



# LAUREL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWSLETTER

Fall

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## OPERATING A SCHOOL DISTRICT DURING A PANDEMIC

**WANTED:** Any individual who has experience leading an institution during a pandemic. Educational experience preferred. Knowledge of viral contagions a plus. Communication skills are essential. The ability to take constructive criticism required.

Do you know someone who is qualified or has the experience running a school district during a pandemic? I do not. These are uncharted waters for all of us. We are grateful to the Laurel Pandemic Team composed of teachers, parents, school health personnel, and administrators that contributed to the district plan. As a result of this plan we

have successfully completed nearly 1/4 of the school year.

Certainly the year has not been without hiccup, problem, etc. We have expanded our network infrastructure to accommodate a one-to-one technological environment for all of our students. We have developed 3 pathways for our students and their families (traditional, synchronous, and asynchronous). We have secured devices. We



have also had to replace our phone system with VOIP.

None of what we have done could not have been accomplished without a team effort between the school and the community. We have been fortunate to rely on the strong relationship with our families to meet their needs. We have had to implement some guidelines and decisions of the depart-

ment of health. These decisions at times have been contentious and questioned. In the end, we appreciate that we are able to resolve these problems with our families.

Our plan has been practical, reasonable and legally defensible. We will continue to provide our 3 learning pathways. We will continue to open up our stadium and gymnasiums to the maximum extent possible. We will continue to serve our community and follow their direction. As always please contact us with any questions, comments or concerns.

**Leonard A. Rich, Superintendent**

## OFFICE OF STUDENT SERVICES

We are excited to be back in school and in front of our students! The Office of Student Services continues to offer multi-tiered levels of support for academic, behavioral, speech, occupational therapy, physical therapy, and social/emotional needs of all children K-12 through our CORE TEAM and varying professionals. Levels of support start at classroom interventions and range up to an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). This school year we are excited to be partnering with Capable Kids, Inc for multi-tiered levels of support for occupational and physical therapy services.

We started our year off with gathering assessment data to determine what skills were lost during our COVID shutdown. We then began remediation and direct instruction to recoup any skills that may have been lost. At the elementary level, we are excited to have added an intervention teacher to our department, Mrs. Kimberly Stewart. She is now in charge of the Instructional Support Team who provides interventions for any struggling students referred by parents or teach-



ers. Also new this year and due to COVID, we have utilized our diagnostic and benchmark assessments to develop skills groups for the students in grades 3 through 6th who typically are proficient on state assessments but due to COVID need a little remediation to be back at grade level again.

In regards to School Wide Positive Behavior Support, at the elementary level we continue to hand out green cards to any student who is exhibiting SAFE, KIND, or RESPONSIBLE behavior. New this year at the elementary level is the Principal's 200 Spartan Club where students enter their names onto a large bingo card when they earn a green card. Once 10 students are in a row on the bingo board, the entire row of students get a bigger prize.

Again, we are excited to be back but recognize the COVID-19 limitations have had a toll on all of us. So if your child is struggling in any way or you feel they need extra help, please feel free to reach out to our office.

Wishing everyone a wonderful year!

**Ms. Nicole Bell**  
Director of Pupil Services

## LAUREL SD TECHNOLOGY DEPARTMENT UPDATE

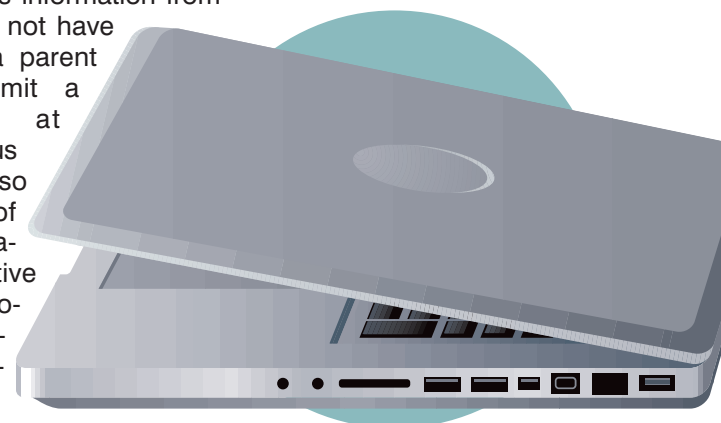
It's an exciting time at Laurel as the district enters a new era in technology integration. There have been significant changes to the infrastructure and we expanded our 1:1 program K-12 to provide every student in the Laurel School District a Chromebook or Chrome Tablet.

In addition to these exciting new experiences, there are some changes happening behind the scenes at Laurel SD. This year we are using Alma, a new software system that will help us better manage school, classroom and student information. Alma, is a secure, easy-to-use online system that brings important school information and tools together in one place. Alma also offers a modern parent and student portal to help families stay informed and on track with student learning. The new system also has an app for both iOS and Android to allow parents/guardians to view their students information from anywhere. If you do not have access to the Alma parent portal please submit a request at [help@laurel.k12.pa.us](mailto:help@laurel.k12.pa.us)

The district is also in the process of replacing the traditional interactive whiteboards and projectors with interactive flat panel dis-

plays. This new technology will equip classrooms with high definition displays that provide the same functions as the traditional interactive boards, along with enhancements that will help meet the needs of the 21st century learner. We also equipped our classrooms with 4k webcams to allow our teachers to provide direct instruction through streaming to support synchronous learning.

"There is a lot going on right now as we continue to expand our program. I am confident that Laurel will soon be a Beacon of Educational Technology, not only in Lawrence County, but the entire Commonwealth," said Mr. Robert Lee, the Director of Administrative Services who serves as the IT director of the district.



## Art Amidst a Pandemic

LAUREL SCHOOL DISTRICT



WRITTEN BY JESSICA FARRA  
IMAGES BY SHANNON SAUDERS



PICTURED:  
CAITLYN BURNS  
ELIANNA MCKISSICK  
IAN MCKISSICK  
VANESSA DICKS



We find ourselves in mid-October at a rural western Pennsylvania school district. It would be nice to say that it was a normal high school setting in a sleepy area, however, this cannot be said about the year of 2020. The pandemic, COVID-19, has hit. The first case was in mid-November of last year. It spreads to the United States in January and to Pennsylvania in March. There was mass panic shortly followed by world wide shutdowns. We are a month shy of COVID-19 lasting a full year up to this point.

You may be wondering what implications this has had for schools. Well, in Mrs. Gryn's middle and high school art classroom, we have clear shower curtains hanging from the ceilings, cases of water with Crystal light packets, extra masks and all seats six feet apart. As per school policy, everyone wears a mask throughout the day unless con-

suming food or water.

We do find some comedic relief throughout the day, like adjusting or using a pencil and eraser without being able to blow away excess graphite dust or eraser remnants through masks which many students have tried.

Although we are social distancing we are trying our best to be a part of the community. Painting students worked on finishing the concession stand mural that was started prior to the school shutting down last year. Under Mrs. Gryn's instruction, students worked off of reference photos for the medal, ring and softball pictured as well as the back of the concession stand. On the back students painted the softball players in their green Laurel Spartan uniforms.

We are keeping a positive outlook and doing the best that we can during uncertain times, and plan to continue to do so in the future.

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## IMPORTANT MESSAGE FROM THE NIC KNOCKERS

The negative effects of nicotine are directly shown in the upcoming generation. Did you know in Lawrence County about 83% of teens are smoke-free? Although from 2015 until 2019, there has been a 5% increase in use of e-cigarettes/vaping but still over 74% of teens choose not to use these products. However, the mere fact remains that almost 20% of teens do continue to use some product with nicotine, which is frightening especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. Given these horrific facts, the following Laurel students joined TRU, which stands for Tobacco Resistance Unit of Pennsylvania, Braden Niles, Madison Domer, Shawn Redmond, Emily Ruggieri, Abigail Stone, Kassaundra Harvey, Vanessa Dicks, Ava Conti, Ellena Perdue, Jenna Kohlen, and Elysia Fabian. These students banded together to say no to nicotine. This group is led by Dr. Dado, and the group created new ingenuitive ways to continue the anti-tobacco/nicotine movement during these times of social distancing.

The future plans are to continue educating the youth at Laurel. The Nic Knocker group will do this by sending informative post cards to community members, having a magnet designing contest for Laurel Middle High School, and an anti-nicotine mask designing contest and coloring contest for the students at the Laurel Elementary School.

President and Ambassador, Emily Ruggieri and Vice President, Shawn Redmond strongly noted the importance of teaching these truths given the COVID-19 health crisis. Knowing the effects of a respiratory virus coupled with vaping could be a disaster for young people, so the group continued to advocate

for facts over fiction. Even though vaping is often labeled as “safer than smoking” it is in fact the opposite. One singular pod of nicotine for a vape product contains the equivalent of 20 cigarettes. Moreover, vaping and e-cigarettes not only negatively impact the lungs, but also affect the heart as well. These electronic cigarettes are just as addictive as traditional cigarettes, and it is essential that the youth understands that. With these frightening facts, the younger generation must not become addicted to these harmful substances and that is primarily done through education.

Parents get on board and help yourselves and your children keep their lungs healthy during the pandemic. Here are many resources for adults and teens who want help quitting.

- [https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/SGR\\_ECig\\_ParentTipSheet\\_508.pdf](https://e-cigarettes.surgeongeneral.gov/documents/SGR_ECig_ParentTipSheet_508.pdf)
- <https://www.mylifemyquit.com/>
- <https://teen.smokefree.gov/>

And remember this year, especially, it is so important to get your flu vaccine!

\*information resources [www.cdc.gov/tobacco](http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco), [www.TRUpa](http://www.TRUpa), [www.truth.org](http://www.truth.org)

## A TRU AMBASSADOR SELECTED

Emily Ruggieri, the daughter of Tina and John Ruggieri, has been chosen to be a TRU Youth Ambassador for TRU PA (Tobacco Resistance Unit of Pennsylvania), which is a nationally known youth driven anti-nicotine group. She is the president of the Nic knockers at Laurel Middle-High School. It is evident she has a passion for tobacco prevention and control, advocacy, and leadership abilities. Last year the Nic knockers group was formed through the direction of Dr. Lori Dado and community guidance by Mrs. Katie Gassner. Emily and a group of 11 other members developed and presented anti-nicotine and anti-e-cigarette instruction to students at Laurel Elementary School. Emily also participated in the Virtual Day at the Hill in May 2020 and was able to talk and lobby for anti-nicotine education money Master Settlement Agreement funding from tobacco companies (MSA) and the Tobacco 21 campaign to increase the legal age to purchase tobacco from 18 to 21 years old. The Ambassador is a prestigious position and only a few exceptional individuals are chosen to represent the Western Pennsylvania area. Emily is an excellent candidate and will serve our community well. Good Luck Emily!



## GLAD TO BE BACK!

It was such a great sight on that first day of school this year seeing all the students coming into the building and making it feel like school again. Laurel Elementary has not felt the same since last March before we had to close our doors due to the Pandemic. However, we are back now and even though it was a giant learning curve with the new technology and synchronous learning, I know that the staff along with myself are so grateful to be able to have students in front of us again. This human interaction piece that is so vital for learning had been missing for almost 6 months. The support and cooperation from the parents and the community is what keeps us moving forward as we work hard to get our students back on track academically. We continue to try to create some normalcy in a world that seems to be anything but normal. Our hope is that we are able to keep our doors open and students in our classrooms for the entire school year. We will get through together!

By Dan Svirbly

## BLENDED LEARNING TAKING SHAPE TO BENEFIT ALL LEARNERS AT LAUREL MIDDLE HIGH SCHOOL

This school year has been unlike any other at Laurel Middle High School. Every teacher in this building whether it has been their thirty-fourth school year or first school year, has had to start the year in an unconventional way while working to teach in both a virtual and brick and mortar classroom simultaneously. The teachers have worked tirelessly to create a safe and rigorous learning environment for all learners. The journey began three years ago when we introduced the BRIDGE Program to the middle high school students and teachers began dabbling with Google Classroom and the Google Suite. Over the evolution of the process, teachers went from novice learners to deep divers over the end of the 2019-2020 school year. As summer

neared the end, the administration and the teachers worked together to develop comprehensive instructional days for teachers to further develop their technology skills while allowing them to create lessons to meet the needs of the learners.

The result of this training has altered the educational landscape. The teachers have used a variety of instructional practices as well as a mixture of new technological tools to create rigorous live lessons for students forced to learn remotely while teaching to live students in their room. As an administrative team, we are proud of the lengths and efforts that our staff has gone to ensure that students have the ability to learn without being forced to look to cyber schools.

As students returned to school for the 20/21 school year many things looked different including the cafeteria. From assigned seating to promote social distancing to the elimination of all things self-served things were unfamiliar. The one thing that was familiar were the smiling (behind masks) faces of the cafeteria staff! The staff returned ready to accept any and all challenges. They adjusted the way they serve items to limit high touch areas and adjusted menus due to supply chain concerns while ensuring that the students' favorite items were available. The care and concern did not just reach the students in the school building. The staff is preparing pick up meals for students learning from home. With the expansion of the USDA Seamless Summer Program, we are happy to provide all students with free breakfast and lunch, no matter where they are learning. In such a time of uncertainty for many, the cafeteria is answering the call again. The staff will soon prepare free meals for students to have on the weekends to ensure that every Spartan is taken care of and ready to learn.



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