

# On Board

A Quarterly Newsletter for Employees of Mercer County Schools

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## BHS DROP-OUT PREVENTION PROGRAM RECOMMENDED FOR APPROVAL

At the January 11<sup>th</sup> meeting of the West Virginia Board of Education, Bluefield High School's Innovation Zone Drop-out Prevention proposal will be recommended for funding by the selection panel that reviewed grant applications.

If the school gets a stamp of approval, it will receive \$154,000 dollars over the next three years to implement research-based strategies for keeping students enrolled and engaged in high school.

Submitted in late November, the Innovation Zone application was written to address needs that administrators and teachers had identified. Foremost was the school's low graduation rate – 69% in 2010. To compound the problem, a disproportionate number of non-graduates have been poor and/or needed special education services.

Dr. Black said the students and community will see a number of changes as a result of the Innovation Zone grant. "We

will be creating a ninth-grade academy at Bluefield High called Base 9," she said. "The 'new wing' of the school will be dedicated to ninth grade core classes and be a zone where there is positive support and appropriate accommodations for in-coming students."

Ninth-grade advisors will use the acclaimed LINKS curriculum to teach students "soft skills" to improve their success such as study techniques, goal-setting, time-management, and conflict resolution.

"Ninth grade is the 'make it or break it' year for many students, and more students fail ninth grade than any other grade in high school," Black said. "So our focus is naturally on laying the groundwork for success in the freshman year."

If awarded, the grant will also provide staff development for the whole faculty, focusing on positive behavior support and understanding how to

meet the whole-child needs of kids from low-socioeconomic backgrounds.

A third important feature is the creation of a mentorship program. In collaboration with Community Connections, school counselors will pair at-risk students with trained adult mentors, setting up relationships that can be sustained throughout high school. Mentors will meet with students during the school day in supervised settings.

Other innovative approaches will include collecting data to detect student disengagement long before the student actually drops out. Stronger communication with families and an effective media campaign are other goals of the program.

"We know we have a lot to do," Black said, "and we can't make a difference over night, but we're committed to improving our school climate, reducing absenteeism, and raising the graduation rate, and this is an opportunity for us to go to work."

## ADDITIONAL VACCINES SOON TO BE REQUIRED FOR MIDDLE, HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Beginning with the 2012/2013 school year, all West Virginia students entering 7<sup>th</sup> grade will be required to have had one dose of Tdap (Tetanus, Diphtheria, and Pertussis) and one dose of the meningococcal vaccines before the start of the school year. Students entering 12<sup>th</sup> grade must also have had at least one dose of the Tdap vaccine and a booster dose of the meningococcal vaccine. If the first dose of the meningococcal vaccine was received after age 16, then the booster dose is not needed.

Although Tdap and meningococcal vaccinations are required for entry into 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade, they are recommended by the Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices for adolescents beginning at age 11. Parents are encouraged to have their child immunized after they turn 11, rather than wait until right before the start of 7<sup>th</sup> or 12<sup>th</sup> grade, to ensure that their child is fully protected from these vaccine-preventable diseases throughout their adolescence.

The Tdap vaccine protects against tetanus, diphtheria, and pertussis. Per-

tussis is very contagious and can last for 10 weeks or more. If pertussis is transmitted to infants, it can be life-threatening. Young children are protected when they get the DTaP vaccine, but protection wears off as kids get older, so adolescents need the Tdap vaccination.

The meningococcal vaccine prevents bacterial meningococcal meningitis, an inflammation of the lining around the brain and spinal cord that is caused by a serious bacterial infection. This infection can lead to brain damage, hearing loss, learning disabilities, amputations, and even death.

While Tdap and meningococcal vaccines are the only two immunizations required for 7<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, the HPV and seasonal influenza vaccines are also recommended, although not required, for adolescents. The HPV vaccine prevents strains of HPV that can cause cervical cancer. HPV vaccines are given in three shots over 6 months—it is very important to get all three shots to be fully protected.

Vaccines are one of the

most cost-effective preventive measures available and have saved countless lives. These new adolescent immunization requirements will not only lengthen the time for which immunized students are protected from vaccine-preventable diseases, but will also lower their chances of passing diseases to the infants, the elderly, classmates with weakened immune systems, and others.

Parents should take adolescents to their health care provider for a routine check-up to determine if shots are current and to meet the 2012-2013 school entry requirements. Adolescents who are found to be missing shots can receive them during that visit. Teens without insurance or a family doctor or health care provider should contact the Mercer County Health Department located at St. Luke's/ Pavilion, 1331 Southview Drive, Bluefield (304-324-8846).

For additional information, call the WV Division of Immunization Services at 1-800-642-3634 or visit <http://www.dhhr.wv.gov/oeps/immunization/requirements/>.

## COUNTY CRACKS DOWN ON TRUANCY

Beginning this week, Mercer County Schools will no longer tolerate chronic truantcies. With the start of second semester, students who are frequently truant and parents – in the case of elementary children – will find themselves in front of a judge.

In September Mercer County Circuit Court Chief Judge Omar Aboulhosn met with county administrators to outline a program initiated by the Honorable Robin Jean Davis, Justice of the WV Supreme Court. The plan called for bringing chronically truant students before Circuit Court judges who would have the authority to charge them as status offenders, require a personal recognizance bond, and impose penalties including supervised probation. When truancy is especially severe, students can be relocated to a facility with an on-campus school.

Because truancy among young children is often an indication of parental neglect, a different approach is applied in cases of children in grades K-5. Parents are referred to the Department of Health and Human Resources for parenting classes, financial assistance, counseling, health evaluations, and other services.

At a September meeting,

the Mercer County Board of Education approved allocating funds for an additional probation officer to work solely on cases of school truancy. In November, Justice Davis, Superintendent Deborah Akers, Board of Education members, and Judges Omar Aboulhosn, Bill Saddler, and Derek Swope co-signed a formal agreement between the district and court system launching the truancy intervention program.

Along the way, Judges Aboulhosn, Swope, and Saddler have pledged their support for the program and for what is shaping up to be a long court docket on the first day of hearings.

Mercer County Schools Attendance Director Terry Hughes has filed 60 petitions with the courts to date. In each case, the student has already amassed twelve or more unexcused absences during this school year. Judges will begin closed hearings after school on January 17<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup>.

Mercer County Attendance Director Terry Hughes says he takes no joy in filing petitions but acknowledges that tough measures may be needed. "My sole purpose in my job is to watch children graduate from high

school," Hughes said. "If they do, then we've done a great job and if they don't, we have failed them."

According to County Policy J-10 (currently out on comment), approved absences are limited to illness or injury, medical appointments, calamities, death in the family, school-approved curricular or extracurricular activities, religious holidays, legal obligations, and failure of the bus to run. Students must submit written verification from parents, guardians and/or doctors for each of the above absences.

"The schools are responsible, now more than ever, for keeping their attendance records accurate and up-to-date," said Superintendent Deborah Akers. "All referrals must be based on correct, up-to-date information."

Data clearly indicate that poor school attendance usually precedes dropping out. In America, seven thousand students drop out of school every day. Eight out of ten dropouts end up in prison at some point in their lives. Dropouts are also far more likely to be unemployed or underemployed, live below the poverty line, and become involved with illegal activities.

## CORNER THE MARKET

### EMPLOYERS SEEKING GOOD PEOPLE, NOT JUST SKILLED EMPLOYEES

As it turns out, our mothers were right. Before we leave for school or work each morning, we should comb our hair, brush our teeth, press our clothes, and put a smile on our faces. We would also be well served to stand up straight, remember our manners, show up with our assignments, and arrive ten minutes early.

For both new hires and veteran employees, the importance of personal values and social competence has never been greater. For those seeking employment, experts recommend weaving these personal and social traits into resumes, cover letters, and answers to interview questions.

What are the values employers seek? According to Mary and Stephen Hamilton, "Employers frequently say that the qualifications they value

most in entry-level employees are not technical skills but such traits as punctuality, reliability, and diligence. They claim that people who have demonstrated personal and social competence can be trained in technical skills. In other words, it is easier to teach people how to work than how to be good workers." The sentiment is echoed across all work fields. No company wants to hire individuals whose personal and social skills undermine the reputation and professionalism of the whole operation.

The #1 personal value in the work world? **Personal integrity** --especially, state Randall and Katharine Hansen, in light of the many recent corporate scandals. Below are employers' Top 10 most sought-after traits:

- #1 Honesty, integrity
- #2 Strong work ethic--tenacity
- #3 Flexibility-- able to adapt to new ideas, pro-

- jects, work settings
  - #4 Dependability-- prompt, ready to work
  - #5 Loyalty-- strong devotion to company and its mission
  - #6 Positive outlook-- enthusiastic attitude
  - #7 Professionalism-- responsible, fair in all dealings
  - #8 Self-confidence-- expecting the best of self and others
  - #9 Self-motivation-- independent, needing minimal supervision
  - #10 Willingness to learn (and keep learning!)
- Hamilton, Mary Agnes, and Stephen Hamilton, "When is Work a Learning Experience?" *Phi Delta Kappan*, May 1997: 682-689.
- Hansen, Randall, and Katharine Hansen. "What Do Employers Really Want? Top Skills and Values Employers Seek from Job-Seekers."

[www.quintcareers.com](http://www.quintcareers.com). Accessed 4 January 2012.

## INCLEMENT WEATHER ROUTES

Mercer County schools has established an Inclement Weather routing schedule that may be used as weather conditions dictate. Although the school board has an Inclement Weather tab on its web-site, we have found that we need to identify several additional routes to this schedule where narrow and/or steep roads become especially hazardous in ice and snow. On days when the Inclement Weather Route bus schedule is activated, buses serving these areas will not travel that portion of their route with especially troublesome roads; instead, they will pick up and drop off students at

the designated locations listed below. Parents who choose may transport their children to meet the bus at the designated pick-up spots morning and afternoon. Students who reside in the area(s) listed below and who do not attend school on days in which the Inclement Weather Routes is used will be counted "absent with excuse".

We rely on you, the television and radio stations, to pass on information as many people turn to you first. With the addition of the Inclement Weather Route bus schedule, the following four options may be activated during the winter months.

**CLOSED:** Schools are closed, no buses will be running.

**TWO HOUR DELAY:** Schools will open two hours late; buses will run two hours late in the morning.

**INCLEMENT WEATHER ROUTE:** Schools are open; buses will run on their regular schedule except as listed below.

**TWO HOUR DELAY WITH INCLEMENT WEATHER ROUTE:** Schools will be open two hours late; buses will run two hours late with the alternate pickup points.

BUS #	OPERATOR	INCLEMENT WEATHER ROUTES
528	Kerri Powers	<b>CERES HOLLOW ROAD</b> INTERSECTION OF MALL RD.: 2:25 P.M.
538	Danny Compton	<b>CLOVER DEW ROAD</b> PICKUP/DROP - INTERSECTION OF MT. HOREB RD.
541	Amy Rose	<b>OXLEY HOLLOW RD. &amp; MT. JACKSON HGTS.</b> PICKUP/DROP - INTERSECTION OF THESE TWO ROADS
552	Sam Hill	<b>HATCHER ROAD</b> HATCHER CHURCH ROAD AT 6:40 A.M.
559	Nina Farmer	<b>CLIFFMONT ROAD</b> MEET AT INTERSECTION OF CUMBERLAND RD.: 6:40 A.M.
560	Mary Taylor	<b>CERES HOLLOW ROAD</b> INTERSECTION OF RT. 20: 7:20 A.M.; 2:50 P.M.
566	Scott Hale	<b>OXLEY HOLLOW RD. &amp; MT. JACKSON HGTS.</b>
569	Joyce Peters	<b>COALDALE MOUNTAIN</b> INTERSECTION OF RT. 52 (HILLTOP MOTORS): 6:30 A.M. ELEMENTARY - 2:50 P.M.; MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL - 3:50 P.M.
571	Perry Adkins	<b>CERES HOLLOW ROAD</b> INTERSECTION OF MALL RD.: 6:45 A.M.
583	Mark Shrader	<b>TURKEY GAP RD.</b>
584	Shannon Brim	<b>CEMETERY HILL</b> PICKUP/DROP - INTERSECTION OF RT. 10
585	David Lee	<b>TURKEY GAP RD.</b> PICKUP/DROP - INTERSECTION OF RT. 10
		<b>CLOUD VIEW</b> PICKUP/DROP - TOP OF ARISTA MOUNTAIN ON RT. 10, AT WYOMING COUNTY LINE
593	John Wimmer	<b>ELLISON SCHOOL RD.</b> PICKUP/DROP - INTERSECTION OF ELLISON SCHOOL RD. & EAGLE CREST
		<b>PINEY FLATS</b> PICKUP/DROP - INTERSECTION OF PINEY FLATS & DUNNS RD.
597	Pete Hamblin	<b>BLACK OAK MTN. / RT. 71</b> PICKUP/DROP - INTERSECTION OF THESE TWO ROADS

## RUBY PAYNE'S "A FRAMEWORK FOR UNDERSTANDING POVERTY"

Coming March 2 (CE Day): County-Wide Staff Development

Most teachers today come from middle-income backgrounds. In southern West Virginia, many students do not. In an educational setting, economic differences can create conflict and challenges for both teachers and students. Payne's "A Framework for Understanding

Poverty" training helps educators understand and provide practical, real-world support for under-resourced children.

Educators will learn about the . . .

- Impact of economic differences on communication, interactions, and expectation;
- Symptoms of generational vs. situational poverty;

- Behaviors and mindsets that affect learning;
- Keys to identifying resources and strengths of any student;
- Tips, tools, and intervention strategies proven to increase teacher effectiveness;
- "Hidden rules" or social cues that differ greatly between socio-economic levels.

### SPECIAL EDUCATION TRAINING

Beginning January 18<sup>th</sup> and continuing through March, the Office of Special Education is offering specialized training in PECS, Tiered Instruction, IEP Development, Literacy, Transition, and CPI. Schedules are posted in the schools. For additional information call the Office of Special Education, Ext. 293.

## BUY SMART !!

Through competitive bidding, two companies – Kurtz Brothers and Bluefield Office Products – have been awarded contracts to provide goods to Mercer County Schools at significant discounts. For the remainder of the school year, Kurtz Brothers will provide curriculum content, furniture, AV equipment, and classroom supplies at reduced cost to teachers and administrators.

Kurtz Brothers catalog prices for curriculum content will be discounted

32%, supplies 32%, furniture 14% plus shipping, and AV equipment 14% plus shipping. The vendor has also linked all schools/sites to the county's master contract so that all orders automatically qualify for these discounts. Although web ordering is currently not available for Mercer County Schools, a complete product listing is available at <http://www.kurtzbros.com/>.

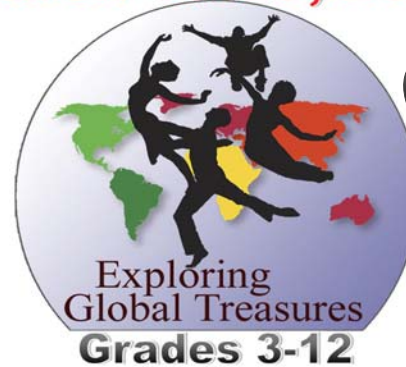
Bluefield Office Products was awarded the contract to provide toner and ribbons,

all brands, for discounts up to 21.5% with free delivery and no minimum order.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact Regina Rarick, at Ext. 240, Elaine Blackwell at Ext. 239, or Leslie Wellman at Ext. 278. Kurtz Brothers: 400 Reed St. PO Box 392 Clearfield, PA 16830-0392 Ph: (800) 252-3811 or (814) 765-6561 Fax: (814) 765-8690. Bluefield Office Products: 327 North Street, Bluefield, WV 24701 Ph (304) 327-6818 fax: (304) 324-8305

Coming Soon . . .

**WEST VIRGINIA dance COMPANY** WV Dance Residency in Mercer County  
March 19-23, 2012



Exploring Global Treasures  
Grades 3-12

Contact Kellan Sariles at (304) 431-1294 or [ksariles@access.k12.wv.us](mailto:ksariles@access.k12.wv.us)

Principals may reserve seats starting February 1, 2012

## BIGGEST LOSERS HOPE TO BE WEALTHIEST WINNERS!

Although television producers dub them biggest "losers," Mercer County Schools prefers to call them what they are – "winners." Now in its fourth year, the contest began again January 3<sup>rd</sup> with weigh-ins conducted by school nurses at each work location.

Participants have three months to shed the Christmas cookies and eggnog before weighing-out on March 29<sup>th</sup>.

According to Assistant Superintendent Rick Ball, the idea originated with the county's Wellness Council. "They thought the similarly-named television series and team dynamic would motivate employees to shed pounds and adopt new fitness goals."

Each participant pays a nominal fee which provides trophies and gift certificates for the winners.

Last year, a total of 144 participants in 15 locations took the challenge. Physical Plant and warehouse employees won the contest (and the biggest kitty) by losing an average 22.8 pounds.

According to Student Services Coordinator Tom Chaffins, the percentage of weight lost by the team, not the total pounds lost, determines the winner.

## Kudos to . . .

- Mercer School and Athens Elementary – recent recipients of "Let's Move WV" grants
- WVVA's Greg Carter, Dustin Long, and Manager Frank Brady -- for recording and broadcasting Mercer County's anti-truancy public service announcements.
- Mercer County students Kimberley Davis and Qunzell Payne, BIS; Jessica Dillow and Steven Parker, Glenwood; Brittany Steele and Mackie Bailey, MCTEC – for "starring in" anti-truancy public service announcements.

HATS OFF TO EVERYONE!!!!

## AM I COVERED? (INSURANCE)

**Q:** Is it true that Wells Fargo, our health plan administrator, has been bought out by Health Smart Holdings?

**A:** Yes, but your coverage and procedures for filing claims will remain unchanged, for now.

**Q:** Will my plan change? Will I need to change doctors or hospitals? Are there different forms for filing claims.

**A:** The answer is "no" to all of those questions. There will be no changes to your coverage, your network providers, precertification procedures, or claim procedures. You may continue to use the old forms. The change in ownership has no effect on your current plan benefits.

**Q:** Will I need a new insurance card?

**A:** Not now. You will be notified in advance of any changes to your insurance card.

**Q:** Will my EOBs look the same?

**A:** HealthSmart's logo will soon appear on EOBs. You will continue to receive EOBs at the same frequency.

**Q:** Will I be able to see my claims history and eligibility by visiting the old website?

**A:** Yes. Ultimately, the websites will be integrated.

### ARE MY DEPENDENTS COVERED?

**Medical Insurance:** De-

pendents who are 26 years old or less are eligible to receive PEIA health benefits as long as (1) they are not working for an employer who offers health insurance; and (2) they are not eligible for coverage under a spouse's health plan.

**Dental and Optical Insurance:** Active employee's dependents between the age of 18 and 23 are eligible for dental/optical coverage only if those dependents are full-time students. Dependents within this age range who are not full-time students are ineligible for dental/optical benefits.

**NOTE: Inactive employees (those on leave of absence) are ineligible for dental / optical benefits.**