



Connections

A report to the community from Michigan City Area Schools

INDIANA COLLEGE CORE: A NEW CITY ADVANTAGE!

Michigan City High School is proud to be among the first high schools in the state to offer the Indiana College Core – a 30-credit hour block of general education courses that meet all requirements for one year of college at all public universities in Indiana.

MCCHS piloted the program this year, under the direction of school counselor Rhonda Lamarr, and five recent graduates earned the ICC certification. The five (Kyra Krachinski, Quinton Collins, Paige Burton, Max Thompson, and Habriah



McFerson, pictured at left) were all honor students in the MCCHS Early College program. McFerson also earned all credits required to graduate a year early from high school.

MCCHS partners with Ivy Tech on the ICC program. The five students earning the ICC designation were invited to take part in the Ivy Tech graduation ceremony in May, along with 28 additional MCCHS students who had earned certifications in career and technical programs at the A. K. Smith Career Center.

"We will be expanding this opportunity to more students next year," says MCAS

Superintendent Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins. "The College Core allows City graduates to finish college early, pursue advanced degrees, or study abroad. This free program can save families thousands in college tuition."

In addition to credits earned for the ICC, MCCHS students can earn college credits for a broad range of high school courses, through dual-credit agreements with Ivy Tech, Indiana University, Vincennes, and Ball State. Advanced Placement (AP) credits are also available to students who pass end-of-course exams for specialized courses.

For more information, visit www.educateMC.net/collegecore.



PRE-K TO OPEN AUG 9TH

Michigan City Area Schools is addressing a pressing need for the community: preschool.

The Little Wolves Early Learning Center, located at the former Brown Mackie on Route 20 in Michigan City, will open August 9. Serving children who are age 4 by August 1, it will operate five days a week, following the MCAS school year calendar. Full- and half-day options will be available.

"We are excited to offer a high-quality pre-K program for families," says Cathy Bildhauser, MCAS Director of Curriculum. "Our goal is to help children grow into happy, confident kindergartners who are ready to enter elementary school."

Bildhauser notes that although there will be a fee for the program, MCAS is working toward certification that would enable parents to use CCDF vouchers in the future.

Little Wolves will be staffed by credentialed instructors and assistants in each of its five classrooms. The facility will also be used as a training center for high school and adult students pursuing careers in the field of Early Childhood.

For more information, visit www.educateMC.net/preK.



WE ♥ FRUITS & VEGGIES!

When was the last time you tried papaya, kumquat, jicama, broccolini, parsnips, or candy-stripe beets?

Two times each week, samples of unusual fruits and veggies like these (and old favorites such as fuji apples and seedless grapes) are served as a mid-day snack to students at MCAS elementary schools, thanks to our district's participation in the USDA's Fresh Fruit and Vegetable program. (A whopping 113,000 kid-size portions were served last year!)

MCAS Director of Food Service Nicole Santana says the goal of the



program is to introduce children to fresh produce and to teach them about healthy eating. "Kids are excited to see what colorful fruit or vegetable will be served each week. They love to try new things."

Dragonfruit, anyone?

FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT: FUTURE FOCUSED

In January, the Michigan City Area Schools embarked upon a strategic planning journey. Since that time, we have conducted surveys and held focus groups, design sessions, and a community town hall. Over **3,000 of you** shared feedback with us through at least one of these opportunities!

Throughout the planning process, four values rose to the top, again and again: Trust. Diversity. Growth. Pride.

We believe in promoting a culture of integrity, so that all members of our community experience deep **trust** and partnership with the district. We



The Strategic Plan Steering Team hard at work.

believe in celebrating **diversity** and empowering all members of our community. We believe in continuously **growing**, learning, and improving so that all of our students experience academic and personal success. And we believe in cultivating **pride** in our schools.

These values guided the work of our planning Steering Team, which is comprised of staff, students, and

community members. The team developed 15 initiatives that will be part of the new Strategic Plan, centered around five Pillars:

1. Culture and environment,
2. Student voice and opportunities,
3. Meeting the needs of diverse learners,
4. Clear and consistent communication, and
5. Educating the whole child.

In August, we will be ready to share the final Strategic Plan with our staff, students, families, and community. But the plan itself will not be the end of our work – it will be the beginning. Our next step will be to pull together implementation teams that will dig in to develop the specific actions that will bring the initiatives outlined in the plan to fruition over the next five years.

If you would like to be a part of this work, visit www.educateMC.net/strategicplanning to let us know.

We truly appreciate all who are working hand in hand with us to serve and support our students. Our teachers and staff, our families, our alumni, and our community are the lifeblood of our school district. And we are so grateful to our partners in business, industry, and higher education who are supporting our work. THANK YOU!

Enjoy your summer. And enjoy this edition of Connections!

– Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins, Superintendent

A LEGACY OF INNOVATION

In December, MCAS received the Richard G. Sussman Prize for Team Innovation from the Society of Innovators at Purdue Northwest. (Pictured are Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins and SOI Managing Director Jason Williams, with the prize).

MCAS was honored by the Society for sustained innovation. The district was a Team SOI Inductee in 2022 for its free broadband initiative, in 2020 for the MCHS Compressed Air Academy, and in 2012 for the Safe Harbor Robotics and Lake Hills STEM programs. In addition, MCHS Engineering teacher Ralph Gee and



Superintendent Dr. Barbara Eason-Watkins are individual inductees.

The prize is housed in the front foyer of the Administration Building, where visitors can also see a display of tech devices used in schools over the past several decades.



FACILITIES UPDATE: SOLAR SUCCESS

In 2017, MCAS completed a major energy conservation project, upgrading over 5,500 fluorescent and metal halide light fixtures with LED and installing seven ground-mounted solar photovoltaic systems at the Administration Building, Joy, Niemann, Pine, Barker, Krueger, and Michigan City High School.

All of these systems are still going strong, resulting in energy savings for the district of close to \$700,000 per year.

This summer, MCAS will begin using robotic mowers to maintain the grass surrounding the arrays. The mowers, which resemble Roomba vacuum cleaners, cut a small area of grass each day, docking to recharge.

Other facilities projects recently completed or in progress include new chillers at Elston and the A. K. Smith Career Center, new HVAC controls at Knapp Elementary, and new LED and HVAC systems at Coolspring Elementary and portions of Michigan City High School. These projects are funded through ESSER, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund and the CARES Act.

But perhaps the most extensive project underway is the renovation and expansion of classroom and lab space at the former Brown Mackie facility. In addition to the Little Wolves Early Learning program that will open in August, several career and technical education programs will be housed there, moving from the A. K. Smith Career Center. The project is financed through \$18.5 million in tax-neutral bonds. Construction is due to be completed by Fall 2024.



MIDDLE SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT

ONE CITY, ONE PACK!

BARKER HONORED FOR STEM EXCELLENCE

This spring, Barker Middle School achieved re-certification for five years as an Indiana STEM school. Certification is a rigorous process, which involved the completion of an extensive online portfolio. (Barker and Lake Hills Elementary were two of our region's first certified STEM schools – and now they are among the first schools to be re-certified.)

Barker students participated in a wide range of STEM-related activities this school year, including a Drone Academy in partnership with the Michigan City Municipal Airport (below), a water-bottle rocket launch and other community STEM challenges, and an annual STEM fair featuring student research projects in engineering and science. Students also took STEM and environmental science field trips. This spring, several Barker Students were honored by the Center for Creative Solutions with awards for their 3D-printed designs.



KMS BASKETBALL'S UNDEFEATED SEASON

by Andrea Roberts and Sean Triemstra

The 2022-23 Krueger eighth grade girls basketball team had a perfect season.

The Wolves went 15-0, with several wins coming by blowouts. The girls and the coaches all did their part to cement their undefeated record.

"Everyone's a family," team member Gabby Patino said, noting that team members let each other know if there was a mistake or if they needed to improve something.

"Their unity was impressive to me," said coach John

Boyd. "The way they came together, and the caring nature that they have for one another."

Their work ethic and belief in themselves transferred from practice to game day.

"We teach it, we drill it, we practice it," Coach Boyd said.

"Faith, just believing that when you go out there, there's nobody better.



No matter what, you learn from it."

All the girls fought hard. Hillary Labis was the top scorer. Iyahni Grinston and Alana Eckwood also were strong on offense. Zaira Vargas was tough in the post, while Ava Kelley and Vivian Tepper also were effective. Gabby and Laniyah Wrice provided scrappy hustle play.

After a great season, the girls can take their experience and move forward with it for promising futures.

"We can get places with basketball," Iyahni said. "(There are) a lot of things you can do, like college, and it makes your body get more fit."

Coach Boyd will remember and root for the girls as they move on to high school. He just hopes they remember his appetite. "All I tell them is that, 'When you make it big, just make sure you send me a salad from Subway.'"

This story was excerpted from an article by student journalists at Krueger Middle School. Read more of their work at www.truthfromtheyouth.com.



STOP-ARM SUPERSTARS

MCAS bus drivers and monitors wowed the crowd while spreading a message about school bus stop-arm safety at the United Way's annual Lip Sync competition in April. The group performed to "Stop When the Arm is Out," their own twist on a hit by The Supremes. Check out their viral video on YouTube at www.educateMC.net/stoparm. (And subscribe to our MCAS YouTube channel!)



ENROLL & REGISTER ONLINE!

www.EducateMC.net

Online enrollment (new students) is now open for the 2023-24 school year! Registration (for current students) begins in PowerSchool on July 17th.

Need help? Contact your child's school after July 17th.

**FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL:
AUGUST 9, 2023**



ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ROUNDUP

A SNAPSHOT OF
SCHOOL YEAR 2022-23

PINE ELEMENTARY - Math is Fun

MCAS was honored as a District of Distinction by Imagine Learning this year, based on the implementation of a new curriculum, Illustrative Mathematics.

Pine kindergarten teacher Carissa Kuckson says her students love the hands-on materials. "They're having so much fun with math," she says. "This is setting them on a path for success at higher levels."



MCAS Math Specialist Mike Maesch says the program's approach is based on the idea that students learn math by *doing* math. "Students use what's around them as resources for problem-solving," he says. "By starting with what kids already know, teachers can help them center their thinking, leading to a deeper understanding of math concepts."

COOLSPRING ELEMENTARY - This Rocks!

How do you get kids excited about school attendance? Give them a rock to pass from class to class as a reward!

In this case, though, the rock is The Rock – a life-size cardboard cutout of Dwayne Johnson the actor and former pro wrestler known by his ring name, The Rock.

Classrooms competed to earn the coveted "We Rock Attendance" traveling trophy for the week, celebrating with a Spirit Day such as Pajama or Costume Day.

Daily attendance is just one way Coolspring Wildcats demonstrated the school's monthly Habits of Character: Kindness/Respect, Responsibility, Honesty, Patience/Effort,



Cooperation, and Integrity/Friendship. Students also were nominated for a recognition wall in the cafeteria and earned rewards, including a popular quarterly "glow bowling" experience.



MARSH ELEMENTARY - Saluting Heroes

On May 5, K-8 students celebrated Better World Day, joining schools across the nation in a day of student-led service tied to lessons learned in the classroom.

At Marsh, students organized a special project to support deployed service members. They collected small items to build care packages for the troops – including lip balm, hand sanitizer, ramen noodles, gum, candy, and perhaps most important... letters of appreciation and encouragement. Lance Corporal Mike Callahan of the Marine Corps League visited Marsh during an all-school assembly to accept donations from each class, which were sent to men and women serving on a Navy ship.

Way to go, Tigers!

KNAPP ELEMENTARY - A Family Affair

For Holly Firaneck, things have truly come full circle: She's now a kindergarten teacher in the same classroom where she attended kindergarten as a child.

Firaneck, who is a 2000 graduate of Michigan City High School, earned her degree in education at Purdue North Central (now PNW). She taught at Barker Middle School for five years before jumping at the chance to return to Knapp to teach kindergarten.

"I knew I wanted to be a teacher from the moment I stepped into this room as a student," she says. "It's so rewarding to see how much kindergarteners grow academically, and how independent and confident they become."

To make things even sweeter, her daughter, Wren, was a student in her class this year. Wren says she loves having her mom as a teacher because she learns so much, and she eats breakfast as her mom prepares for class.

But will she become a kindergarten teacher like her mom? "Undecided," she says. (Her mother notes that she has expressed interest in being a baby doctor and a Ninja.)

"The possibilities are endless for all of our students," says Firaneck. "It was so exciting to cheer for this year's high school grads who visited Knapp, and to hear about what they'll do next."





SPRINGFIELD ELEMENTARY - Touch a Career

Springfield put a twist on the typical career fair this spring, inviting exhibitors to bring vehicles used in their jobs to the school parking lot.

Students were excited to visit the LaPorte County Library's mobile library, a loader from Tonn and Blank Construction, a truck from Apex Auto Care (above), a Michigan City Police rescue vehicle, and many others.

"We borrowed the idea from the Touch-a-Truck events, which are very popular with kids," said MCAS K-12 College and Career Coordinator Aaron Garrett, who helped the school organize the fair. "Students are out here asking about equipment, training, wages, and more."

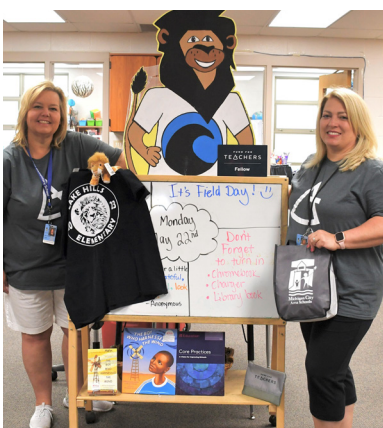
LAKE HILLS ELEMENTARY - Malawi Bound

This summer, sixth-grade teachers Shariann Forker and Deanna Muñoz will take the journey of a lifetime – a trip to Malawi to deepen a connection for their Lake Hills students.

It all began with a unit on *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind*, a true story about a young inventor who brought electricity and water to his Malawian village.

Forker's sister lives in Malawi and works for a nonprofit that promotes the farming of native plants. She connected with sixth-graders via Zoom to answer their questions about life in Malawi and take them on virtual field trips.

"We learned that there is still a 'hunger season' in Malawi," says Muñoz. "During the pandemic, we got a small taste of scarcity – so this really resonated with students."



Thanks to a grant from Funds for Teachers, Forker and Muñoz will travel to Malawi to learn about the culture, documenting their experience through photos, videos, and interviews. They also plan to establish a penpal relationship for their students.

The next phase of the project involves Lake Hills students cultivating

native plants and sharing their progress with friends in Malawi. "Students are learning that we are all connected, and we can all have an impact," says Forker.

JOY ELEMENTARY - Crew, Not Passengers

Consider this: When you are a passenger on a boat, you are catered to. Your job is to arrive at your destination, with minimal effort. But if you are crew... that's a different story. Each crew member must work hard and collaborate with others, and they are responsible for the entire journey.

At Joy, classes take part in sessions called "Crew," where they focus on students' sense of purpose, belonging, and agency – the

idea that they can make a difference in the world around them. During Crew, students circle up and greet one another. They discuss one of Joy's Habits of Character (Respect, Perseverance, Responsibility, and Integrity), and participate in activities that provide opportunities to practice these habits. "Crew builds a sense of community," says principal Jason Hopper. "It gives students a forum to discuss their academic and social-emotional needs."

Crew, which is part of the district's EL curriculum for Language Arts, is now in place for all MCAS students at the elementary and middle school levels.



EDGEWOOD ELEMENTARY - Kids Step Up

At Edgewood, students are encouraged to be leaders of their own learning. This is evident in the school's new practice of student-led conferences.

Unlike traditional parent-teacher conferences, the meetings are conducted by students. In preparation, children set academic and character-based goals, and then track their progress toward these goals throughout each quarterly grading period.

They celebrate their growth with their parents, teachers, and classmates as they lead the conferences. "This opportunity allows students to set specific learning targets and aim for them," says principal Kristin Smith. "They definitely rose to the challenge!"

Visit www.educateMC.net/SLC to learn more.



ONE CITY, ONE PACK

IMAGES FROM THE YEAR AT MICHIGAN CITY HIGH SCHOOL



HOME GROWN: Michigan City High School has a new addition: a greenhouse! The structure is the brainchild of Science teachers Adam Goebel, Andrew Jasicki, and Rachel Pauer, and was funded in part through grants from the Unity Foundation and DonorsChoose. Students planted vegetables this spring, which will be used by Family and Consumer Science classes. Next year they plan to expand, growing herbs, flowers, pumpkins, and more.



RED DEVILS + RAIDERS = WOLVES: The Elston and Rogers High School classes of '72 and '75 raised \$5,122 for the MCHS student fund, prior to their reunion in September. Thank you for supporting your Wolves!



MAGICAL BREAK: The Wolfpack Marching Band traveled to Disney World in April, participating in a clinic with Disney musicians. Several MCHS band and choral ensembles received gold ratings at competition this year.



ESPORTS IS HOT: MCHS students excelled in esports this year, winning monetary prizes at competitions in Super Smash Bros., Tekken and more. Five team members won \$3,000 scholarships at a tournament in October!



HIRE A WOLF: More than a dozen Michigan City Chamber members visited MCHS in April to speak with seniors about summer jobs, internships, and future employment. The event was a win-win for students and businesses.



THAT'S A WRAP: MCHS School Resource Officer Michelle Widelski's Dodge Durango is now decked out with the school colors, logo, and wolf mascot. The design was created by Art students in teacher Taylor Tice's classes, and the project was funded by the Unity Foundation of LaPorte County, in memory of English teacher Jerry Peters, who passed away in 2012.



TECH TOOLS: Industry partners visited the MCHS Compressed Air Academy (now in its sixth year) for an open house in October, touring the classroom and manufacturing lab spaces. Visitors got a peek at the school's EV go-karts, which students built and raced in the EV Grand Prix at Purdue University in May.



WAY TO GO: The front driveway to MCHS has been named in honor of beloved Principal's Secretary Joyce Westphal, who retired this summer after 38 years of service. Mrs. Westphal organized every graduation ceremony at Michigan City High School (28 years!).

ATHLETICS RECAP: CELEBRATING HERITAGE

MCHS Basketball hosted a "Heritage Night" in January, welcoming thousands of fans for a varsity girls-boys double-header against La Porte. Past greats from Elston, Rogers, and MCHS were spotlighted, with Indiana Mr. Basketballs Delray Brooks (1984) and Dan Palombizio (1981) in attendance. Pep band and cheerleader alums performed during the game, and they, along with basketball alums, were honored at halftime. Watch our "MCHS Basketball Throughout the Years" video at www.educateMC.net/bb.

In other Athletics news, Track standouts Jeremiah Clanton (200 meters) and Zaria Truvillion (100 meters) reached the IHSAA State Finals for a second year in a row. Clanton and MCHS Basketball forward Jamie Hodges were both named Duneland Athletic Conference MVPs.

And thanks to support from sponsors and the MCHS Booster Club, the



MCHS has a new team: Boys Volleyball. Several schools in the Duneland Athletic Conference began competing in this IHSAA sanctioned sport this spring. Visit www.michigancityathletics.com for the 2024 schedule.

baseball and softball teams have a new scoreboard! A new storage shed for Track was also installed this year. (Visit www.michigancityathletics.com for details on joining the Booster Club.)

MCHS Athletics also hosted a series of "Friday Night Live" social events for all students. These popular quarterly events featured open gym for basketball, staff vs students volleyball, free food, pop-up art by the Lubeznik Center, a video game truck, and giveaways by community partners. A Halloween costume contest (right) was also a hit. These events are supported by the United Way, JDAI (Juvenile Detention Alternative Initiative) and the Salvation Army of Michigan City.





3rd Annual
MCHS Athletics

GOLF OUTING

JULY 28 | MICHIGAN CITY MUNICIPAL COURSE

REGISTER NOW:
219-873-2043
CSHAMAN@MCAS.K12.IN.US



SPONSORED BY:
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CITY-WIDE BACK TO SCHOOL RALLY

Saturday, July 29
Elston Gill Field, 11am - 3pm

FREE Food, Supplies & School Vaccines!

A HANDS-ON, RECORD SETTING YEAR FOR CAREER-TECH

The A. K. Smith Career Center continues to offer students unparalleled opportunities for hands-on learning, certifications, and dual credits in 14 program areas, including automotive, career skills, construction, cosmetology, criminal justice, culinary, education professions, energy, EMT, fire science, health careers, machining, video/digital communications, and welding.

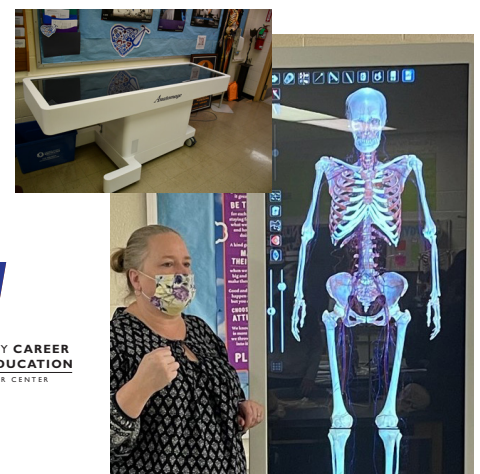
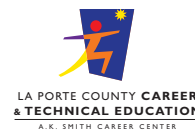
This year, Fire Science students educated fellow students on the



proper use of a fire extinguisher. Demonstrations were tailored to each career class; for example, they showed Culinary students how to put out cooking fires and the Energy Academy how to extinguish electrical fires. Student participants received a certificate in Fire Extinguisher Education and Awareness.

Health Careers students continued clinical rotations at Franciscan Health in Michigan City, while utilizing an Anatomage table in the classroom lab at A. K. Smith. This 3D, life-size, touch-screen tool allows students to visualize human anatomy exactly as they would on a cadaver. The equipment is typically only available at the college level.

And Automotive students exceeded



expectations. According to teacher Steve Barnes, in just one semester, 21 students earned a record 64 certifications through the National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence, making them highly valued by employers.



Michigan City Area Schools
408 S. Carroll Avenue
Michigan City, IN 46360

www.EducateMC.net
(219) 873-2000

MICHIGAN CITY HIGH SCHOOL CLASS of 2023 DISTINGUISHED GRADUATES



CLASS OF 2023: BY THE NUMBERS

3,000+
Hours of Community Service
79 Students Earning
Technical Certifications

Academic & Technical Honors Diplomas: **82**

3,047 COLLEGE CREDITS EARNED

550 AP COURSES COMPLETED



All-DAC Athletes: **12**

8 Athletes signed to
play on college teams

28

number of graduates with
4.1 OR HIGHER GPA

10

number of graduates with
4.3 OR HIGHER GPA

63
EARLY COLLEGE
program graduates



\$4.6 MILLION
scholarships
accepted

Follow us on:



#ONECITYONEPACK



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the Michigan City Chamber of Commerce.

6 Students Entering
the U.S. Armed Forces

