

CONNECTIONS

Fall 2018

NMSI Grant Leads to Innovation

In July, 27 Ambridge Area School District teachers participated in academic training provided by the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI). The trainings are in support of the NMSI program, which is designed to improve students' growth in the areas of English, Math and Science through participation in the Advanced Placement (AP) program.

The training is part of the [NMSI three-year grant](#) the District secured in January 2018. The grant covers the cost of the professional development for teachers, including the accompanying course materials. Ambridge is the only school district in Beaver County to receive a NMSI grant.

During the first two weeks of training, teachers from grades 3-10 received lessons in NMSI's Laying the Foundation program. The program provides supportive instruction for students that will



Professional development opportunities for staff are a vital part of the NMSI grant.

build skills and higher-level thinking, allowing more students to participate in the AP program.

Ambridge High School AP teachers received training in their specific course during the second week through the College Readiness Program. The training they received has been proven to help students score higher on the AP tests, allowing students to receive college credit for high scores, which will in turn help to lower the cost of tuition.

The NMSI program also has permitted the High School to offer the following additional AP courses: Chemistry, Computer Science, English Language and Composition and Statistics. The new AP courses will be added to the English, Math and Science AP courses Ambridge High School already offered.

Similar fall training sessions and Saturday Study Sessions have been held for

students and staff. At the Saturday sessions, students are randomly selected to win Amazon gift cards provided by NMSI. At the Oct. 20 session, an Ambridge High School student was the lucky recipient of the gift card.

Throughout the year, the English, Math and Science teachers will continue training in the NMSI model, and our students will have the opportunity to participate in regional study sessions with students from other schools within the Pittsburgh area. At the end of the year, the students participating in the AP classes will be able to take the corresponding AP exams at no additional cost. Students who score a 3 or higher on an AP test are eligible for a \$100 stipend for each test where the score is earned.

Additional information on NMSI's Laying the Foundation and College Readiness Programs can be found [here](#).

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A Message from the Superintendent

As I write this message, students in the Ambridge Area School District are finishing up the first grading period of the 2018-2019 School Year. While it is still early in the new school year, it is never too soon to share the good news about what is happening inside our schools.

To kick off the good news, we are pleased to announce State Street Elementary as a Distinguished Title I School. Each year, the Division of Federal Programs honors and recognizes the top performing Title I schools in Pennsylvania. State Street is among 158 Title I schools to be named as Distinguished Schools for meeting all four Annual Measurable Objectives, which includes scoring in the top 5 percent in English Language Arts (ELA) and Math PSSA assessments, and showing marked growth in the Pennsylvania Value-Added Assessment System (PVAAS). State Street will be honored by the PA Department of Education's Division of Federal Program at the 2019 Title I Improving Schools' Performance Conference in Kansas City, MO. Additionally, State Street has been invited to share its success with other educators as presenters at the 2019 Title I Improving Schools' Performance Conference Jan. 13-16 at the Sheraton Station Square in Pittsburgh.

At the elementary level, we also have introduced our students to the Assessment to Instruction (A2i) program, which is dedicated to helping all children read at or above grade level by the end of third grade. Only 174 schools nationwide were invited to participate in this innovative program. We are very excited to have this in our elementary schools and have already begun

to see improvements in our reading skills. Learn more about how A2i works on page 5 of this newsletter.

As many of you already know, we have revamped the former junior high school into the new Ambridge Area Middle School. There is more to this transition than just a change in name. A variety of new courses designed to build career awareness and future readiness have been implemented into the Middle School Program of Studies. Advanced coursework and exploratory options have been added and are designed to challenge our students to their fullest potential. Computer applications and coding are two unique experiences in 6th and 7th grade, along with Family and Consumer Sciences, where students will explore food preparation and careers for the future. Technology Education, STEAM, music, art, physical education, health and world languages will also be available and required of all students. These nine-week rotations will keep student interest piqued and provide engaging activities. Eighth graders also will receive computer instruction and will make choices from other elective offerings. We also have upgraded the facilities to include new lockers and furniture, as well as two newly-renovated restrooms. Additionally, the Student Council is being revived at the Middle School, and a newly-formed Parent-Teacher Group (PTG) is already hard at work. Learn more about Student Council and the PTG inside this newsletter.

At the High School, we continue to challenge students at all levels. One of the programs we're most proud of this year is a new cooperative program with PittMoss. The program is designed to provide

students with valuable employment skills from the production line. Learn more about the co-op on page 4. The High School also is offering several new Advanced Placement (AP) courses this year: Chemistry, Computer Science, English Language and Composition and Statistics. The new AP courses will be added to the English, Math and Science AP courses Ambridge High School already offered. The new AP courses are part of an overall National Math and Science Institute (NMSI) grant the District received. Learn more about the grant and its many benefits inside this newsletter.

These are just a few of the many positive things happening this year in our District. As we continue through the school year, I will continue to be present in our buildings each day, engaging with students and staff to discover additional ways we can grow and prosper in our District. I also appreciate the opportunity to dialogue with parents and the community, hosting a number of Superintendent's Coffees this fall. Additional coffees will be scheduled throughout the year in an effort to keep the lines of communication open. Our work can be challenging, and it is helpful to continue to involve the community in our efforts.

Like every school district, we have our challenges, but we are working toward providing a brighter future for our students, serving as the "bridge" to leading and learning, preparing students for the future through academic excellence. We look forward to your support as we tackle this challenge together.

Dr. Jo Welter
Superintendent of Schools

2018-2019 Operating Budget to Increase Academic Opportunities District-Wide

The Ambridge Area School Board of Directors approved a 2018-2019 Operating Budget in June that will enhance academic opportunities District-wide, while affording much-needed upgrades to infrastructure and technology. The budget was approved by a vote of 5 to 2.

Budget highlights include:

Technology

- Upgrades to the Middle School wireless service at a cost of \$38,103;
- Four new laptop carts for the schools and a new laptop lab for the Middle School at a cost of \$140,465;
- Purchase of 30 new laptops and 200 new iPads at a cost of \$166,995; and
- New projectors purchased for \$75,190 and existing projectors upgraded for \$17,000.

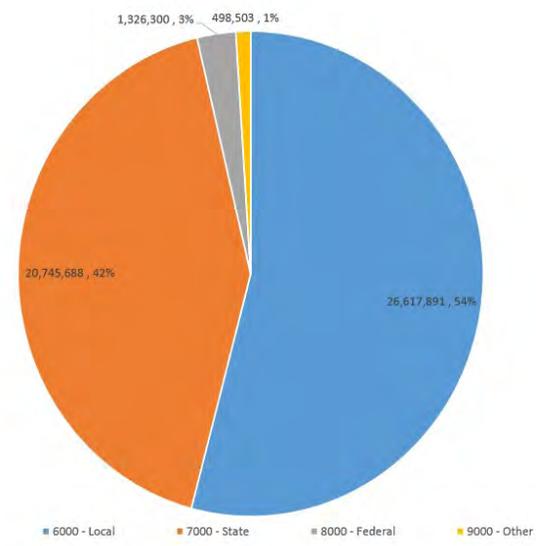
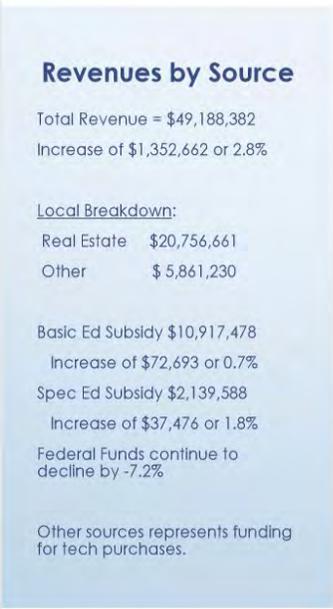
Thanks to an E-Rate grant secured by District Technology Supervisor Ms. Lori Heim, 80 percent of the cost of the wireless upgrades at the Middle School will be covered.

Security

- Upgrading the security operating system;
- New and replacement cameras District-wide;
- District radios to improve communication among buildings/administrators; and
- Card access for elevators.

Curriculum

- New Grade 6-8 Math Textbooks;
- New Grade 3-12 Social Studies Textbooks;
- New High School Physics, Honors, Chemistry, Biology and Earth Science Textbooks;
- NMSI grant (\$750,000) used to align and increase the rigor of the science, math and English curriculum District-



wide. The terms of the three-year grant require the District to contribute \$25,000 annually for the life of the grant to be used for staff development. 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; and

- Assessment to Instruction (A2i) grant that will be used to help all students in the District reading at or above grade level by the end of third grade. A2i is an instructional tool that was developed and evaluated for more than a decade with the support of the Institute of Educational Sciences and the National Institutes of Health. It combines technology and professional development to accomplish the goal of increased literacy of children in grades K-3. Highland Elementary will be 100 percent funded and State Street Elementary will be 50 percent funded through the program. Only 174 schools in the nation were invited to participate in the grant program.

“Some of these textbooks date back to 1990,” said Mr. Doug McCausland, Director of District Operations. The new math series is budgeted at \$95,832 and the Science textbooks total \$116,000.

The District is able to pay for the Social Studies textbooks, totaling \$61,048, over a two-year period.

Facilities/Middle School

Under the direction of AASD Facilities Manager Mr. David Matzie, more than \$600,000 in capital improvements are built into the new budget and include:

- Locker replacement at Middle School - \$89,720
- Patching at Economy Elementary - \$150,000
- Flooring and Window Coverings at Middle School - \$56,490
- Bridge repairs at High School - \$75,000
- Bathroom replacements/upgrades at Middle School - \$276,500
- Bathroom sink sensors and mixing valves at High School - \$11,500
- Furniture replacement at Middle School - \$75,000

“We’re moving in the right direction. We’re attacking maintenance issues that haven’t been addressed in years,” said Dr. Jo Welter, Superintendent. “We’re making use of the staff we have and taking care of the facilities we have while being good stewards of taxpayer money.”

(Continued on Page 4)

(Continued from Page 3)

The \$49.49 million budget includes a millage increase of 2.1409 mills, or 2.7 percent. With the increase, the new millage rate will be 81.435 mills. One mill in the District generates approximately \$267,000 in tax revenue. The median assessed value for a home in AASD is \$23,450. With the new millage rate, the increased tax liability will be \$50.21 annually.

“No district likes to adopt a budget with a tax increase,” said Dr. Welter. “We have done a lot to reduce costs within reason but are left with the reality that a tax increase is necessary if we want to provide a quality education to our students.”

Among the cost-saving efforts the District made prior to presenting the final budget included:

- Reducing, through attrition, five professional staffing positions, at a savings of \$743,028;
- Anticipated profits of the AASD Food Services Department of an estimated \$150,000;
- Savings in health insurance costs for employees through the transition to the Allegheny School Health Consortium.

The 2018-2019 budget is available on the District website [here](#).

High School Offers Hands-On Learning at “The Lab”



In October, Ambridge High School students and their guests celebrated the grand opening of the “lab,” a dedicated space at the school for providing students with hands-on work experience.

- Consumer/Service
- Construction/Industrial
- Computer Technology
- Processing/Production
- Business/Marketing

Guests also had the opportunity to visit the co-op room to learn more about the school’s recent partnership with PittMoss, an Ambridge-based company that manufactures an organic, recycled, natural cellulosic fiber replacement for peat moss. PittMoss is partnering with the high school to provide workforce training opportunities to students in the Life Skills program.

Special Education teacher Mrs. Teresa Brewer said three Ambridge students participate in a school-to-work program, spending their afternoons at PittMoss learning valuable employment skills from the production line. Additionally, students are able to work in the lab at the High School, building boxes, placing labels and thank you cards and packaging the PittMoss product in the boxes, and then sealing and labeling the boxes for shipping. Students also learn how to inventory supplies needed for each delivery of product, as well as the products they are exporting. To date, students have packaged 200, 10-quart bags of PittMoss.

Special Education teacher Mr. David Bobak said 15 students are participating in the co-op on site at the new lab. Students have the option of selecting from one of five tasks when in the lab:

Students will rotate in groups of five in the lab throughout the day. When in the lab, they will practice the procedures involved with their selected task. Each student has a work record that will be used to clock them in and out and keep track of which tasks they performed in the lab.

Following the grand opening of the lab, PittMoss General Manager, Mr. BJ Rankin, said he was pleased to be working with the school as part of the co-op program. He said the students who are participating on site have a great work ethic and he is pleased to be helping them to learn the skills needed to enter the workforce. Students who participate in a co-op with PittMoss or any other businesses in the region are paid by the Beaver County Job Training Center for their work. Representatives from the center were present at the event today.

Mr. Rankin presented the school with a check for \$1,605. The money was raised through the generosity of local business and industry. “The community really came together on this one. I had set a goal of raising \$1,000 and was able to exceed it. We look forward to continuing our partnership with the school and we’re hoping to develop something even bigger in the future.”

AASD Invited to Participate in United2Read Program

In the Spring of 2018, the District was pleased to receive notification that it had been selected to participate in the United2Read program, which focuses on getting all children reading at – or above – grade level by the end of third grade.

Ambridge was one of only 174 school districts nationwide selected to participate.

Teachers in the District are calling the program an “amazing asset” and are reporting positive results. “We are able to differentiate with ease, use our time more effectively and create more engaging activities and lessons,” said Dana Burns, a Highland Elementary School first grade teacher. “This program directly benefits each student individually. Students are engaged, working on their grade level and making progress. It is exactly what we have been looking for to improve our students’ needs. We are passionate and excited to grow as educators and provide the best education for our students.”

[United2Read](#) consists of four partners working together to achieve this goal: Learning Ovations, mdr, Digital Promise and The University of California. The organization was awarded a \$14.65 million Education Innovation and Research Grant from the U.S. Department of Education. The grant money has been used to create the Assessment to Instruction (A2i) program. A2i consists of four components designed to accomplish the goal of having all student at or above grade level for reading by the end of third grade:

- A2i Software – this software is designed to assess the type and amount of instruction needed by each student in grades K-3.



- Professional Development – teachers receive professional development tools and resources that best model the literacy outcomes established by the program. Ambridge has been assigned a Literacy Outcomes Specialist from Learning Ovations, who has completed two, in-class coaching sessions and has collaborated with teachers to gather feedback on how the program is progressing.
- Classroom Teachers – the program provides tools and tips for teachers to empower them to effectively differentiate instruction based on the results of the A2i software.
- Existing Resources – teachers and administrators receive professional development and support to leverage and integrate existing assessments and curricula.

The program is being implemented over a three-year period. During the initial year of the program, students in grades K-1 will be assessed via the A2i software for 5-10 minutes several times a day to gather pertinent data on their individualized reading needs. That data will then be used to craft a differentiated reading program that can be conducted in small groups or 1:1 as necessary. The process will be repeated in year two for second graders and for third graders in year three.

A unique aspect of the A2i software is that it can be populated with the McGraw-Hill textbook materials being used in the classroom, said Superintendent Dr. Jo Welter. “I am encouraged by the statistics that indicate 94 percent of students who use this program are at or above grade level for reading by the time they complete third grade.”

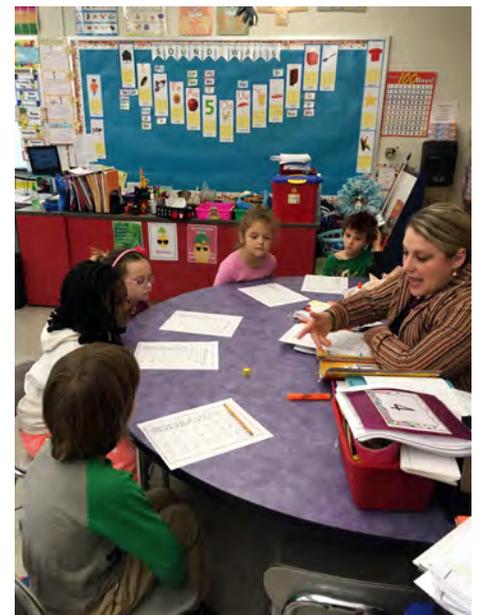
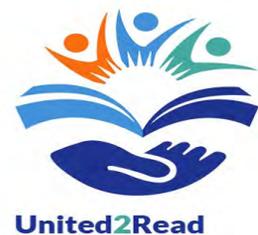




Photo Courtesy of Alan Freed

Ambridge Steel Drum Band Marching Toward Exciting Season

It's shaping up to be a busy – and exciting – year for the Ambridge Steel Drum Band.

Now in its 30th year at Ambridge, the band is celebrating the milestone with a few unique opportunities to shine this year. First on the agenda is the upcoming performance in the 38th Annual WPXI Holiday Parade. The steel band was invited to march in this prestigious local parade, which will be held on Saturday, Nov. 24 starting at 9 a.m. The parade will be aired live on WPXI Channel 11. The theme for this year's parade is "Neighborhoods," and will celebrate the 50th anniversary of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood.

"It's been more than 20 years since any Ambridge band has been involved in this parade, so we're thrilled to be selected to perform this year," said Steel Band director Mr. Todd Hartman. "Much like the heartbeat of the once-booming steel town, the Ambridge Steel Drum Band has established a culture of excellence, hard work and pride for our students and the Ambridge community."

The band also will be a featured ensemble performance at the 2019 Pennsylvania Music Educators Association (PMEA)/ National Association for Music Education (NAFME) Eastern Division Confer-

ence at the David L. Lawrence Convention Center in Pittsburgh in April 2019. The appearance as a featured performer at the conference will be a first for any band at Ambridge. "This is an incredible opportunity for our students to be showcased in this way," said Hartman.

As if that wasn't exciting enough, the band also will be performing at the revival of the B.E. Taylor Christmas Show at Heinz Hall on Dec. 17. Taylor's family is reviving the concert series, and using it as a platform to feature some very talented musicians in the area. Learn more about the performance [here](#).

Another thrilling opportunity is happening on May 5, 2019, when the band hosts a collaborative performance with the River City Brass Band. World renowned steel percussionist Liam Tighe will participate in the event. Tighe also will conduct a workshop with students earlier in the day.

"I think it's safe to say this year is shaping up to be a big year for our Steel Band," he said.

Check out the band on its Facebook page [here](#), or at its [website](#) for a complete schedule of events.

Ambridge Area Middle School Launches PTG, Student Council

Exciting things are happening at Ambridge Middle School, including the formation of a Parent Teacher Group (PTG) and a Student Council.

Parents have been incredibly supportive of the new PTG, said PTG President Cathy Fischer. "We sent home parent membership forms and clearance information, and we had a great response. A lot of parents have expressed interest in helping."

Mr. Tom McKelvey, AAMS Principal, said he has been pleased with the positive response to the PTG. "A lot of people have good ideas, and the goal of the PTG is to help spearhead those ideas."

So far this year, the PTG has sponsored an Oct. 24 dance and will be assisting Student Council with a Snowball Dance in December. Mrs. Fischer said the plan is for the PTG to assist the Student Council in planning fun and educational events for their peers. They hope to "mirror" the events happening at the High School to help generate school spirit at the Middle School, particularly during Homecoming week and other important events.

Council representatives were recruited from fifth graders who previously served on their respective elementary school councils, said Mr. McKelvey. Of the council representatives serving, two will be selected to work as liaisons with the PTG for co-planning purposes. "It is their Student Council, and we want it to reflect their voices," he said.

Parents interested in learning more about the PTG can contact Mrs. Fischer [via email](#) or Mr. McKelvey [via email](#).



Burns



Miller

Ambridge Area School District Welcomes New Staff

The Ambridge Area School District is welcoming some new faces for the 2017-2018 School Year.

Dr. Laura Burns was hired to fill the position of principal at Highland Elementary School. Dr. Burns replaces Mrs. Joanne Hoover, who was transferred to State Street Elementary School.

Dr. Burns earned her Bachelor of Arts degree in History and Master of Arts degree in Teaching from the University of Pittsburgh. She received a Master of Public Management with a concentration in Educational Leadership from Carnegie Mellon University. Most recently, she received her Doctor of Education and Superintendent Letter of Eligibility from the University of Pittsburgh. She previously served as a Social Studies teacher in the Baldwin Whitehall School District and as an Assistant Principal at both the Carlynton Junior-Senior High School and the Pine-Richland High School.

Dr. Burns' professional honors include: memberships on the Pennsylvania State Social Studies Curriculum Committee and the World Affairs Council of Pittsburgh Study Tour. Also, Dr. Burns was a recipient of the National Consortium for Teaching about Asia Grant.

She is excited to lead Highland Elementary School and is looking forward to helping the students and staff to grow together. "My personal philosophy is we

can't have kids learning until their basic needs are met," said Dr. Burns, which includes food, clothing and mental health services. "That's always something I've been passionate about, no matter where I've been." Among her priorities this year is helping the staff to expand the food pantry at Highland, which provides weekend meals for students in need of the extra assistance.

Another goal Dr. Burns has is to get to know every student, and to make sure they know who she is and that her door is always open. "I have an open-door policy for students, teachers and parents. I truly believe it's a team effort when it comes to the success of our students. We need the support of our staff, the parents and our community."

Tiffany Miller is also a new face in the District. She joins Dr. D.J. Dennison as a District Psychologist. She is primarily stationed at Economy Elementary School and Ambridge Middle School. Dr. Miller possesses a Bachelor's degree in psychology from Shippensburg University, and completed her Master's and Doctor of Psychology (Psy.D.) degree from Duquesne University. Prior to coming to Ambridge, she most recently worked as a School Psychologist for the East Liverpool School District in East Liverpool, Ohio. Dr. Miller said she was drawn to the District because of her love of the area and desire to serve in a diverse community.

"I like the diversity of students in Ambridge. This is an area where I can really apply my skill set and affect the most change. I also love the smaller size of the District. It allows for more personal connections with the staff, students and community."

It is her goal to focus on the three-tier intervention process currently in place in the District, which she said is one of the most effective ways to support students' needs. The three-tier response to intervention model identifies students at risk of failing and provides interventions designed to help them succeed. Tier one is a whole-class approach; tier two involves small group interventions; and tier three is intensive, individualized intervention. Along with Dr. Dennison, and the Child Study Team, Dr. Miller has made it a long-term goal to streamline the process and to include parents and guardians in the process sooner to ensure student success.

The further development and support of the positive behavior model for the District at all grade levels also is an area of focus for Dr. Miller, and she noted she is looking forward to achieving these goals with the help of the school community. "It's not just the school working on things. You get the most out of an initiative when you have all sides working together."

TECH CORNER

The District was busy over the summer months, upgrading facilities and the tools and resources students use to enhance classroom learning. This year, the District significantly upgraded its technology. The following is a description of all of the technology upgrades and how they are being used.

Computers

This summer, the technology department imaged, configured and distributed over 200 laptops to various buildings to replace or create laptop carts for student use. Each laptop cart holds 30 devices. We replaced two carts at the Middle School and added a third. We replaced both carts at State Street and Highland and added one at Economy. Additionally, we added our third cart of laptops at the High School. Updates to the Middle School computer lab included 30 desktops. In addition, the technology department imaged, configured and distributed over 40 laptops to the Middle School teachers. With that distribution, we now have laptops in the hands of all of the teaching staff in the Ambridge Area School District. The HS staff received laptops in 2015 and the elementary staff received laptops in 2017.

iPads

The Ambridge area School District currently has over 700 iPads in each of the five buildings. The High School and Middle School have eight carts of 30 between them to use on a regular basis. This summer, the technology Department configured, setup, and distributed over 300 iPads district wide between the elementary buildings and the SPED department. In all three elementary buildings, the teachers were given a cluster of devices (between 6-8) to use in their classroom. The teachers are encouraged to use the iPads to conduct small group, center based activities with the students. Within the Special Education Department, over 50 iPads were distributed to the teachers.

Projectors

Almost all of the staff at Ambridge Area School District has an LCD projector (most being interactive) in their classrooms. Over the summer break, we installed over 30 interactive projectors across the district. Most of the projectors were installed in the Middle School, along with a new whiteboard surface. Additional projectors were installed in the Elementary Special Education classrooms.

Security

The antiquated surveillance system at State Street Elementary was replaced. We installed over 20 new cameras (both indoor and outdoor) along with a new Network Video Recorder (NVR). This upgrade comes one year after the camera system at Economy Elementary was replaced. The district is looking to secure grant funds to replace all of the cameras and the video recorder at the Middle School next year. In addition, upgrades were made to the software that manages our card access system. This system allows us to control access to the buildings through district issued badges. We started requiring badges for all employees in prior years. Card readers were also installed on the elevators in all five buildings to control access. Lastly, the district purchased and issued 80 digital handheld radios for added communication within the buildings.

Wireless

Over 60 wireless access points were replaced at State Street and the Middle School through E-Rate funding the district received. Applying each year for E-Rate funding allows our district to receive up to 80 percent in discounts for network upgrades. Past projects included new network switches and wireless access points in all of our schools.

