aging equipment
- **additional instructional space** constructed at School No. 3 for multiple class instruction and activities involving science, technology, engineering, and math
- **roof and exterior repairs** at School No. 3
- renovations of some **bathrooms** in all three schools
- improved **computer networking** and WiFi
- redesigned **website** to improve communication and access to information
- new **tables, chairs, and other furniture** for English classes at School No. 1

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MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

COVID-19 will not deter our mission

The COVID-19 virus hit the pause button on much of society; however, instruction and learning are continuing unabated in the district.

Though physically separated, students and teachers use technology to bridge the physical divide and maintain quality teaching and learning. Various methods are being employed including video conferencing, student and teacher collaboration and communication using Google's suite of educational tools, and the use of educational websites for research and skill practice. The virtual lessons developed by teachers are engaging and thorough, and students are staying positive and working hard as we continue through the curriculum.

On behalf of the Board of Education, I would like to thank our teachers, students, parents, support staff, bus drivers, nurses, and administrators for their efforts over the past few weeks in dealing with this crisis. A special shout-out is due to our drivers who personally deliver 170 breakfasts and 170 lunches every weekday to children who receive free and reduced-price meals.

Please follow the district on **Twitter @LFschools** for all updates. And please remember the virus prevention protocols and to stay positive during these unsettling times. As we say at the end of the morning announcements at School No.1, today and every day is a great day to be a hornet.

– **Tracey Marinelli**

Sydney Sopov shows off the cereal box she created for Annie Oakley, the famous figure she studied

Famous figures visit No. 3

HISTORY recently came alive at School No. 3 when the fourth grade presented a living "wax" museum in the school gym. 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.

At the touch of a button in front of each display, a motionless young performer sprang to life and delivered a short informational speech to parents and visiting staff members.

While the speeches were brief, there was so much learning that went on behind the scenes. The event was the culmination of weeks of reading, research, and writing.

The students also applied what they had learned by creating cereal boxes which described the history and accomplishments of the celebrities they chose to study.

Among the luminaries researched and portrayed were Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Steve Jobs, Annie Oakley, and Dr. Seuss.

'Live from the Hive' begins

SCHOOL No. 1 is on the air. Well, on the internet. The school recently launched a monthly podcast which discusses a variety of topics such as trends in video games, fashion, music, sports, and school news. Faculty interviews are also a part of the show.

"Podcasts are the new hot thing out there, so we thought why not create one about the middle school," said Jim Delfino, the science teacher who serves as podcast adviser with math teacher Vincent Plateroti.

Three eighth-graders are regularly involved in the production. Henry Baer and Lena Uzelac serve as on-air hosts; Kathryn Dillman produces the show.

The experience provides real-life experience in front of and behind the mic. It's a taste of the broadcasting industry which the students might want to further explore at Passaic Valley Regional High School next year.

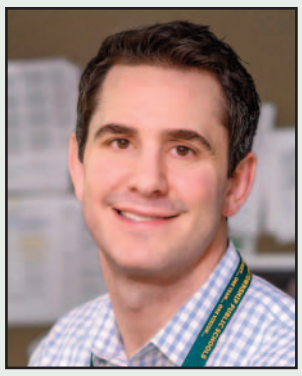
"It's a really unique opportunity and being a podcaster has been on my bucket list for a while," said Lena. "I really learn all that happens behind the scenes. It gives me an idea of what broadcasting is like in case I want to do it in the future."

Podcast hosts Lena Uzelac and Henry Baer record a segment of "Live from the Hive"

Twelve eighth-graders auditioned to be a part of the podcast. During the audition, each one made a demo recording in which they answered questions posed by the two faculty advisers. The students who were not chosen for the top three regular positions participate as guests in various special segments.

Each podcast runs from 30-40 minutes. You can find "Live from the Hive" on Apple Podcasts and Spotify.

New business admin joins district



Christopher Jones joined the district as its new business administrator, taking the post January 1. Mr. Jones spent two years as business administrator at the High Bridge School District. Prior to joining High Bridge, he spent 11 years working in accounting and corporate finance, including four years at JPMorgan Chase.

Mr. Jones has his bachelor's degree and master's in business administration, both from Drexel University. He currently serves as a board member on the Drexel Athletic Director Leadership Council.

Little Falls video shown at film festival

"Everyone Counts," a video produced by the district in association with Kahwaty Media, was streamed during the Garden State Film Festival's digital screening on March 28. The video was slated to be shown at the live festival before COVID-19 concerns necessitated its cancellation.

The video underscores the district's motto of unity: One District... One Team... One Vision.

Aurel Cena delivers coffee to Lynette Fata

Learning to run their own business

Eighth-graders in the gifted and talented program at School No. 1 have teamed with special education students to run a business.

Once every two months the students operate Hornets Coffee and Cake, a cart that sells snacks to the school's staff. The kids work together to plan the menu, take and organize orders, and analyze costs. They also shop together for products.

"The program is all about working together and inclusiveness," said G&T teacher Bethanne Strippoli, who organizes the program with teacher Melissa Natale. "The students learn what it's like to be a business owner and to feel a part of something bigger than themselves."

The program was created three years ago.

Technology that engages the mind

TEACHERS at School No. 2 are using two new instructional tools that harness that power of technology to engage students.

Seesaw

Seesaw is an online platform that allows students to create and demonstrate their learning in many ways. They can take photos, record video and audio, draw, label, and write. The application can be used in some way for every subject.

> ***"Seesaw allows kids to use technology to put their own spin on things, and encourages them to be creative in different ways."***
>
> **Cortney Caruso**
> *Teacher*

All first-graders use Seesaw and kindergartners are just beginning to learn to use it. Walk into a room and you might see students recording in their own words a classic fairy tale or looking at photos and labeling the shapes they find. Or just doing something for fun such as decorating jack-o'-lanterns.

"Seesaw allows kids to use technology to put their own spin on things, and encourages them to be creative in different ways," said Cortney Caruso, who co-teaches first grade with Christina Montesano. "They take the general directions we give them and make their own learning from it. It's amazing to see what they can do."

An important part of Seesaw is parent involvement. Students can send an email or text to their parents to show what they're working on. Parents can then access Seesaw and reply back to their kids during the school day. It's a way to keep mom and dad in the loop, and make them a part of their child's everyday learning.

"That communication is encouraging to kids, knowing they have this real audience out there," said Shana Opdenberg, media specialist.

Qballs

Qballs are giving students a chance to speak up and be heard. The virtually indestructible balls used in some classrooms are about the size of basketballs and have microphones and speakers built in. Kids love to hear their voices projected from the Qball's speaker or from the classroom speaker system which a Qball can wirelessly connect to.

That's it. That's all a Qball does. But like all instructional tools, it's how teachers use the Qball that is making an impact. Teachers have kids give their opinions and read written work right into the ball, for example. Or they can just ask kids to toss the ball to other students and ask them rapid-fire questions about likes or dislikes. Throwing the ball adds physical motion too, which also helps to increase engagement.

"We have to remind ourselves that they're eight years old and they think the Qball is so fun to use in class," said Kerianne Brown who, with Rhonda Parma, teaches a second grade class. "If they're answering a question, they want to answer on a Qball and hear their voice. We find that children who are normally nervous to speak in front of the class and who are less likely to participate or raise their hands actually feel much more confident with the Qball."

The Qballs were purchased using grant money from the Little Falls Education Foundation.

Left, *Michael Kot throws a Qball to Kaitlin Dammers;* ***below,*** *George Mugelston and Kaylee Sproviero take photos of stories they wrote for upload to Seesaw*

Issa Sharif gets a head start on a chapter assigned for that night

Reading initiative completed

SCHOOL No. 2 recently completed a whole-school reading initiative designed to involve parents in the learning process. Students in each grade were given copies of the same book to read at home with their parents as a family. Follow-up activities were then completed in class; students studied vocabulary words and engaged in cross-curricular activities which focused on the book's plot and themes.

"The program sparked conversations between students and their parents that built understanding," said Principal Jill Castaldo.

According to research, reading aloud with children sharpens their imagination and engenders in them a love of reading. In addition, it strengthens the emotional bonds between the adult reader and the child.

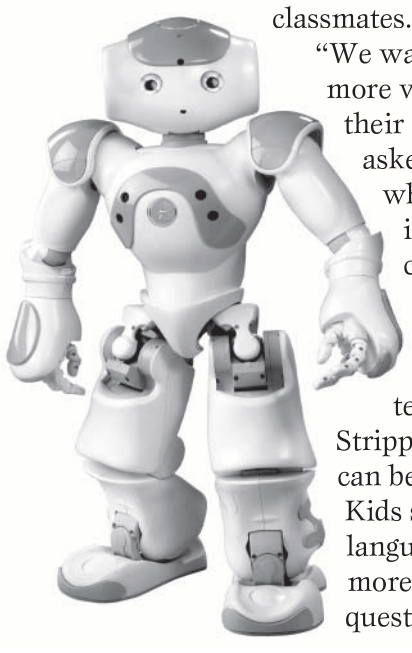
Parents received schedules and were asked to read the selected chapters/pages to their children by the dates indicated.

Kindergarten read "Mr. Popper's Penguins," first grade read "The World According to Humphrey," and second grade tackled "Friendship According to Humphrey."

This is the third year in which the program has been run.

Students become the teachers

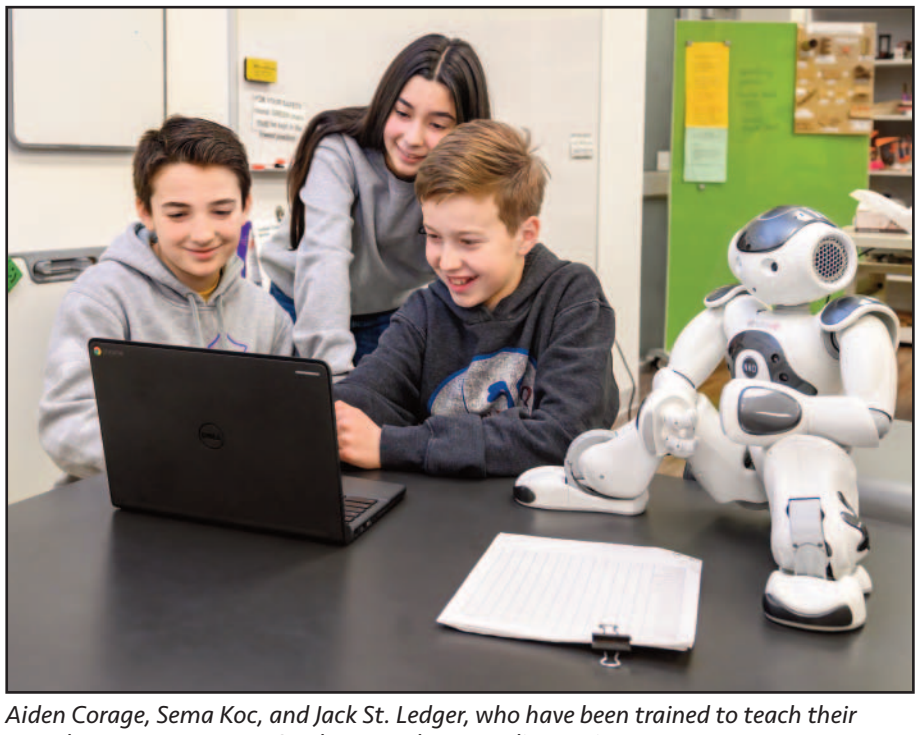
STUDENTS in the gifted and talented program at School No. 1 are teaching their peers how to program NAO robots. Several seventh- and eighth-graders were trained in the various capabilities of the 24-inch-tall articulating robots and the computer coding that makes them tick. The students sat next to five teachers in a training session led by company representatives and are now passing their knowledge on to their classmates.



"We want students to have more voice and choice in their education so we asked for volunteers who were interesting in learning how to code the robots and then be responsible for teaching others," said G&T teacher Bethanne Strippoli. "Peer teaching can be very powerful. Kids share a common language and often feel more comfortable asking questions and interacting with each other."

Having multiple subject matter experts in a single classroom also allows those learning the material to receive more individualized instruction.

The district has three NAO robots. They can walk, talk, sing, and dance. G&T students are working in small groups and use laptops to code the robots with a graphical drag-and-drop interface. The robots are being programmed to introduce assemblies and to go into classrooms and interact with students.



Aiden Corage, Sema Koc, and Jack St. Ledger, who have been trained to teach their peers how to program NAO robots, work on a coding project

"The opportunity to work with the NAO robots is giving my students a hands-on learning experience in coding," said Mrs. Strippoli. "It's also teaching the students to work collaboratively with each other and communicate effectively, which are valuable life skills."

Programming the robots is a major unit that will be explored in G&T classes for the remainder of the school year.

Contributing to the world

FIRST-graders at School No. 2 are raising money to buy a farm animal for a family in a developing nation. The students are participating in Read to Feed, a fundraiser that helps families in need and allows kids to practice key literacy skills. In Read to Feed, contributors donate money for each book their sponsoring student reads.

The students learned of the huge benefit that an animal can make to a family and community after reading "One Hen: How One Small Loan Made a Big Difference," the real-life inspired story of an African boy who starts a poultry farm after receiving a single chicken.

"We need kids to understand that they can make a difference," said media specialist Shana Opdenberg who has been working with first grade classes on the initiative. "With this project, the students will make a tangible impact on the lives of others."

Dominic DeCaito and Anthony Garcia hold drawings of their breakfasts which they shared with students in Pakistan

The first-graders are working on the fundraiser with students from a school in Punjab, Pakistan. The two schools were paired together through the International Education and Resource Network, an organization that connects classes from different areas of the world. Students in partner schools engage in collaborative projects and share information about their lives, countries, and cultures.

Through videos, presentations, and photos shared through iEARN's online platform, the first-graders also interacted with their international peers and learned about music in Brazil and holidays in Russia.

LEADing the way... Little Falls Police Officer John Vanek works with a student at School No. 3. Officers from the department teach district third-graders and seventh-graders proven strategies that promote positive behavior, help kids develop healthy relationships, and help them resist substance abuse. The programs were developed by the Law Enforcement Against Drugs organization.

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