

# Advocate

Connect Unite Succeed



The newsletter of the  
Owen J. Roberts  
School District

Fall 2019

Inspiring Each Student for Success Today and Greatness Tomorrow

## National Blue Ribbon School

West Vincent Elementary School, has been deemed a National Blue Ribbon School. On September 26, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos recognized 362 schools as National Blue Ribbon Schools for 2019. The recognition is based on a school's overall academic performance.

"We recognize and honor your important work in preparing students for successful careers and meaningful lives," said U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos in a video message to the honorees. "As a National Blue Ribbon School, your school demonstrates what is possible when committed educators hold all students and staff to high standards and create vibrant, innovative cultures of teaching and learning."

The coveted National Blue Ribbon Schools award affirms the hard work of educators, families, and communities in creating safe and welcoming schools



where students master challenging and engaging content.

According to Mr. Edward J. Smith, Principal of West Vincent Elementary School, "I am blessed and honored to be a small part of the West Vincent school community. The

National Blue-Ribbon Award is a well-deserved recognition to our staff, students, and every family that has been a part of West Vincent Elementary School. Additionally, the National Blue-Ribbon Award is recognizing not just West Vincent, but the entire Owen J. Roberts School District."

Now in its 37th year, the program allows up to 420 schools to be nominated each year. The Department invites National Blue Ribbon School nominations from the top education official in all states, the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, the Department of Defense Education Activity, and the Bureau of Indian Education. Private schools are nominated by The Council for American Private Education (CAPE).

On November 14 and 15, the Secretary and the Department of Education will celebrate with 312 public and 50 non-public school honorees at an awards ceremony in Washington, D.C.

## Delayed School Start

In 2018, the Owen J. Roberts Board of Directors Pupil Services Committee initiated a community investigation on the issue of adolescent sleep health. This followed a sleep health study in 2016-2017, at which time the current Board of Directors opted not to change any school start times, but to continue to expand cyber and hybrid course offerings, continue to explore flexible scheduling for secondary students, and bolster health curriculum with sleep hygiene topics.

In the fall of 2018, the district held two community forums open to any parents, students, staff, and community members. The groups gathered to discuss the issue and formulate, through guided focus groups, an action plan for Board consideration moving forward. Based on the input received from the community, the district website was updated with research and articles about sleep health, and in February, 2019, an open information session about current schedule, budgeting, transportation, and academic programming options for students was held. From these meetings, a task force was formed and members of the community participated and worked on submitting proposals to the Pupil Services Committee regarding possible scheduling options including a delayed start, a flexible schedule, and, of course, remaining status quo.

There were task force meetings in April and May, 2019, in which community members assisted in further developing proposals. Based on the input from the community meetings, two models were

prepared—flexible scheduling and delayed start. The district administrative team worked out details including scheduling, transportation, cost, staffing, etcetera, for each model.

The flex schedule model consists of furthering on-line and hybrid classes as well as scheduling around study halls, team times, and more. Transportation would be provided for those coming late. For the delayed start model, all school start times, K-12, would be pushed back 30 minutes. Costs are defined with each model and could range from approximately \$250,000 to \$1 million per year.

Based on Pupil Services Committee feedback, next steps include an expert speaker, Dr. Wendy Troxel, and more data collection from all stakeholders via an electronic survey/questionnaire. If a change in school start schedules were to occur in 2020-2021, a decision would need to be made in January 2020 for budgeting timeline reasons.

The Pupil Services Committee members have been well informed and directly involved in this process as board members participate in community meetings and discuss at the monthly committee meetings. Throughout the process, all community stakeholders

Please offer your feedback by completing a survey at [www.ojrdsd.com](http://www.ojrdsd.com)



have been welcome to participate in the process. All meeting notes, models, costs, and research articles are posted on the district website under Departments, select Student Services.

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# Google Classroom By Mike Brilla

One thing of which I am certain is that songwriter Jerry Ragovy was not an educator! While Ragovy wrote a number of popular songs in the '60s and '70s, none was more famous than "Time is on my Side." This may ring true in terms of love and romance, but anyone involved in education knows that time most certainly is never on our side! It's this constant search to save time that led me down the long and winding road to Google Classroom in my own teaching. Over the past few years, our middle school has increasingly turned towards using Google Classroom to help drive our instruction and aide in student-learning, so we thought it would be good to explain our "why." More than anything else, Google Classroom provides a time-saving platform that allows for the development of career-ready skills while fostering an environment in which learning is visible by all.

When asked what they liked about Google Classroom, nearly all the middle school teachers commented on its ability to save them time. Whether it's through the automation of simple processes such as answering questions, grading multiple-choice assessments, or decreasing the time spent making and handing out paper copies of work, Classroom has certainly been able to save vast amounts of time. Many teachers commented that the time saved in these activities allows them to spend more time connecting with their students and providing meaningful feedback. Other teachers noted the ability of Classroom to allow for learning beyond the traditional boundaries of the classroom and school day.

In addition to time, another recurring theme when asked "why Google Classroom," was its ability to help prepare students for the ever-changing world. In a recent study conducted

by *The Economist*, 52% of executives surveyed said that students graduating today and entering the workforce are hampering the ability of companies to grow because of their lack of skills that are transferable to the workplace. In today's ever-changing society, it's important that we are thinking about how best to prepare our students for a future workplace that might not even exist yet. As seventh-grade teacher Zach Hoagland put it, "Google Classroom enables us to better prepare our students for the future workplace." According to Hoagland, "in today's society, one of the 21st century skills necessary... is to organize information online... Google Classroom provides a platform to help students practice the skills of digital literacy and organization."

In addition to allowing teachers to save time and practice real-world skills, Google Classroom also helps to make learning visible by the teacher

and families. More than one teacher commented on the ability to make, edit, and revise student work in real time because of Google Classroom. What better way for learning to take place than in the moment? Furthermore, the increased use of Google Classroom allows for a more transparent classroom--one in which parents/guardians, students, and teachers can easily see what the students are doing in class.

It's an exciting time to be a student and teacher at OJRMS! As we continue our journey to a one-to-one school next year, we are finding more benefits and advantages to using Google Classroom and other Google Apps for Education in our school. Through Google Classroom our teachers have been able to save time, teach more authentic skills, and make the learning process more visible for all stakeholders.

## French Creek Collects Over 2,500 Items

Throughout the month of October, OJR schools and business offices host an annual "Make A Difference Day" food drive to support the Coventry Food Pantry. The goal of this community service project is to fill an entire school bus with donated non-perishable items. Student groups such as K-Kids at the elementary level, and the Animal Study Club at the high school, take responsibility for advertising and coordinating efforts within each building.

French Creek students and staff learned the Food Pantry's shelves were literally bare this fall, and the pantry was in dire need of food and supplies. As a result, French Creek K-Kids and their advisor, Mrs. Jessica Hengst, became determined to fill the shelves once more for community members in need.

Students visited classrooms urging others to bring in donated items. Individual classrooms set goals related to the number of items each classroom would collect, and students celebrated proudly each time a goal was met.

Excitement began to build as the first table in the main lobby filled with donations and a second table was needed. Boxes and bags began overflowing onto the lobby floor. Former French Creek kindergarten teacher, Lesia Hyrsio, assisted by securing personal donations from management at the Phoenixville ACME who provided several cases of breakfast-related foods.

Ultimately, the French Creek school community collected over 2,500 items to help replenish the Food Pantry's



shelves. The determination from students, and support from parents and teachers was overwhelming,

and most importantly, students felt tremendous pride knowing they were helping others in need.

## Hybrid Courses

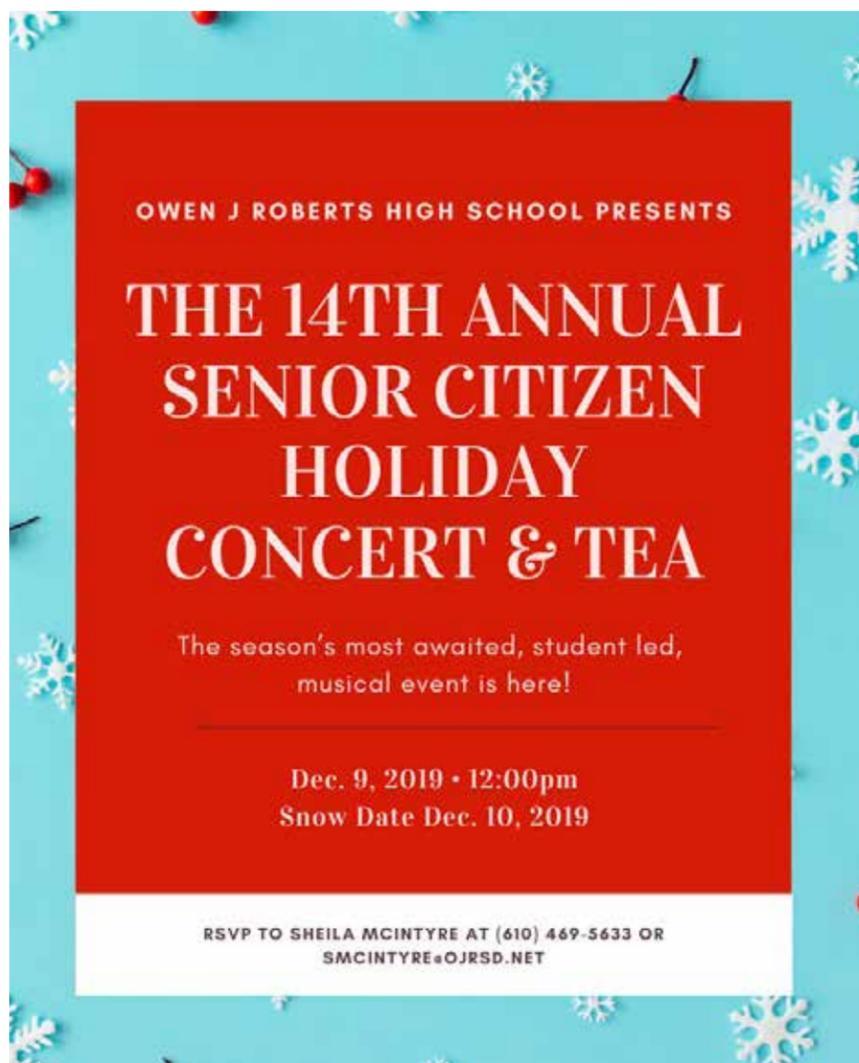
Many Owen J. Roberts High School students look to challenge themselves beyond traditional classes and take Hybrid Courses. Owen J. Roberts High School currently offers various hybrid courses that include College Prep and Honors Literature of Change, Honors Algebra 2, College Prep Statistics and many more. Hybrid courses meet two days in a traditional classroom with the remainder of the instruction and work taking place online. During the online time, students work on worksheets, reading assignments, homework, and other assignments. Classroom time is reserved for projects and group activities as well as work directly with their teacher and peers.

The structure of a hybrid course allows a student to take on the responsibilities of taking their notes off of the videos that are provided to them from the teacher. Students also gather structured skills that will be valuable to them when they go off to college and in their future careers.

By taking hybrid courses, students gather the skills of time management and taking ownership of their learning as well as gather questions to be able to ask the teacher when they meet in the classroom.

With the mixture of face-to-face and online instructional time, students earn the flexibility to learn concepts on their own time, at their own pace, yet have the support of the teacher when needed.

Students that benefit the most from hybrid courses are those who want a head start on college and who can manage their time wisely. A hybrid course is also beneficial for students who wish to explore online classes while still attend a traditional high school. Hybrid courses may allow additional flexibility with a student's time. A hybrid course is an excellent transition from the conventional structure of learning to the more unstructured setting a student may find in college.



# Math Workshop By Dennis Fletcher

When you think about your experiences in a traditional mathematics classroom you may remember sitting in rows and practicing math problems in a teacher centered classroom. In OJRSD elementary schools, math classrooms look different than what many of us experienced as students. Many of our K-6 teachers make use of the “Math Workshop Model” to deliver their instruction.

Math workshop is a model that allows teachers to meet with small groups of students during the lesson in an effort to differentiate instruction based on student need. The typical math workshop lesson begins with whole group instruction in the form of mini lesson where the teacher introduces the teaching point to the students. This is often done through a discovery approach where students come up with the big idea on their own.

During the second part of math workshop, teachers will work with small groups of students for about

10-15 minutes while other students move through a list of activities in stations or rotations. This is probably the most powerful portion of the lesson. While working with students in small group, the teacher is able to work closely with them on targeted skill-based instruction. During this time the teacher can engage each student, monitor their work, and provide appropriate intervention. Working in small groups also gives students more confidence in explaining their thinking and sharing their strategies for solving problems.

While the teacher works with each small group one at a time other students engage in completing their must do's. They work independently, in pairs, or in small groups to practice concepts directly taught in the lesson, practice math facts, review old concepts, and play Everyday Math games.

At the end of every math workshop is a time for reflection. Usually, the whole class is brought back together for a group discussion of the lesson objective.

Teachers ask questions about the big ideas from the lesson, important vocabulary, and how the lesson connects to upcoming concepts. Students discuss in pairs what they learned and then share that information with their teacher.



The math workshop model is an effective way for our teachers to deliver the concepts that our students are expected to learn. In this student-centered approach, our teachers can facilitate learning while keeping

student engagement high in the classroom. Students are able to get focused attention each day from their teachers in order to foster their curiosity and strengthen their mathematical foundation.

## Teachers Present at Excellence Fair

Students and staff from around the state lined the Great Lobby on Wednesday and Thursday at the Education Excellence Fair for the 2019 PASA-PSBA School Leadership Conference to talk with attendees about exemplary programs. Two teachers from East Vincent Elementary School shared strategies for creating a healthy social-emotional classroom environment. Mrs. Joanna Burns and Mrs. Shawn Lavelle may have students in grades 1 and 5 respectively, but their classrooms parallel one another in their social-emotional approach. “It is really about bringing the mind and the heart together by focusing on the whole child,” the teachers said. East Vincent Elementary teachers use calming corners and practice morning classroom meetings and Mindful Mondays. Their staff is very conscious of meeting students’ emotional needs understanding that the transition from weekend or holiday, back to the structure of school, may be stressful

### Social Emotional Learning



for some children. By implementing soft start strategies such as calming music and dim lights, learners can shed anxiety and get comfortable and ready to learn.

Mrs. Lavelle and Mrs. Burns shared many practices and tools at the Excellence Fair that could be utilized in any classroom. One strategy is the use of morning slides each day to

allow students to walk into a peaceful classroom and leave their worries at the door. Morning slides help students come in and follow a routine without having to ask the teacher, “What’s next?” Classroom calm down areas are a place in the classroom where a student can take a few minutes to de-stress without having to leave the learning environment.

Teaching coping strategies and de-escalation methods increase learning productivity. Mrs. Burns and Mrs. Lavelle also utilize learning bins. Social-emotional practices, such as morning play, are integrated into the school day. They are not “extra” activities, but rather ways of integrating social skills, collaboration, and creativity into the day to engage students. Sensory bins help students with self-regulation. Mrs. Lavelle and Mrs. Burns demonstrated different ways to teach students to use tools to support breathing for regulation. Learning to control breathing controls cortisol levels and allows students to transition from a stressful zone to the “green zone” where they are do their best learning. Teachers at East Vincent have found that many escalated behaviors may be avoided by having calming tools, strategies and areas available. Check out their interview on the Success Starts Here website at <https://t.co/RTC1qA3fDe>

## Graduation Requirement Change

Throughout the last school year, a committee of teachers and administrators reviewed the current courses available for high school students, specifically courses at the College Prep level. The committee made recommendations to the High School administrative team to make changes that would offer more flexibility for students as they prepare for their education beyond high school. Currently all students must earn 4 credits in English, 4 credits in mathematics, and 3 credits in each of science and social studies. The recommended change would be for students to earn a minimum of 3 credits in mathematics and a fourth credit in another academic subject or elective area that would be more in keeping with their post-secondary plans. Making this change gives greater flexibility to students enrolled in many of the high school programs including Advanced Placement, International Baccalaureate, STEM, Career and Technical programs, Art, Business, Music, and Technology Education. Students will be able to take a fourth credit in any subject area will have greater flexibility in their schedules for their senior year. The Board Curriculum Committee and the Board Legislative and Policy Committee reviewed recommended changes for the 2020-2021 High School Program of Studies and this potential change for graduation requirements in November. If the School Board approves this recommendation, all high school students will begin with the new graduation requirements next school year.

## Safety Addition

We are pleased to announce the addition of Officer William Burdette, School Police Officer. A local resident and Wildcat supporter, Officer Burdette started working in our District on November 4. He has a Bachelor’s Degree in Criminal Justice Administration from Mansfield University. After completing training at the Pennsylvania State Police Academy, he worked as a Trooper for 25 years, retiring in 2011. This role encompassed patrol, narcotics investigation, criminal investigations and working as a Corporal for the K-9 Division. Officer Burdette also spent time as an instructor for canine training and as a guest instructor for criminal justice programs. His most recent position was as the School Police Officer for Governor Mifflin School District. In this role, Officer Burdette had the opportunity to strike a balance between safety and educational achievement, spending his time protecting kids, while mentoring and advocating for the students he served.



Officer Burdette will work in cooperation with Chief Daniels to maintain a safe and secure environment conducive to learning. Families will interact with Officer Burdette during educational programs and activities, as well as during daily campus traffic control. In his spare time, Officer Burdette enjoys spending time with his family and 5 grandchildren, one being a fellow Wildcat!

# Service Key for Middle Students

The Middle School provides many extra-curricular activities for students. An area of pride is that there are many service clubs and organizations for student participation. We believe in providing opportunities for our students to volunteer and give back to their school and their community. Each year, these clubs are some of our most popular amongst students and the students are the driving force behind the activities in which they participate. Service organizations at the Middle School include:

**The Youth & Philanthropy Club:** This club has worked with various non-profit organizations over the years. Sponsored by the Phoenixville Health Foundation, each May the club hosts a special luncheon at which students recognize the work of the non-profit organizations with which they have partnered and present donations that will help these organizations continue their important work.

**Tri-M Music Honors Society:** Tri-M signifies Modern Music Masters. The

Tri-M Music Honor Society students are selected for membership on the basis of musicianship, scholarship, character, leadership and service to their community. They have weekly meetings and monthly volunteer activities. Each month, Tri-M students find a different way to volunteer in their school and/or community.

**OJRMS Student Council:** Student Council is the driving force behind multiple events during the school year, the largest being Operation Angel, which takes place in December. The group teams up with the Pottstown Salvation Army and collects donations used to buy presents for kids with financially struggling families. Last year, Student Council collected over \$3000. Student Council also runs a book drive, a paper products drive, and all kinds of fundraisers and events. In March of 2019, they donated over 70 boxes of books to local organizations.

**Leo Club:** This service club is sponsored by the Coventry Lions Club. They currently have 35 active

7th and 8th grade members for the 2019-2020 school year. Essentially, this club operates on three main principles: Leadership, Experience, and Opportunity and the motto, "We Serve". Many of the OJRMS Leos have been members of the elementary Lions Cub programs, and they come to the Middle School looking to further service experiences. The Middle School is happy to welcome and support student service and leadership during middle level years.

**Builders Club:** The Builder's Club is sponsored by the Pottstown Kiwanis Club and the members work on a variety of community service projects throughout the year. Events include the REA Safe Trick-or-Treat night at the High School as well as organizing and running the Reading after Dark (RAD) Night at the Middle School. The Builder's



Club also organizes and runs the epic annual student versus faculty basketball game which benefits a non-profit foundation within the school district.

## Canvas Learning By Jon Yoder

Our mission statement is to "Inspire all students for success today and greatness tomorrow". Today and tomorrow are often used in a mundane context, but in the educational setting, they carry weight beyond 48 hours. There is a common thought in education that if we teach today's students like we taught yesterday's students, then we rob them of tomorrow. We all can see that there is an evolving paradigm shift that has been occurring in not only how our young people engage in the world, but also how we educate them. At Owen J. Roberts, we are meeting that challenge head on.

The high school has now equipped all students and staff with amazing devices that help extend teaching learning outside the walls of each classroom. The high school finished the final phase of the 1:1 Chromebook rollout for all

1600+ students this year. But that is only one leg of this educational stool. We have implemented strategies for how we utilize those devices. Another leg of that same stool is the addition of a robust Learning Management System (LMS), Canvas. It is really our virtual classroom space. And much like its name depicts it allows teachers to build an amazing "canvas" to extend learning beyond the classroom by leveraging educational tools such as Google apps so that we can truly engage today's learners in new and exciting ways such as creating ePortfolios and coding with Ozobots. The third leg of that stool is our approach to help empower teachers and students to be able to use this new technology. For the teachers, it is a brave new world and they need constant support to help navigate these uncharted waters as digital immigrants. This was not how they were educated.

And as for the students, we cannot assume that because of their age that they are technologically savvy. A perfect example is with my own daughters; my eldest by the age of two had figured out how to use my Iphone to project photos on the TV while my youngest at three cries for help when a screen times out.

Fortunately, Canvas can be very easy to use and manage with on-site support for teaching and learning. Canvas offers amazing support materials and also releases user requested changes every three weeks. Not to mention it is the #1 LMS used by not only K-12, but



by colleges and universities worldwide. So when we talk about 'today' and 'tomorrow', Canvas and its integration into our district can be a very powerful and consistent tool to help us truly adhere to our mission.

## Safe Night

This year marked the 7th annual Safe Night for trick or treating sponsored by the Roberts Education Association (REA). The REA members recognized that due to the rural nature of our district, children were often trick or treating on very dark roads without sidewalks. The safe night held at Owen J. Roberts not only offers families a safe place for children to fill their buckets with candy, they also get to fill their social and emotional buckets spending time with schoolmates, teachers, administrators, and community organizations. Older students provide games and activities and many community organizations are able to showcase their services. Many decorations are recycled and any candy left over is boxed and shipped by NJROTC to troops overseas. The Coventry Food Pantry, who has served our community for more than 40 years, collected 61 boxes/bags of food and \$376 for their work with families.



This year's event eclipsed previous years on every metric:

- 1,291 children who visited
- 1,112 parents with those children
- 37 trick or treat stations
- 23 activities
- 45 student volunteers to help direct folks and take donations
- 20 community or charitable organizations

## Stay Informed

Owen J. Roberts schools and district present programs of all types throughout the year. The schools in the district send regular notifications to school families through email. If you are a community member without children in the district, you can sign up for District e-notifications related to events that may be of interest. Sign up on the district website where you see the logo.



About once per month, the district superintendent will provide updates for events and matters you may find important. This may include happenings for Senior Citizens, Owen J. Roberts School District Education Foundation, Friends of the Arts, Community Swim, Advocacy, Education, or Special Projects. We won't clutter your inbox and you may unsubscribe at any time. We also invite you to follow the district, our schools, and our superintendent on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram.

## Pre-K Counts

Did you know that Owen J Roberts School District runs a Pre-K Counts program in partnership with Warwick Child Care? Pre-K Counts offers a quality education to three and four-year-old students who live within the District. The program runs a full day from 9:00 am to 3:45 pm and there is no charge to families who qualify. A family of four earning less than \$77,250/year, a family of three earning less than \$63,990/year or a family of two earning less than \$50,730/year are eligible. Do you have a qualifying child or know a family who does? If so, please reach out to the Warwick Child Care Center near you: South Coventry Center (610) 469-0148 or Cedarville Center (610) 326-4522.

# Partnership for Careers

Owen J. Roberts has a strong partnership with The Technical College High School. TCHS specializes in providing our high school students with technical training and academic preparation to be successful in work, college, and life.

Owen J. Roberts students attend TCHS on a half-day basis, whereby they receive their career and technical education at the Pickering Campus and their academic instruction here at Owen J. Roberts High School. Students may enroll in either a morning or afternoon session for their selected course of study. TCHS offers our students a verity of programs including: Allied Health Science Technology, Animal Science, Automotive Collision Technology,

Automotive Services Technology, Carpentry, Commercial & Graphic Arts, Cosmetology, Criminal Justice & Police Sciences, Culinary, Arts, Digital Media & Sound Communications, Early Childhood Care & Education, Engine Technology, Engineering & Automated Manufacturing Technology, Health Career Pathways, Precision CNC Machining, Robotics, Sustainable Energy Engineering and Teacher Leadership Academy.

Graduates receive their high school diploma from Owen J. Roberts High School and a standards certificate from the Technical College High School. More than just obtaining a diploma and certificate, Owen J. Roberts Students who attend TCHS, also gain skills critical to achieving

a prosperous, rewarding career. They also receive training in the highest-paid and most sought-after jobs. Furthermore, any Owen J. Roberts student who plans to attend college after graduation, can get a head start through their dual-enrollment program. For those looking to go directly into the workforce, students can gain valuable experience through their on-the-job training through their cooperative education and school-to-career program.



The partnership between Owen J. Roberts and The Technical College High School is preparing our students to meet both the educational demands as well as making them marketable for the careers of the 21st century.

# In a world where you can be anything...BE A SCIENTIST

By Dr. Heidi Lehmann



Photo credit: @MrsGallo\_OJR

Explore. Design. Create. Communicate.

Young children are naturally curious! We know the skills for success in science not only embrace this curiosity - they prepare students to be logical thinkers, practical problem solvers, and creative architects. These skills will enable students to be successful in any career choice they pursue.

Employment opportunities in STEM fields have grown 79% since 1990 outpacing the overall U.S. job growth as reported by the US Census Bureau. While significant gains for women in Life Science, Physical Science, and Engineering have been noted, there is a continual decline in women pursuing careers in Computer Science. Eileen Cipriani, Deputy Secretary for PA Workforce Development,

shared at a recent STEM-UP event at the Governor's residence that by the year 2027, seventy percent of all jobs will require skills in computer programming.

Early skills in Computer Science (programming) include logical thinking and problem-solving. Additionally, experiences in classifying, sorting, analyzing, measuring, calculating,

finding patterns, and communicating will only strengthen our students' potential to be successful in any career choice they wish to explore. The "scientists" at Owen J. Roberts may be young; however, they are confident and curious learners ready to tackle any and all challenges presented to them.

Explore. Design. Create. Communicate. Program!

## Title One and Parent Involvement

The Every Student Succeeds Act which replaced No Child Left Behind went into effect in 2016 with expanded Family Involvement requirements for recipients of Federal Funding. Any school district that receives Title I Federal Funds is required to have a Parent Involvement Policy and any school receiving funding is required to have a Parent Involvement Compact. Owen J. Roberts School District receives Federal Funding and three of our elementary schools; East Vincent, North Coventry and East Coventry have been identified as Title I buildings. There are many benefits to both the school district and family stakeholders when there is a positive relationship between the two. Anne T. Henderson in her article "A New Wave of Evidence: The Impact of School, Family and Community Connections on Student Achievement" (2002), found "when schools, families, and community groups work together to support learning, children tend to do better in school, stay in school longer, and like school more. Many studies found that students with involved parents, no matter what their income or background, were more likely to succeed." Each of our Title I Elementary buildings, East Vincent, North Coventry and East Coventry offer special parent involvement activities for our parents to help engage them in their student's education.

## Kindergarten Registration

Kindergarten Registration for the 2020-2021 school year will open up on Monday, February 3rd at 9:00 am. Follow the online registration link on [www.ojrdsd.com](http://www.ojrdsd.com) to begin the process. You will be called to set up an appointment to finish registration in March.



## OJR Student Takes Steps Towards Dream Career

While many students are uncertain about what they want to be when they grow up, high school senior Jeff Mitchell has always known that he wants to work for Mercedes-Benz. After attending a presentation about the Technical College High School (TCHS) Pickering Campus as a 9th grader, he knew that the Automotive Service Technology program was the perfect opportunity to help make his dream a reality.

"I have always had a passion for cars since I was a kid, particularly Mercedes. Coming to TCHS has allowed me to pursue my passion and helped motivate me to be the best student I can be," said Mitchell.

Mitchell has been a student at TCHS Pickering Campus for three years and feels that his time in the Owen J. Roberts School District prepared him for success in the program. "The more you do, the more experiences you will have. My experience in the Owen J. Robert School District gave me experiences that really helped me hone in on what I want to do with my life," said Mitchell.

Since being at TCHS Pickering, Mitchell has decided to pursue a dual-enrollment course in order to earn college credits while also getting credit



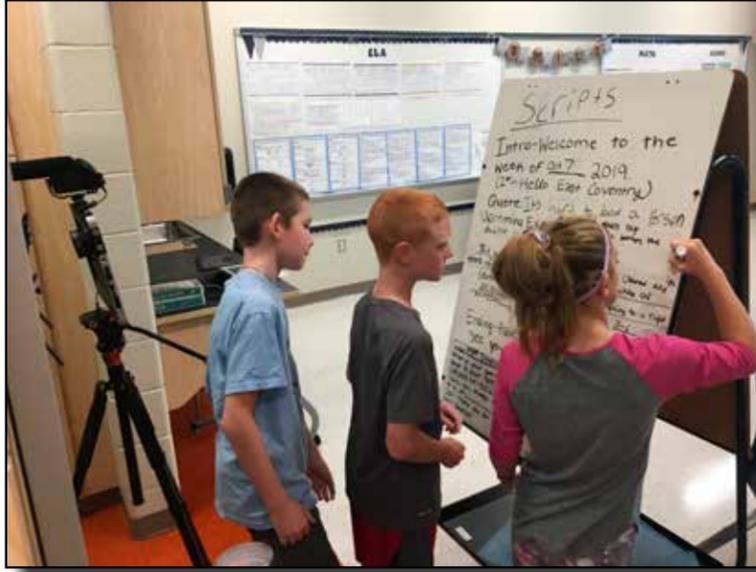
towards his high school diploma. "I just applied to take a brake systems course through the Pennsylvania College of Technology. I am excited to be able to begin earning college credits while I am still at TCHS," said Mitchell.

Mitchell believes his experience at TCHS Pickering helped him gain entrance into Universal Technical Institute (UTI), where he will be studying in the automotive program. "It feels great to know where I am going after graduation in the spring. TCHS has given me the opportunity to pursue my passion, earn college credits and take the next step towards my dream career at Mercedes-Benz," said Mitchell.

# Lights, Camera, Action

Each week, a group of 6th grade students at East Coventry Elementary School produce a short video entitled "EC WEEKLY NEWS". The production is 100% student created, recorded and edited. The finished product is sent to all of the classrooms as well as published on social media for the East Coventry community to view.

Production begins early each week when students begin to gather research for the weekly topics. These topics include school-related news, staff interviews, growth mindset quotes, local and national headlines. Next, students decide the order of the featured stories and begin writing the script. After the decisions are made, the recording of the segments begins. Students use a green screen, Ipad and PadCaster equipment to capture the video and audio. A portion of a classroom has been created into a recording studio where they have even created a make-shift teleprompter. The EC News team also looks for opportunities to take the equipment outside of the recording



studio and go "on location". They had a chance to do so recently to record highlights from an assembly program.

Once the segments are recorded, students use iMovie to edit the footage and begin assembling the short video clips. Music, graphics, and storylines are added to the production. Finally, the completed video is published on YouTube and ready to be shared. The process then begins all over again for the following week!

The production represents a culmination of academic skills including researching, reading, writing and speaking. Students use their creative skills to edit and create the video. Knowing that Owen J. Roberts has an exemplary video production club at the secondary level, the hope is to foster an interest in this field at an early age. This

interest might increase the likelihood of students continuing a path in the video production career field.

# Student Memorial

On September 27, 2019 the staff of North Coventry Elementary revealed a memorial generated and created for the students of the school; a special place celebrating the life of Makenna Massi.

Makenna was diagnosed with Wilm's tumor (kidney cancer) in the spring of 2014. She fought and beat it after a nine-month treatment plan and in January 2015, was declared cancer free. Approaching her three-year milestone of being cancer free, the Massi family received news that Makenna had developed Acute Myeloid Leukemia (AML). Makenna embarked on the path to her new treatment plan and was in remission when she received a bone marrow transplant from her older sister. Makenna and her family were excited that she was able to return home in May 2018. During early July of 2018 Makenna developed complications with her breathing and the next few months became marked with numerous admissions to the Intensive Care Unit at CHOP. The intense treatment damaged her heart and lungs and she had developed Pulmonary Hypertension (PH). Unfortunately, all the attempts to treat the PH were unsuccessful. On September 27, 2018, surrounded by family and friends, Makenna lost her battle. Through both cancer journeys, Makenna never complained. She never stopped smiling and showed an undo amount of strength each day. In 2018, The Fight On Makenna Foundation was established to honor her and her fight with pediatric cancer.



Makenna was a beloved student at North Coventry Elementary School. Everyone loved Makenna and her heart was as big as she was. Kelly Beaver and Shelli Flick, teachers at North Coventry, conceived and led the idea of creating a permanent memorial for the students, staff and family members of North Coventry in the outdoor courtyard. Now, staff, families, students and friends of North Coventry can honor Makenna's strength and fighting spirit

"This memorial will help us keep Makenna's beautiful spirit alive in our lessons we teach daily, our kindness we share with each other, and the love we feel in our North Coventry Family." Kelly Beaver said as she spoke to all in attendance.

Using the expertise of previous artist-in-residence Scott Osio, who had created the original floral pieces in the courtyard, three butterflies on a sculpture represent each of the three Massi children and the color purple was chosen to represent Makenna's favorite color.

Two mosaic benches were created by Baily Cypress, an artist who specializes in mosaics. Ms. Cypress worked with the students

to generate the design for the benches and then led the students in gluing on the mosaic pieces remembering her as each piece was laid. Makenna's friends from the Middle School came down to be a part of the bench by placing special quotes to honor her and integrating them into the artwork.

"My heart is full knowing that so many people had a hand in making it perfect. NC students, neighborhood friends, classmates, teachers...all put a loving touch on this very special place.

Makenna will always have a profound impact on the lives of so many. We will never forget her." Shelli Flick said as she spoke about the legacy Makenna leaves with us.

Makenna Massi will be forever in our hearts as she touched everyone with her strength and determination to live life to the fullest despite the obstacles put in front of her. As Dr. Susan Lloyd, Owen J Roberts Superintendent stated, "Once a student with us, always a student with us."



## 4<sup>TH</sup> Annual Holiday Tree Festival



You'll love our NEW LOCATION!

Join the Owen J. Roberts Friends of the Arts and Education Foundation in the heart of Coventryville as we delight in the history and holiday cheer at the George S. Chrisman Homestead and Coventryville United Methodist Church, 1521 Old Ridge Rd, Pottstown on Saturday, December 7 from 12 - 4 pm. These two historical properties will be filled with holiday splendor! Both properties are on the National Register of Historic Places and date back to the pre-Revolutionary War days. This event supports and enhances the educational experience in the arts for the entire school district.

# Dual Enrollment

Dual-enrollment is a unique opportunity for qualifying juniors and seniors at Owen J. Roberts High School to take college-level courses while working towards completing their high school graduation requirements. The courses count towards high school graduation and towards earning a college degree. The classes are offered in high school classrooms taught by teachers certified to teach college-level courses. By taking dual enrollment courses, students rise to a level that will bridge high school and college learning. The high school has a partnership with Montgomery County College and other post-secondary institutions, and currently offers 24 dual credit courses.

The benefit for our students who wish to take dual enrollment courses is it provides our students with a head start on the college experience at no or little cost to their family. Dual enrollment courses also allow our students to explore fields of study that help them choose a major later on when they are in college. Students also may choose from classes that are currently not available at Owen J. Roberts. Dual-enrollment is an excellent opportunity for our students to establish themselves as lifelong learners and stretch their learning prowess.

# Sound it Out By Dr. Ryan Monaghan

Phonics instruction continues to be a vital and foundational aspect of the English Language Arts (ELA) program. Beginning with the start of the 2019-2020 school year, the district implemented a new phonics program in kindergarten and grade one. The Phonics Units of Study (PUOS) from Teachers College Columbia University, works seamlessly with the already utilized Reading and Writing Units of Study by the same university. Both the previous Owen J. Roberts School District and the new PUOS draw upon the widely-accepted field of research on reading development; however, the new PUOS is written to connect cohesively with the current ELA units to increase the transfer of the Phonics learning into student reading and writing.

According to the research from Teachers College, pillars to effective phonics instruction include: transfer of learning to reading and writing, follows a researched-based sequence, supplements - not replaces - real reading and writing instruction, teaching of strategies to draw on phonics as they read/write, increased student engagement, and flexibility to meet the needs of all students. These essential elements of teaching and

learning provide the groundwork for instruction in our classrooms.

The units also build on what is known about child development and the power of play in the early grades. Using play during instruction helps the students visualize themselves doing something they could not previously. In Kindergarten, the phonics instruction follows the story of the classroom mascots, Mabel the elephant and first grade has Rasheed the lion. Early in the year, Mabel turns into a superhero after the students get a visit from Super Reader and first grade Rasheed becomes a detective after the Chief of the Super Secret Detective Agency - both elements and storyline "play" align with the current reading units. Implementing the new units in kindergarten and first grade affords the teachers the ability to meet all elements of effective and engaging phonics teaching.

The program units have been well received throughout the district. One of our kindergarten readers made sure to tell us that Phonics is better than recess. Another class was so excited with Mabel, that they insisted she get her class picture on picture day

after the teacher announced, "everyone in the class needs to have their picture taken." Fortunately the photographer eagerly seated Mabel for her own photo shoot.

The PUOS not only connect what students are applying within the ELA classroom, but also beyond the classroom walls. During the recent unit on studying names, a French Creek Elementary first grader in Miss Roland's class noticed a name in the hallway that looked almost like hers, and she marveled aloud, "If you take away the 'v' and 'a' in Giavanna you get Gianna!"

Teachers received the units and professional development in the spring of 2019 through the current school year. Plans are in place to continue to support teachers as they implement the program this first year. A phased-in plan is



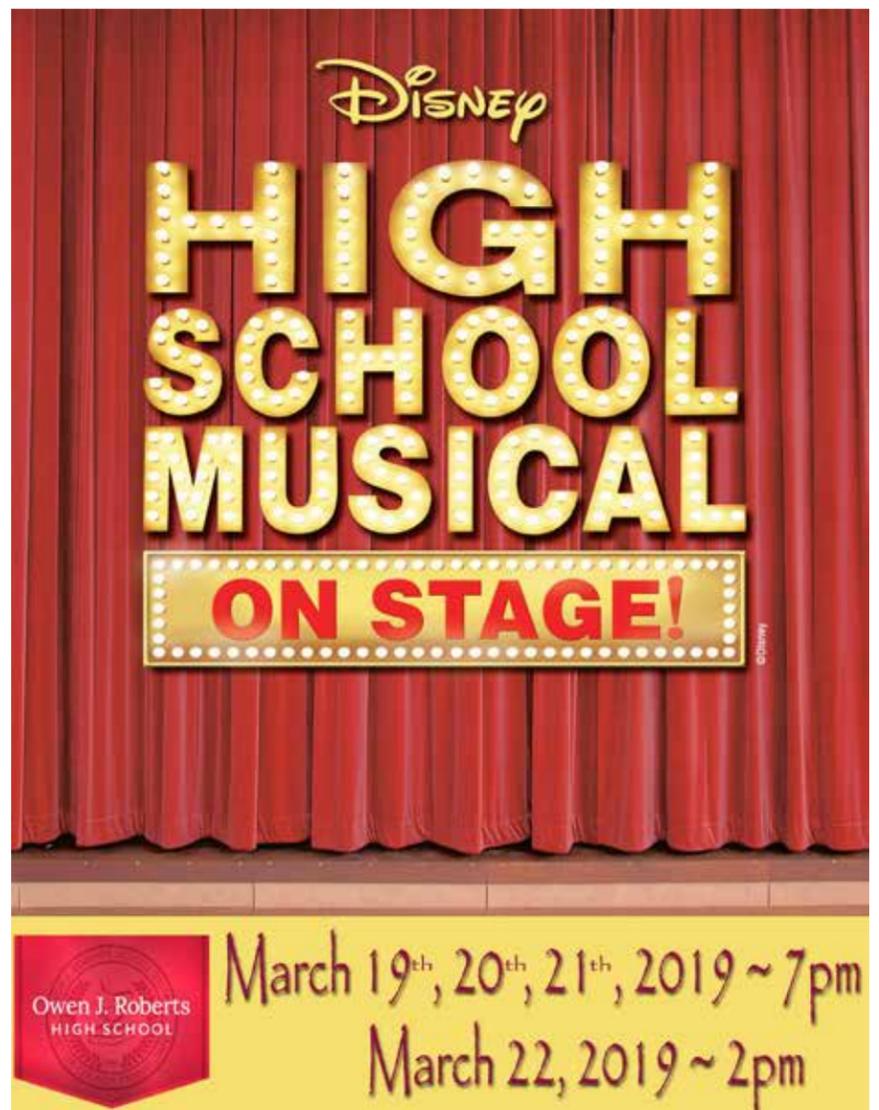
in place to implement the PUOS in second grade for the start of the 2020-2021. Grade two students will welcome Gus the Dragon as their mascot once they begin their program of phonics studies. Teachers College has no plans to publish a grade three program, rather suggesting continued word study work in a program following the same body of research. The district's current word study program is based on this same body of research, with the goal of getting all students studying the structural analysis of Latin and Greek roots and words by the end of sixth grade.

## Paint the Plow



This year, Owen J. Roberts high school art students participated in the PennDOT Paint the Plow program, which began in 2015. The program helps PennDOT and local communities promote public awareness of winter driving safety while showcasing the artistic talents of students. This year's theme was "Don't Rush in Ice and Slush" and Owen J. Roberts students submitted more than 100 designs to visualize the theme and honor the Owen J. Roberts brand. There were many spectacular designs. Ultimately, Senior Robert Tranter's playful design was chosen to be painted on the plow blade.

Once the design was selected, students worked collaboratively to paint the design onto the plow blade. Student-created plow blades from around the state will be visible on plow trucks during the winter months. PennDOT further embellishes the competition with a state "Judge's Pick" and "Fan Favorite."



## Farm to School

On October 24, Owen J. Roberts Chartwells Food Service along with the Owen J. Roberts Wellness Council, celebrated PA Preferred and the Great Apple Crunch Day in our schools. PA Preferred Day is a day to celebrate Farm to School Month where schools showcase things that are grown and processed in Pennsylvania. The day began two years ago and this year was rolled out throughout the state with Owen J. Roberts being one of more than 20 districts participating. The day was sponsored by the PA Department of Agriculture and the PA Farm to School Network. Farm to school

enriches the connection communities have with fresh, healthy food and local food producers by changing food purchasing and education practices at schools and early care and education settings.

The district chef and food service director worked with regional and corporate Chartwells headquarters to source the best local foods and develop an amazing lunch menu serving foods grown and produced within a 250 mile radius of the school. The menus included local classic chicken sandwich on a fresh baked pretzel bun (Tyson foods sourced

chicken from New Holland, pretzel bun from Hatfield), Cilantro Lime Coleslaw (locally grown cabbage from Lancaster), Herb Roasted Potatoes (locally grown from Lancaster), fresh gala apples (locally grown apples from Lancaster) and warm baked local apples.

Supporting farms near us supports our economy and offers students some of the freshest foods available. On the same day, students enjoyed the full flavor of local apples giving a nod to National Apple Month and the Great Apple Crunch. Announcements and a variety of fresh local apples from



which to choose helped encourage students and families to eat apples and apple products.



# Message from the Superintendent

Every once in a while an issue comes up that reminds us critical business decisions need to be made with forethought

and wisdom, in the service of educating our youth. The Owen J. Roberts School District is weighing the pros and cons of just such an issue right now, and everyone's voice should be heard.

There is new research that indicates that starting the school day an hour later helps students get better grades. There are, however, many operational, financial and community considerations to discuss as we reflect on making this far-reaching change. This edition of the Advocate shares

details about this topic, and provides you with instructions about how to participate in the discussion.

As a public school district, we are required to educate every student who walks through our doors. But not all students learn the same way or require the same amount of time. These differences require our team to adapt to individual learning needs:

- Our teachers need to tailor their classroom instructions,
- Our school counselors need to provide counseling and mental health services,
- Our reading specialists need to offer tiered interventions,
- Our psychologists need to determine if students are in need of special education services, and
- Our nurses need to deliver in-school medical care.

More and more, public schools are customizing student schedules and learning environments to help their students succeed.

Here at OJR, we have students at all grades benefitting from customized learning plans. I encourage you to read this edition of the Advocate to learn more about online/hybrid and dual enrollment opportunities at our high school. Each of our seven schools has a team of educators, led by the building principal, who are all eager to partner with students and parents to ensure individual needs are being met. Please don't hesitate to reach out to your school teams as you formulate your decisions about delayed start schedules.

I urge everyone to make their voices heard regarding delaying the start of a school day by completing an online

survey at [www.ojrsd.com](http://www.ojrsd.com). If you do not have a computer, please stop by the OJR administration building on our main campus to complete a paper survey. **We need to hear your thoughts!**

As I complete my second year as superintendent of this school district, I have been reflecting on my promise to the OJR community to make communication a cornerstone of my administration. So much can be achieved by ensuring consistent and collaborative messaging. This issue of the Advocate also highlights two new communication tools that the district has implemented to enhance communication between home and school. One is Google Classroom and the other is Canvas. Be sure to check out those articles and to share your thoughts with us.

## SEL Connection

The Social Emotional Learning Connection, organized by Thom Stecher and Associates, provides school districts with an opportunity to network with national researchers and other local school districts to implement data-based programs that help all members of our school community to reach their fullest potential. In an effort to strengthen the ways that the administration and staff in the Owen J. Roberts School District works to support our students, representatives from each of the seven buildings in the district have committed to being trained in the best current practices of SEL growth models, collaborating with other public and private school teams, evaluating the current SEL programs within our district, and working within each building to implement effective and sustainable programs for our entire school community. The program was paid for through grant funding including a generous grant from the Pottstown Area Health and Wellness Foundation.

The objectives of the SEL Connections program include engaging students to empower their

capacity and voice as an essential part of social and emotional wellness in their communities and provide school leaders with the data and training needed to implement effective SEL programs. The program also is used to conduct a needs assessment within each part of the school district and develop a network of educational leaders that are focused on the integration of Social Emotional Learning practices.

Social Emotional Learning is how children and adults learn to understand and manage emotions, set goals, show empathy for others, establish positive relationships, and make responsible decisions. More than two decades of research, by multiple organizations, has shown that effective SEL programs improve the lives of students in many ways. Some of which include:

"Gains of 11 to 17 percentile points on achievement tests." (CASEL, 2008)

"Improved classroom behavior, an increased ability to manage stress and depression, and better attitudes about themselves, others, and school." (CASEL, 2019)

"The average return on investment for six evidence-based programs is 11 to 1, meaning for every dollar invested there is an \$11 return." (Columbia University, 2015)

The SEL Connection Program consists of six full day training sessions for teachers, administrators, and staff representatives from each building in the school district; a Social Emotional Learning Implementation Audit for each school; an assigned Liaison to the district; and six parallel sessions that expose stakeholders and give opportunities for sharing and feedback.

The Owen J. Robert's commitment to quality SEL programs will provide our students with benefits that will last for decades. SEL competencies include skills that enable children to calm themselves when angry, initiate friendships and resolve conflicts respectfully, consistently make ethical and safe



choices, demonstrate resilience in times of difficulty, and contribute constructively to their community. It is the goal of the Owen J. Roberts School District to help engrain each of these skills in every OJR Graduate!

## Go Wildcats!

### Noted Accomplishments in Athletics and Other Arenas



Boys Cross Country- finished 4-1 and placed first at the PAC Championship, 2019 PAC Champs. The team placed 5th at districts and 12th at states.

Field Hockey- presently 20-4, advanced to the PAC Championship game but lost a close game 2-1 to Upper Perk. The team placed 4th in the district playoffs, qualified for states and advanced to the state quarterfinals before losing to Emmaus 3-0.

Girls Cross Country- finished 4-1 and placed 2nd at the PAC Championships. The team placed 6th at districts and 15th at states. Congrats to Claire Zubey on her 9th place finish and state medal!

Football- finished the season 8-2 and qualified as the #14 seed in the

district playoffs. The team lost to Garnet Valley in the first round to finish the season 8-3.

Girls Soccer- finished 11-5-3 and was the #17 seed in the district playoffs. The team lost a tough game to Great Valley 2-1 in the first round on 10/22.

Boys Soccer- finished 11-7-2, qualified for the PAC Championship but lost a tough semi-final game 1-0 to eventual Champ Boyertown. The team was the #19 seed in the district playoffs and lost to Pennsbury 3-0 in the first round on 10/22.

Golf- the team finished 8-4 and qualified for the PAC Team Championship, but lost in the semi-finals to Spring-Ford. Four golfers qualified for districts and one golfer qualified for regionals.

Girls Tennis- despite several key injuries early in the season, the team had a strong season and finished 7-4 in the PAC.

Cheerleading- the cheerleading team has done a great job this season at the football games, and they went to a preseason camp in August and brought home several awards.

Volleyball- the volleyball team improved throughout the year and was very competitive, even with a much tougher schedule this year. The highlight of the year was their dramatic 3-2 win over Pottsgrove on senior night, when they came back from 0-2 to win three straight games to win the match 3-2.

Congratulations to Arianna Arditì for achieving the status of National Merit Semi-Finalist and Elizabeth

Amstutz, Anya Winemiller, Mackenzie Hale, and Jeevan Bandi, for receiving the designation of National Merit Commended Students.

Payton Ridenour triumphed as champion in the Women's finals at the inaugural Red Bull UCI Pump Track World Championship at the Swiss Bike Park in Bern, Switzerland to claim the honour of wearing the UCI's coveted rainbow jerseys for the first-ever time. Payton is an Owen J. Roberts senior.

Congratulations to the Owen J. Roberts Mountain Biking Team for winning FIRST PLACE in the 2019 PA Interscholastic Cycling League state race series!