



SPRING 2009

# COMMUNITY

NEWSLETTER

## Curriculum Encourages Real-Life Science Discoveries

**F**ox Chapel Area elementary school students are making scientific discoveries on their way to becoming expert scientists. "I love science! I get to do so many hands-on things instead of just reading," says Kerr Elementary School fourth grader Jessica Means.

The Fox Chapel Area elementary science program is an inquiry-based, hands-on curriculum that addresses earth, physical, life, and environmental and ecological science. The goal is to engage each student to think and work like a real scientist. Teachers serve as guides in the inquiry process, rather than merely delivering the subject matter, according to Ron Korenich, Ed.D., Fox Chapel Area School District's coordinator of elementary education.

At the beginning of each science activity, the student scientists are presented with a question or problem. As the process continues, they make predictions, run experiments and tests, pull data they collect, and make claims based on their observations and evidence. An integral component of the hands-on process is the lab notebook, which includes notes, calculations, and work sheets, all gathered by the students during their scientific quests. Once evidence is gathered, students compare results with their classmates, and together, teacher and student scientists work to clear up misconceptions and clarify what has been learned during the process.

In order to manage and update all of the materials necessary to implement an inquiry-based science curriculum, the district has contracted with ASSET, Inc. (Achieving Student Success Through Excellence in Teaching). ASSET provides professional development and training for teachers so that they can effectively guide their students in their scientific discoveries in each unit. Additionally, ASSET also serves as the clearinghouse for materials management.

Fourth graders in Kelly Clark's class at Kerr Elementary School have been studying land and water. The students, working in small groups, engaged in a landscaping project in order to learn, first hand, the importance of ground and surface water and how directing water flow can protect their homes from being flooded. They drew up plans in their notebooks before constructing their own landscapes.

Fourth grader Alan McIvor described the activity, "We're supposed to create a village that won't blow away and be flooded by water."



Fourth grade teacher Kelly Clark works with students as they make predictions about will happen when water flows over their landscapes.

Their plans took into account water absorption by the soil and grass, the slope of the landscape, the location and construction of a dam, the placement of rocks, and finally, where the building structures in their villages should be placed.

Students used vocabulary words such as ground water, surface water, humus, and clay to complete the process of making predictions on what would happen when the water flowed over their landscapes. "We learned how land and water relate to each other and how water can change the land's shape," student Olivia McQuarrie states.

When the water used for the tests flowed through the dams and the landscape structures became wet, several of the students noted that a sturdier material would have prevented the flooding and erosion. Mrs. Clark suggested that concrete and rock, used in real-life dams, would be more effective in directing the flow of water.

"I like doing the hands-on stuff," says student Mallory Weimerskirch. "It's fun and you get to see what actually happens."

In addition to the land and water study, fourth graders completed a unit on electrical circuits earlier this school year. ASSET packaged and sent all the materials and supplies needed for the units to the classroom teachers.

ASSET is a nonprofit initiative funded by several corporate and educational partners, which provides professional development for science teachers and up-to-date science kits for science curriculum. The purpose of ASSET is to achieve a self-sustaining, exemplary science program by promoting professional development, teacher support, collaboration, and hands-on material. Fox Chapel Area School District has participated in the ASSET program for the last several years. Fox Chapel Area School District Superintendent Anne E. Stephens, Ph.D., is president of the ASSET board of directors, which also includes educators from school districts, colleges, and universities in the region.



Student scientists test their predictions.

*The goal is to engage each student to think and work like a real scientist.*

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# Interactive Technology Enhances Everyday Learning

Twenty years ago, it wasn't unusual for Fox Chapel Area School District teachers and students to use computers as learning tools. But those former students and their teachers could not have imagined how computers and interactive learning tools would transform education and become so much a part of everyday class work.

The Mimio®, a versatile and portable interactive tool that turns any white surface into an interactive computer whiteboard, was recently introduced at O'Hara Elementary School in Carol Natali's second grade classroom. Mrs. Natali likes it because of its large format, multimodality, and multicolors and her second graders quickly learned to use it themselves.

In Mrs. Natali's math class, students eagerly raise their hands, hoping to be called on to work on the next problem. As each student takes a turn working on the large interactive screen, classmates also work on the problems at their desks. When the students finish their work, their teacher can save the problem or print out the page on the computer printer for later review and continued practice. The versatile Mimio also can be used for instant assessment, and a printout can be saved for a student's portfolio.

After math class, Mrs. Natali changes the screen for an interactive map study in social studies class. Students again take turns using the touch-screen technology and infrared stylus, this time to identify the state they are looking for and to drag it and place it in its proper spot on the U.S. map. The second graders say they love using the Mimio and that it helps them quickly learn both the states and their two-letter abbreviations.

On this day the class is learning about the Northeast region. "Do you remember the smallest state?" Mrs. Natali asks the students.

"Rhode Island!" the class eagerly responds. Second grader Sophia McMahon clicks on the state, and it pops on the screen. She then drags Rhode Island to its proper space on the map.

The Mimio is also used throughout the day for spelling, reading, and science. Students recently created a visual to help them learn the life cycle of a pumpkin seed for science class and Mrs. Natali, who piloted the Mimio at O'Hara Elementary, says there's no end to the possibilities. Her students have become accustomed to using the interactive technology to work on math problems, reading, spelling, and map studies almost daily.



An O'Hara Elementary School second grader uses a stylus to drag a state to its proper place on the U.S. map.



O'Hara fourth grade students demonstrate how the SMART Board helps them bring their research to life.

Mrs. Natali's students enjoy learning their lessons with the Mimio. On a recent day, O'Hara Elementary Assistant Principal James Prager stopped into the classroom seeking to borrow the Mimio for a demonstration. The second graders protested, "We need it today!"

Downstairs at O'Hara Elementary School, fourth graders recently learned about electric circuits and how to use schematic drawings as prescribed in their science class. They were expected to understand terms including motors, incandescent light bulbs, and carbon filaments, and how circuit boards work. As "expert engineers," Mihir Garimella and Vincent Lundy took the science lesson a step further, doing their own Internet research and putting what they discovered into designing an electric hybrid. Then they demonstrated what they learned through an interactive presentation on the classroom SMART Board. During their presentation, they demonstrated the depth of their knowledge as teacher Beth Durbin and their classmates asked them to further explain variable resistors and the difference between AC and DC currents.

Mihir proudly showed the three-dimensional image on the SMART Board and rotated the image as he described their hybrid. He then drew a button on the traditional dry-erase board but he could not use that illustration to demonstrate how the button really works. "The interactive whiteboard allowed us to actually push a button and not only tell what it does, but show what it does," he says.

Students also described how the SMART Board helps in mathematics. Fourth grader Harry Wetmore says, "You can see in three dimensions." Adds Micah Ziff, "It gives a different visualization. The SMART Board helps you get smarter."

Additionally, a large-as-life image of Martin Luther King, Jr. on the classroom SMART Board brought a moment in history to life for Brooke Zombeck and her classmates. "Martin Luther King, Jr. came into the room. The SMART Board lets us bring him to life," she says.

As these Mimios and interactive whiteboards become increasingly more important in engaging students in active learning, more and more teachers in the Fox Chapel Area School District are using them. Funding for the interactive technology is provided for in the district's technology budget, plus additional funds come from grants, parent groups, and from individual building budgets.

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***"The interactive whiteboard allowed us to actually push a button and not only tell what it does, but show what it does."***

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## ***Fox Chapel Area Children First Fund***

**T**he school district has established a foundation called the Fox Chapel Area School District Children First Fund managed by The Pittsburgh Foundation. The district superintendent and School Board began the foundation in 2007 in response to the passage of Act 1, Pennsylvania legislation that limits school districts to a set index for raising taxes to meet budget needs. Under Act 1, if a district determines that additional money is needed beyond the set index, the request to raise taxes must be made through the referendum process and put before the voters.

The Board of School Directors and superintendent believe that there are three areas especially vulnerable because of the Act 1 legislation: technology, the arts, and athletics. These three areas are addressed by the Children First Fund initiative and the school district encourages anyone interested to make donations to the fund.

Donations may be made by writing a check to The Pittsburgh Foundation and indicating in the memo area of the check "FCASD Children First Fund" and also specifying in the memo: technology, arts, or athletics. A letter should also be sent along with the check outlining how the money should be used and indicating which school(s) should benefit from the gift. All donations are tax deductible. The check and letter should be mailed to: Kelly Uranker, Donor Services Officer, The Pittsburgh Foundation, Five PPG Place, Suite 250, Pittsburgh, PA 15222. Donors are also encouraged to mail a copy of the letter to the district superintendent at the following address: Dr. Anne Stephens, Superintendent, Fox Chapel Area School District, 611 Field Club Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15238.

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***All donations given to this foundation will go directly to help Fox Chapel Area School District students.***

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The Pittsburgh Foundation has guidelines that govern special fund-raising events held by the foundations they serve. Any group that would like to raise money for the Fox Chapel Area Children First Fund should contact the superintendent's office for a copy of the fund-raising guidelines.

Individuals may also flow donations through the fund for specific purchases approved by various booster organizations. For example, money could be donated for the baseball boosters to purchase a batting cage. The memo line on the check would indicate: "FCASD Children First Fund – Baseball Boosters." The Pittsburgh Foundation would issue a check to Fox Chapel Area School District and the district would forward that check to the boosters. The person making the donation would receive a letter indicating that the gift has been received and is tax deductible.

Donations to date have been made to purchase technology-related materials and to purchase various items for the athletic program.

Additional information concerning the Fox Chapel Area School District Children First Fund is available through the superintendent's office by calling 412/967-2413.

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## ***High School Athlete Comes Back from Injury***

**F**ox Chapel Area High School senior basketball player Alex Vargo was recently named the High School Playbook Athlete of the Week. Alex was featured on the February 26, 2009, 6 p.m. and 11 p.m. WTAE-TV newscasts in honor of his achievements both on the basketball court and in the classroom.

Alex received the award at a pep rally held in his honor February 26 in front of the entire Fox Chapel Area High School student body. Alex was unaware that he was receiving the award until his parents, brother, and grandfather were introduced at the assembly.

Part of the reason Alex received the award was his comeback from a March 2008 car accident. Alex hit a patch of ice while driving and his car rolled over. As a result of the accident, Alex's left hand was severely injured and he nearly lost two fingers. He endured several surgeries to repair the injury. Yet throughout his rehabilitation, his focus remained on playing basketball for his high school team and he was determined to make a comeback. Throughout the season he played through ligament and bone damage and severe pain. He was a team captain and was among the top players on the team, averaging 15 points per game.

"Without my teammates, my parents, and my coach, I couldn't have gotten through it," says Alex. "They got me through the whole rehabilitation process."

However, according to coach Ben O'Connor, the team owes much of its success to Alex's efforts.

"We would not have been in the playoffs if it wasn't for Alex," says Mr. O'Connor.

At Fox Chapel Area High School, Alex maintains a 3.5 grade point average. He plans to study business and has narrowed his college choices down to Allegheny College or Denison University, both of which are recruiting him to play basketball.

The High School Playbook Athlete of the Week is sponsored by WTAE-TV and the Clearview Federal Credit Union. Fox Chapel Area High School received a \$250 cash award from the Clearview Federal Credit Union in honor of Alex's achievement.



*Alex is congratulated by his teammates following a special pep rally in honor of being named the High School Playbook Athlete of the Week.*

# School Board Reorganization Meeting

## JTCA Moving

The Joint Tax Collection Agency (JTCA) offices are moving from RIDC Park and, beginning in May, will be located on the second floor of the Indiana Township Municipal Building. The office hours are Tuesday-Friday from 9 a.m.-4 p.m. The phone number (412/967-9680) is remaining the same.

The JTCA collects earned income taxes and the local services tax for the Fox Chapel Area School District, as well as the six municipalities comprising the district. Additionally, the JTCA collects school district property taxes within O'Hara Township and Fox Chapel Borough and also collects the property taxes for O'Hara Township.

The new mailing address will be 3710 Saxonburg Boulevard, 2<sup>nd</sup> Floor, Pittsburgh, PA 15238.

The Fox Chapel Area Board of School Directors held its annual reorganization meeting December 2, 2008. Charles R. Burke was re-elected president, Robin F. Baum was re-elected vice president, and Joanne C. Gaus was re-elected assistant secretary. Karen A. Mitesser (treasurer), Sandra M. Garbisch, Frederick C. Leech, Robert Mauro, Sherman M. Snyder, and Joel R. Weinstein are also members of the Board of School Directors.

As part of the reorganization meeting, the School Board also set its meeting schedule for 2009. The agenda study sessions for the remainder of the year will be held at 7 p.m. on Mondays (unless otherwise noted) and are as follows: April 13 (Fox Chapel Area High School), May 4 (O'Hara Elementary School), June 1 (Dorseyville Middle School), August 24 (Fox Chapel Area High School), September 8 (Fox Chapel Area High School - Tuesday), October 5

(Hartwood Elementary School), November 2 (Kerr Elementary School), and November 23 (Fairview Elementary School).

The School Board will hold its regular business meetings on Mondays (unless otherwise noted) at 7 p.m. at Fox Chapel Area High School on these dates: April 13, May 11, June 8, August 24, September 8 (Tuesday), October 12, November 9, and December 1 (Tuesday).

The School Board will also hold a special year-end meeting June 15 at Fox Chapel Area High School. The School Board's annual reorganization meeting will be held December 1 immediately following the December regular business meeting. Please note that the April 13, August 24, and September 8 meetings are combined agenda study sessions and regular business meetings.

## High School Receives Silver Rank from U.S. News

Fox Chapel Area High School was recently ranked among the best high schools from across the nation. The high school was one of only 20 from Pennsylvania to receive a Silver Medal rank from U.S. News & World Report.

U.S. News & World Report, in collaboration with School Evaluation Services, analyzed academic and enrollment data from more than 21,000 public high schools to find the very best across the country. The top schools were placed into gold, silver, bronze, and honorable mention categories. School Evaluation Services is a K-12 education and data research and analysis business run by Standard & Poor's that serves as an independent, analytical resource for parents of school-aged children, state and national policymakers, and educators.

According to the December 15-22, 2008, U.S. News & World Report, "The 2009 U.S. News & World Report America's Best High Schools methodology, developed by School Evaluation Services...is based on the key principles that a great high school must serve all its students well, not just those who are bound for college, and that it must be able to produce measurable academic outcomes to show that the school is successfully educating its student body across a range of performance indicators."

"A three-step process determined the best high schools. The first two steps ensured that the schools serve all their students well. For those schools that made it past the first two steps, a third step assessed the degree to which schools prepare students for college-level work."

### Board of School Directors

Region I (covers all of Sharpsburg Borough and Wards 2, 3, and 4 of O'Hara Township)  
Robin F. Baum, Vice President (2011)  
Karen A. Mitesser, Treasurer (2011)  
Sherman M. Snyder (2009)

Region II (covers Districts 2, 4, and 5 of Fox Chapel Borough and all of Indiana Township)  
Sandra M. Garbisch (2011)  
Joanne C. Gaus, Assistant Secretary (2009)  
Robert Mauro (2009)

Region III (covers all of Aspinwall Borough and Blawnox Borough, Wards 1 and 5 of O'Hara Township, and Districts 1 and 3 of Fox Chapel Borough)  
Charles R. Burke, President (2009)  
Frederick C. Leech (2011)  
Joel R. Weinstein (2009)

Regular Board business meetings are usually scheduled the second Monday of each month at 7 p.m. Meetings are held in the high school large group instruction room. The public is invited.

### Administration

Superintendent: Anne E. Stephens, Ph.D.  
Assistant Superintendent: David P. McCommons, Ed.D.  
Administrative Assistant for Business Affairs: Steven E. Mols

For the latest information on district events and activities, call the Fox Chapel Area School District 24-Hour Information Line at 412/967-2500 or visit the district's Web site at: [www.fcasd.edu](http://www.fcasd.edu).

The Community Newsletter is an official publication of the Fox Chapel Area School District. Comments regarding the publication or its contents should be directed to the communications office at 412/967-2452.

The Fox Chapel Area School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, creed, color, sex, nationality, ethnic origin, age, or disability in the administration of its policies, hiring practices, employment practices, and admission to its programs, services, or activities, in access to them, in treatment of individuals with disabilities, or in any aspect of its operations. Additional information pertaining to civil rights, school district policies, and grievance procedures can be obtained by contacting the compliance officers listed below between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. Monday through Friday. This notice is available from the compliance officers in large print, on audiotape, and in Braille.

Title IX: David P. McCommons, Ed.D. (412/967-2456)  
Section 504 and ADA: Lynne Porterfield, Ph.D. (412/967-2435)  
Address: Fox Chapel Area School District, 611 Field Club Road, Pittsburgh, PA 15238



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