

CONNECTED



AMBRIDGE AREA

2016-2017 Annual Report

A Message from the Superintendent of Schools



Connected to Community . . . Connected to Success

Without a doubt, one of the most important landmarks in Ambridge is the steel cantilever truss bridge that spans across the Ohio River. Built in 1910, it has stood as a symbol of strength and endurance for over a century.

The bridge also is a reminder of its main purpose – connecting one area to another. In the Ambridge Area School District, we firmly believe in the importance of connections in the success of our students. The District serves as a “bridge” to leading and learning, preparing students for the future through academic excellence.

But this is not a mission we can accomplish on our own; we need the support of the community.

As many of you know, I have only been with the District as its Superintendent since July 1, 2017. However, my family has deep roots in this community. My children were raised here and attended and graduated from Ambridge Senior High School. Although my children now are in college, I am still a resident of this school community and have been for the last 20 years. My vested interest in our District, not only as its leader, but as a member of its community should be apparent. I know that together, we can do great things here at Ambridge.

Prior to being hired as Superintendent here in Ambridge, I spent decades as a teacher, principal and central office administrator. My extensive experience in technology education provided an

opportunity for me to be recognized by Tech and Learning Magazine as its 2013 Technology Leader of the Year. This was a humbling honor that created additional contacts and partnerships in education.

Since taking the helm at Ambridge six months ago, together with other Ambridge administrative leaders, we have taken swift action in several areas which needed addressing in order for us to get back to the business of educating our students.

First and most pressing was the successful negotiation of a new contract for our teachers. For too long, this unresolved issue has hung over the heads of our entire community. Along with others, we worked toward a resolution that would be fair to all parties involved. On August 11, 2017, our teachers voted to approve an arbitrator’s ruling. The agreement, which is retroactive to the 2015-2016 school year, includes a fair salary and health insurance package. Savings achieved through the healthcare plan will be used to support well-deserved teacher salary increases without an impact to taxpayers. Full details of the new contract are available on the District website.

With the addition of a new Director of Operations, Mr. Doug McCausland, nearly two years ago, we have been able to develop a comprehensive budget and have implemented a zero-based budgeting process. With the guidance of principals, professional employees are taking a more active role to review all

line items of the budget, are searching for areas to reduce costs, and are held more accountable for spending. While this is a new process for the District, we will realize benefits moving forward. In addition, Mr. McCausland, working closely with our Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds, Mr. Dave Matzie, is developing a five-year Capital Improvement Plan and attending to numerous maintenance and facilities improvements throughout the District.

We have also been able to open our three elementary libraries for weekly book circulation to provide all children the opportunity to experience the joy of reading. Our Jr. High Media Center is open and provides opportunities for students to engage in creative group work, utilize technology, and enrich their learning experiences. The High School Media Center is also open for students to use each period of the school day and provides technology for student use.

Mrs. Lori Heim, the District’s Technology Supervisor, worked to provide access of all components of the new Tyler student information system for professional staff. Through the activation of the Tyler Pulse option within the system, teachers now have easy access to all student data that can be used for enrichment or remediation, planning and meetings to address students’ individual needs. This is a very effective tool that is used on a daily basis.

(Continued on page 3)

(Continued from page 2)

We also began using an interactive assessment and learning, online program called Istation for students in grades K-6. The tool allows us to determine if students require remediation or enrichment in reading and math. Through Istation, we can effectively monitor students' present learning levels, to determine which new skills they are mastering and when. The program provides teachers with data that can be used to compare our students nationally. Students use Istation twice weekly. It provides students a technology experience that is an engaging, interactive and enjoyable way to learn.

Together with Mr. Barry King, the Director of Curriculum, Instruction, Assessment and Special Projects, we have established a planning committee consisting of teachers, administrators, board members, representatives from business and industry and members of the community we serve. The Comprehensive Planning Committee will meet several times annually to review and discuss District accomplishments, and to ensure we are embracing and following our Comprehensive Plan.

These are just a few of the things we have accomplished in the last six months, and I look forward to tackling other areas in need of attention as we move forward together.

Regardless of my experience and the things we have accomplished thus far in my new role here, I recognize that success cannot be built on the shoulders of one individual alone; it truly takes a village. I am eager and excited to work with local business and industry, faculty and staff, parents and others in our community to transform Ambridge Area School District into a stomping ground for success.

I thank you for joining me on this journey, and know that together, we can do great things!

Sincerely,

Dr. L. Jo Welter
Superintendent of Schools

About the Ambridge Area School District



Serving nearly 2,500 students in the municipalities of Ambridge Borough, Baden Borough, Economy Borough, Harmony Township, and South Heights, the Ambridge Area School District is the largest school district in Beaver County. Covering approximately 27 square miles within the metropolitan Pittsburgh Area. The District's ideal location allows its residents to easily access the region's vast academic, business, cultural, entertainment, sport, and recreational resources. The area is rich in tradition and offers a wealth of historic, cultural, and ethnic attractions. Revitalization projects are ripe in the commercial and historic districts. The area provides an array of entertainment, numerous churches and denominations, a myriad of restaurants, expansive shopping and nightlife, abundant parks and recreation, and a mass of cultural and historic vitality. The region is surrounded by scenic settings with river valleys nestled along the Appalachian Mountain Range. Additionally, the District is within a short commute to the Pittsburgh International Airport, numerous major shopping areas, and the Pennsylvania Turnpike along with other interstates, such as State Route 65, Interstate 79 and Interstate 279. Shopping areas close by include: Cranberry Township, Center Township and Robinson Township.

AWARDS AND DISTINCTIONS

AASD STEAM COACH NAMED TEACHER OF THE YEAR

For more than 20 years, the Beaver County Educational Trust has awarded mini-grants to area teachers to launch innovative classroom projects or expand curriculum that otherwise might not develop because of limited school budgets.

This year, however, is the first for its Teacher of the Year award honoring a teacher whose project grant application scored highest in judging rubrics and is deemed “exemplary.”

Caitlin Bajgier, STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and mathematics) coach in the Ambridge Area School District, helps kindergarten pupil Ty Hartman as he works on a computational thinking problem at Economy Elementary School. Bajgier is one of two teacher’s named Teachers of the Year by the Beaver County Educational Trust.



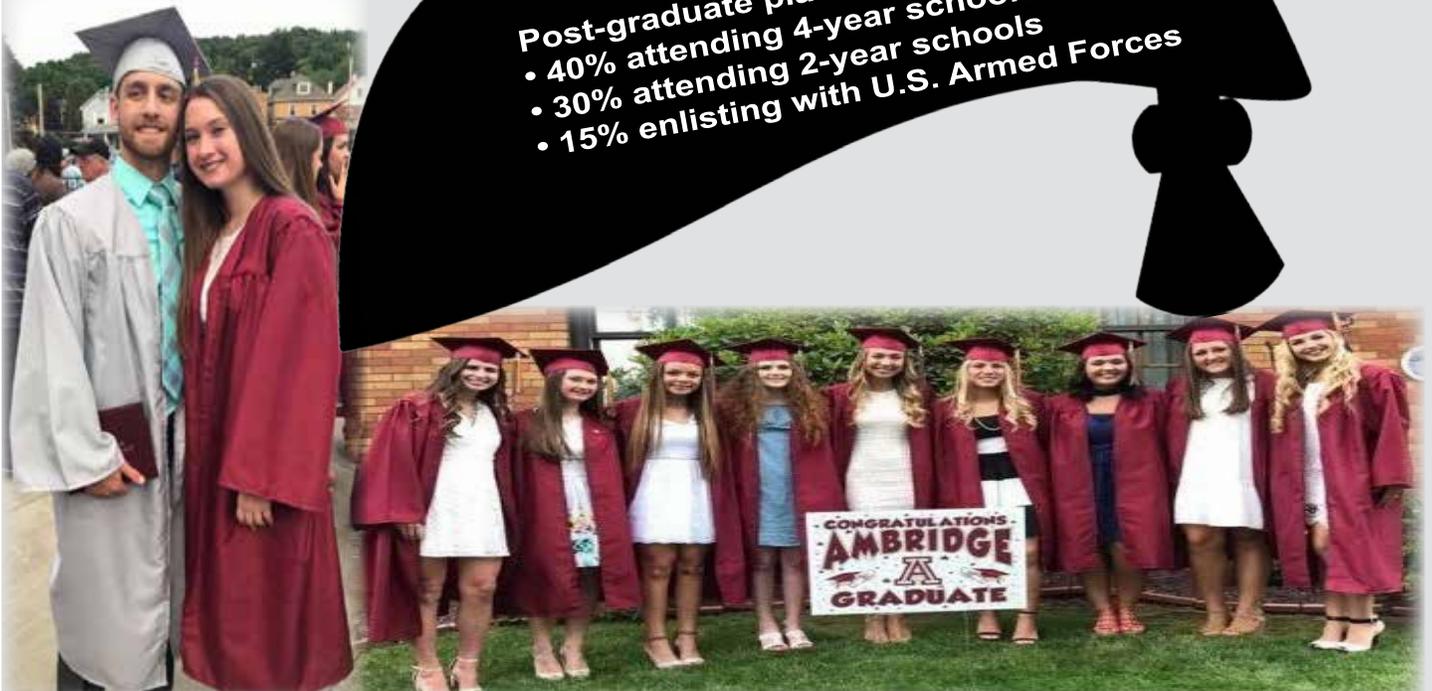
“I see what the kids are learning in math, reading and science and pull them together,” Bajgier said.

For the full article go to: <http://www.timesonline.com/entertainmentlife/20171217/beaver-county-educational-trust-awards-teacher-of-year>

Class of 2017 Stats

Date of ceremony: June 9, 2017
Total number of graduates: 170

- Post-graduate plans:
- 40% attending 4-year schools
 - 30% attending 2-year schools
 - 15% enlisting with U.S. Armed Forces



DISTRICT FINANCIAL REPORT

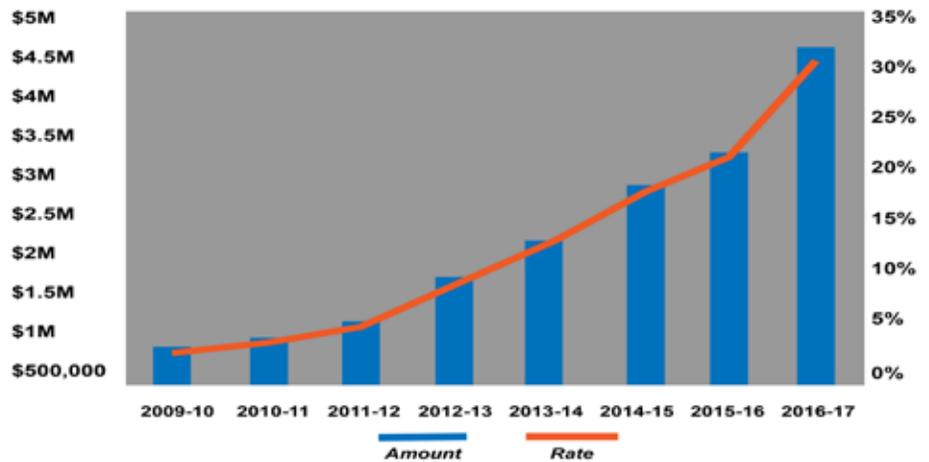
On June 21, 2017, the Ambridge Area School Board of Directors approved a 2017-2018 Operating Budget that preserves the quality programming in the District without increasing the current millage rate.

Expenditures of \$47.8 million – a 5.3 percent increase over the previous year's budget – are included in the new operating budget. The millage rate will remain at 79.2941 mills. One mill generates \$266,685 in revenue for the District.

The 2017-2018 budget reflects the following:

- Salary line items are increasing by 2.22 percent from the current year's estimated actual. The district reduced its professional staff and increased the JROTC program. Any reductions in staff will have no effect on programs being delivered.
- Premium rate costs for medical insurance increased by 2.4 percent for the PPO plan. In addition, the district offered an EPO plan to administrators and support personnel at a reduced premium over the current PPO plan.
- The school district's contribution rate paid to the Public School Employees' Retirement System (PSERS) increased from 30.03 percent to 32.57 percent. The school district contributed \$5,253,795 to PSERS in 2017-2018, compared to \$4,996,622 in 2016-2017 – a 5.15 percent increase in cost to the district. The PSERS trustees determine the contribution rate increase annually. At the end of the fiscal year, the District receives a 50 percent reimbursement from the State on these costs.
- Equipment, technology, and vehicle purchases for the district cost \$740,992. These items are required to update computers/laptops for students and staff, update network switches that are beyond useful life, upgrade servers to provide data backup, and a new truck and maintenance equipment for maintaining facilities.
- Costs for supplies, books and software increased. Much-needed textbooks for AP and Honors classes, remedial and support materials, upgrades and additional software, have been purchased.

RETIREMENT CONTRIBUTIONS AND RATE



As with other public school districts in Pennsylvania, Ambridge continues to face difficult budget years in the future due to the PSERS contribution mandate. The graph (see top right) outlines the District's PSERS contribution rates from 2009-2010 through 2016-2017. Due to rate increases, the District has paid \$18.9 million over the last eight years. Combined with the limitations on increasing tax rates imposed under Act 1, these unprecedented PSERS increases have created the need for the District to consider cuts.

Additionally, the District established a capital projects fund to help fund future improvements to facilities without the need to issue new debt to cover the costs. Currently, the fund has a balance of \$4.1 million. The District continues to monitor its outstanding debt issues in pursuit of opportunities to refund this debt to generate savings. The District also hired Mr. David Matzie as its Facilities Manager. Mr. Matzie's previous experience managing facilities for hotels has given him insight into maintaining the District's physical plant, while prioritizing which areas need addressing and how to do so in the most cost-effective manner possible.

Moving forward, the District also plans to implement sound financial strategies to manage expenditures and anticipate revenue shortfalls. A comprehensive evaluation

of the District's financial health has been conducted. As part of the findings of the evaluation, the District has overhauled its annual budget process to include building administrators in the planning stages. Formal staffing procedures also will be implemented District-wide to ensure staffing is in alignment with the number of students the District currently is serving, and to ensure the District is meeting all state financial reporting requirements.

The District also recently completed a comprehensive state audit by the Pennsylvania Department of Education for the years 2012 through 2016, as well as the Annual Financial Audit for the fiscal year 2016-2017. The only finding of the state audit involved contract language relating to retirement packages offered in superintendent contracts; otherwise, the District's operations and financial records were reported in good standing. The local auditing firm of Mark Turnley, CPA, completed its financial audit of the District's records for the fiscal year 2016-2017. This audit also has no findings with regard to the District's financial reporting.

A complete copy of the 2017-2018 Operating Budget is available on the District website at <http://www.ambridge.k12.pa.us/index.php/budget/981-fiscal-general-fund-budget-2017-2018>.

CONNECTED TO COMMUNITY...CONNECTED TO SUCCESS

The late Mattie Stepanek once said that “unity is strength . . . when there is teamwork and collaboration, wonderful things can be achieved.” During his short life, the young poet and motivational speaker truly believed that anything was possible when people worked together toward a common goal.

In the Ambridge Area School District, we believe it is our mission to be the “bridge” to leading and learning, preparing students for the future through academic excellence. It is part of our vision to encourage the community to be an active participant in the educational process and success of our students. Like Stepanek, we believe in the value of teamwork.

Studies have shown that when a community is actively engaged and involved in its schools, resources are effectively shared, healthy behaviors are promoted

The goals are as follows:

- Goal #1: Increase student performance, growth and achievement.
- Goal #2: Develop and implement a Professional Development Plan for employees.
- Goal #3: Increase communication and public relations throughout the District.
- Goal #4: Implement consistent Human Resources protocols and procedures.
- Goal #5: Review, evaluate and manage resources of the District.

The idea is not simply to physically group students in these grades under one roof,” said Dr. Jo Welter, Superintendent. “The main goal of the middle school concept is to improve the educational program, increase rigor and provide more opportunities for students at a younger level. The hope is to also encourage those attending charter schools to rejoin the Ambridge Area Community and School District.”

There are costs associated with improving the facility; however, those improvements will be included in the five-year capital improvement plan. Regardless of whether the District moves forward with the middle school concept or keeps its existing structure, the current junior high facility will need remodeling.

There are also benefits associated with making this change.



both at home and at school, and overall student achievement is increased. We recognize that we have many great resources within our community – ones we hope to build on for the betterment of our students.

Growth and Goals

The recognition of the importance of the community in building a successful academic environment for our students is the centerpiece of the District’s goals and growth moving forward.

In June, District Administration and members of the Board of School Directors established a list of goals for the District and an action plan for each of those goals.

Each one of these goals makes room for community involvement. District Administration has made it a priority to actively seek community input on decisions which affect the future of our schools.

One of those decisions involves the creation of a middle school model to replace the existing junior high school. The middle school concept has been in existence in one form or another for nearly 40 years, and involves housing students in grades 5-8 or 6-8 in the same building. In our case, District Administration is proposing the conversion of our existing middle school – which houses 7th and 8th graders – to a middle school for grades 6-8.

Moving sixth grade from our three elementary schools to a middle school with grades seven and 8 will allow for the more efficient use of staff, which will result in cost savings. The move also would provide team planning time for sixth graders, allowing teachers to provide a more structured and consistent delivery of instruction and the opportunity for more frequent communication with the seventh and eighth grade teachers.

There are several other ways in which we have been actively working toward achieving goals one, three and five.

The reopening of our three elementary

(Continued on next page)

CONNECTED TO COMMUNITY ... CONNECTED TO SUCCESS

(Continued from previous page)

libraries was an important first step toward improving literacy and helping to foster our young students' love of the written word. Studies have shown that literacy-rich environments foster the continuing development of speaking, reading and writing skills in all students. Making libraries available to our students - and encouraging the love of reading - is an important component in the entire educational process.

At the Junior High School, we transformed the library into a new Media Center, which provides opportunities for students to engage in creative group work, utilize technology and enrich their learning experiences.

The media center was unveiled to parents, students, teachers and community members during a special ribbon-cutting ceremony on Nov. 8, 2017. The room features dry-erase tabletops, brightly-colored walls and flexible chairs that are great for helping students to keep focus. It also has 22 computers and a digital projector which can be used for a variety of projects.

This innovative media center replaced an outdated library, which hadn't seen new books or materials in more than three years.



Now, students have access to online research materials that are current and applicable to a variety of academic subjects.

Total cost for the media center was under \$100,000, with grant money providing the funding for the purchase of the computers.

Academic Opportunities Abound

Ambridge also is the first public school district in Beaver County to be awarded a National Math + Science Initiative grant worth up to \$750,000. The three-year partnership with NMSI will be used to provide professional development opportunities for teachers in grades 3-12 in the subjects of science, math and English. Grant money through the partnership also will be used to dramatically increase the number of Ambridge students enrolled in AP courses and allow the District to provide an additional five AP courses beyond the eight already offered.

"I am incredibly excited about this grant, as it will provide extensive training for up to 34 staff, helping to lay the foundation in grades 3-8 for students to have exposure to more rigorous coursework in alignment with our AP classes," said Ms. Janice Zupsic, Ambridge Area Senior High School Principal. "This truly is a District-wide opportunity, allowing all of our students to benefit from having access to master teachers and

mentors for teachers in all grade levels." The resources being made available through this grant are a valuable tool in reshaping and enhancing the District's curriculum to meet the goal of increasing student growth and achievement.

AP teachers at the high school also will have access to hundreds of lesson plans, mock tests and materials that can be used to help prepare students to sit for AP exams. Currently, students are not required to sit for an exam upon completion of an AP course at Ambridge. As part of the partnership agreement with NMSI, students will now be expected to sit for the AP exams. NMSI will pay for half of the cost of the exams, with the school district covering the other half.

"We will now have a solid, vertical alignment of curriculum in grades 3-11, with nationally-normed standards and assessment items," said Dr. Welter. "Our students will be better prepared for college and careers."

These are just a few of the exciting things going on in the Ambridge Area School District. As we move forward, we hope to form new partnerships with resources in our community that will help further our goal of serving as the bridge to leading and learning for all students.

BOARD OF SCHOOL DIRECTORS



Front Row: Mrs. Valerie Pedigo (Treasurer), Mr. Scott Angus (President), Mrs. Terry Mylan (Vice President), Dr. Jo Welter (Superintendent). Back Row: Mr. Hobart Webster (Solicitor), Mr. James Sas, Mrs. Kimberly Locher, Mr. James Wear, Mr. Roger Kowal, Mrs. Mary Jo Kehoe, Mrs. Kelly Fischer, Ms. Marianne Salzman (Secretary)

School Board Directors are elected officials who volunteer their service to the Ambridge Area School District and community-at-large. Members are required to attend both meet-and-discuss sessions and voting meetings. Additionally, they serve on a variety of ad-hoc and standing committees.

In December, the Board welcomed newly-elected members Mrs. Valerie Pedigo and Mr. James Wear.

Meet-and-discuss meetings are held on the second Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m., and voting meetings are scheduled for the third Wednesday of each month at 7 p.m. Meetings are held in the Ambridge Senior High School library, unless otherwise noted. School Board meeting agendas can be found on the District website at <http://www.ambridge.k12.pa.us/index.php/agendas>.

Contact the School Board:

Angus, Scott (President)	scott.angus@ambridge.k12.pa.us
Fischer, Kelly	kelly.fischer@ambridge.k12.pa.us
Kehoe, Mary Jo	maryjo.kehoe@ambridge.k12.pa.us
Kowal, Roger	roger.kowal@ambridge.k12.pa.us
Mylan, Terry (Vice President)	terry.mylan@ambridge.k12.pa.us
Locher, Kimberly	kimberly.locher@ambridge.k12.pa.us
Pedigo, Valerie (Treasurer)	valerie.pedigo@ambridge.k12.pa.us
Sas, James	james.sas@ambridge.k12.pa.us
Wear, James	james.wear@ambridge.k12.pa.us