

School Talk



A Newsletter of RSU 54/MSAD 54

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From Vision to Reality: MCSCS Opens with Joyful Celebration



More than 500 community members gathered in August to celebrate the grand opening of the Margaret Chase Smith Community School with a festive ribbon cutting and community barbecue. The event marked a major milestone for the district and the culmination of years of planning and dedication.

Superintendent Moody, Senator King, Representative Golden, and an aide from Senator Collins' office were among the distinguished speakers. Attendees then enjoyed food, music, and tours of the state-of-the-art facility.

The building also features a donor wall, honoring those who contributed to the project through the efforts of the Building Better Beginnings Committee. The wall will stand as a lasting tribute to the community's shared investment in education and the future.

When school opened later that month, students poured into the bright, modern learning spaces with wide smiles, eager energy, and just a few first-day nerves. Our amazing staff worked tirelessly over the summer to prepare for the opening, ensuring every detail was in place to welcome students.



The Margaret Chase Smith Community School stands as a testament to what can be achieved when a community comes together with a shared vision: to give its children the very best start. The new school promises to be a hub of learning, growth, and community pride for generations to come.

Mill Stream Families Gather for Annual Applefest



Fall may bring apples, pumpkins, and crisp air to Maine, but at Mill Stream Elementary School, it also brings one of the most anticipated community traditions of the year: Applefest. This year's celebration, held on Saturday, September 20, brought together more than 100 students and their families for a morning of fun, laughter, and connection.

From the moment families walked in, the school was buzzing with excitement. Children rotated through a variety of stations, including the duck pond, craft corner, face painting, scooter races, and soccer challenges. With caramel apple kits, popcorn, and decorated cupcakes, there was no shortage of tasty fall treats. The event was made even more special by the fifth-grade student volunteers, whose encouragement and support at each station ensured that every child had a wonderful experience.

Alongside the festival, the Scholastic Book Fair offered students and parents a chance to celebrate the joy of reading. The fair generated more than $2,000 in sales in just one day, underscoring the community's strong commitment to fostering a love of books.

Applefest is more than just a seasonal celebration; it is a cherished tradition that highlights the close-knit spirit of Mill Stream Elementary. Events like this would not be possible without the dedication of PTG volunteers, whose hard work behind the scenes helps make lasting memories for students and families alike. As the leaves continue to turn, Applefest will remain a reminder of the warmth, joy, and sense of belonging that defines the Mill Stream school community.

Canaan Elementary: Small but Mighty!



Canaan Elementary has had a fresh start this year as a Pre-K–2 school, and we couldn't be more excited! Even though we're a little smaller, we're proud to say we're small but mighty.

Our students are off to a great start: learning, growing, and thriving every day. From building early reading and math skills to making friends and learning how to be kind community members, there's a lot of great energy in our classrooms. Students are also learning about core values such as courage and knowledge.

The staff here at Canaan are so proud of the work our students are doing. Together, with families, we're building a strong foundation for learning that will carry them through their academic career.

Big things are happening at our school, and we can't wait to share more of the wonderful things our Canaan kids accomplish this year.

MSAD 54 Expands Early Learning Opportunities



MSAD 54 is proud to announce the launch of its Early Childhood Special Education Program, designed to serve children ages 3–5 who qualify for Special Services across all district towns. This fully state-funded program offers evaluations and individualized learning plans for eligible children with a focus on early development, inclusion, and school readiness for young learners.

The launch of this program aligns with Maine's transition from Child Development Services (CDS) to local school districts for preschool special education. Under state law, all Maine school administrative units will assume responsibility for these services by July 1, 2028, bringing early childhood and K–12 education under a local and easily accessible system to better support children and families.

While the program office is located at the Hight Family Learning Center at the Margaret Chase Smith Community School in Skowhegan, services are provided district-wide; this will ensure access to high-quality supports for all eligible children within MSAD 54. The program will collaborate with the KVCAP preschool partnership in the three elementary schools to work with children as young as three across a variety of community-based settings.

This program represents an exciting step forward for the youngest learners in our district and for their families in our community. By partnering with other early childhood providers and offering services such as speech therapy, occupational/physical therapy, and individualized instruction, we are helping ensure that every child will have the opportunity to grow and succeed.

For more information about the Early Childhood Special Education Program, please contact:

Aliza Jones, Early Childhood Special Education Coordinator
40 Heselton Street, Skowhegan, ME 04976
207-858-1475

Riverhawk Wellness Challenge a Success





This summer, staff from across the district participated in the River Hawk Recharge Wellness Challenge, an initiative to promote healthy habits across the eight dimensions of wellness: physical, intellectual, financial, emotional, spiritual, environmental, occupational, and social.

With their River Hawk plushies in tow, participants completed a wide variety of wellness activities and submitted photos for a chance to win a prize. Our plushies had many adventures from traveling to Alaska, hiking Mount Katahdin, recycling, meal planning, painting, attending concerts, and much more.

The challenge was a fun and meaningful way to stay connected, support well-being, and highlight the importance of balance in our daily lives. These activities helped our staff recharge, refocus, and return energized for the new school year!

The Heart of Early Literacy: Celebrating Our Reading Interventionists



In our elementary schools, particularly in grades K-2, reading interventionists are doing more than helping students sound out words; they are building confident, capable readers from the ground up. These educators play a vital role in supporting our youngest learners.

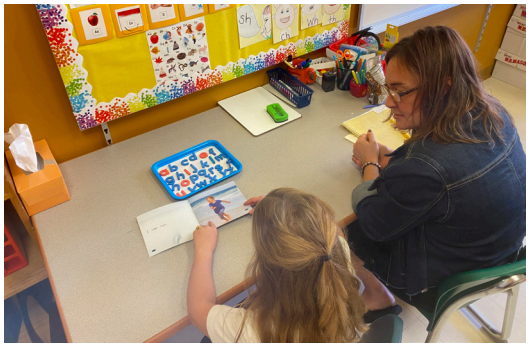
Literacy Interventionist Nicole Duncan notes, "There are many changes in students as they grow throughout their intervention work. They not only grow academically, at times [achieving] 1-2 years of growth, but students also develop a confidence that is unmatched. They see that they are readers, writers, and can do these tasks proudly on their own."

Our reading interventionists work closely with students through a variety of settings: intensive 1:1 Reading Recovery sessions, small skill-based groups, and individualized lessons tailored to each child's strengths and challenges. Their goal is to catch students who may be slipping through the cracks to help build strong foundational skills and give them the tools they need to thrive.

One of the most powerful aspects of intervention work is that it doesn't exist in isolation. Instead, it strengthens Tier 1 classroom instruction, reinforcing key concepts and ensuring that students receive multiple layers of support.

When asked about phonics instruction, Reading Interventionist Katie Flannery said, "First graders returned to school with a strong recall of their Jolly Phonics learning from kindergarten. Building on this foundation enhances their classroom experience by connecting new lessons to familiar concepts."

What sets our interventionists apart is their deep knowledge base and ongoing commitment to professional growth. These educators participate in extensive training and continue learning throughout the year to stay current with evidence-based literacy practices.



At its core, intervention work is about equity—ensuring that every child, regardless of their starting point, has the opportunity to become a successful reader. By addressing skill gaps early, our interventionists help close the achievement gap and set students on a path to long-term academic success.

One of our other interventionists, Sarah Rogers, appreciates the impact of this work: "What I find most rewarding about being a Reading Recovery and Literacy Interventions teacher is having the gift of witnessing the academic and emotional transformations students experience right before my eyes."

Community Food Resources

With ongoing uncertainty at the federal level, including possible disruptions to nutrition assistance programs, many families may be struggling.

If you or someone you know could benefit from food assistance, please click the QR codes below to locate nearby resources.

REACH Expands: New Site, Programs, and Partnerships



This fall marked an exciting milestone for the REACH Afterschool Program as we officially opened our newest site at Mill Stream Elementary School in Norridgewock! The expansion of REACH—short for Relationships, Education, Aspirations, Community, and Health—means that more students across MSAD 54 now have access to high-quality, engaging afterschool opportunities designed to support academic growth, social-emotional learning, and whole-child development.

Under the leadership of Site Coordinator Brian Pollard, the Mill Stream location is already buzzing with energy. Students participate in hands-on academic enrichment, guided play labs, and creative club-based programming that builds curiosity and connection. Each afternoon includes time for physical activity, STEAM challenges, literacy and math enrichment, and student-choice activities that encourage teamwork, imagination, and confidence.

This year, Mill Stream REACH is proud to launch two exciting new partnerships:

- Girl Scouts of Maine has joined forces with REACH to expand leadership and life-skill programming for girls in grades K–8. Through this partnership, REACH staff will host five Girl Scout clubs across all three REACH sites.
- The Maine Master Naturalist Program has partnered with REACH to bring nature-based education directly to students at Mill Stream. Mill Stream's librarian Constance Woodworth and other program volunteers are leading lessons on local ecology, wildlife, and conservation.

"We're thrilled to see Mill Stream families joining the REACH community," says Dawn Fickett, Director of Afterschool and Summer Learning. "Each new site represents not just an expansion of access, but an investment in the relationships and experiences that help our students thrive—academically, socially, and emotionally."

The Mill Stream site is one of three REACH programs serving over 200 students districtwide through the federally funded 21st Century Community Learning Centers initiative. Together, the REACH programs at Margaret Chase Smith, Mill Stream, and Skowhegan Area Middle School continue to keep the lights on afterschool—providing safe, enriching spaces where learning, play, and community come together.

SAMS Starting Year Strong



The 2025-2026 school year started at SAMS with a focus on attendance, intervention, and the joy of school. We returned this year with nearly five hundred students and a push to make sure all are welcomed and respected.

This year, we are continuing our attendance work. Starting on day one, we phone home each day a student is absent, and we are sending attendance letters at regular intervals to the parents/guardians of students who are missing school, regardless of the reason for their absence. These letters align with the Maine Department of Education's guidelines that define chronic absenteeism as missing ten percent of the school year (18 days). Through our efforts to communicate with families, we have made significant improvements in our attendance; through the month of September, we had 96% of SAMS students attending every day!

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Academic intervention has been another area of focus. In addition to the usual classwork, teachers at all grade levels now spend two hours a week providing targeted support for students in math, reading, and writing. Our goal is to fill any gaps our students have as they prepare for their transition to high school.

Lastly, we continue to foster and promote the joy of school. We celebrate attendance success every month, showcase students of the month at every opportunity, and provide a safe, welcoming space for all. School is an exciting place, and we would not be able to do what we do without the support of our families.

SAHS Celebrates Homecoming



Skowhegan Area High School brought the community together to celebrate Homecoming from September 22-27, filling the week with energy, creativity, and tradition.

The festivities began with Marvel Monday, where students dressed as their favorite superheroes, followed by Jet Lag Tuesday's travel-inspired attire. On Wednesday, each grade stood out proudly on Color Day, and Thursday's Rhyme Without a Reason sparked plenty of clever and funny pairings. The week rounded out with School Spirit Friday, as halls overflowed with orange and black.

Beyond the dress-up days, students competed in gym events, decorated class floats, and joined the lively parade and bonfire on Wednesday evening, where the junior class took home the top prize in the float competition. The celebration wrapped up on Friday with a spirited pep rally that brought the entire school together to cheer, celebrate, and show off true Skowhegan River Hawk pride.

MSLC: A New and Improved Location



Marti Stevens Learning Center is proud to announce the opening of its new location at the former Bloomfield Elementary School.

This new learning space is designed to create a supportive and enriching environment for all our learners. The facility has been thoughtfully revamped to meet the diverse needs of students, offering flexible spaces that cater to individual and group learning.

The new location is not just a physical expansion but a reflection of the district's ongoing dedication to innovative, student-centered education. We've created a welcoming atmosphere that encourages collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking: an environment where students are empowered to take charge of their own learning.



The Marti Stevens Learning Center remains focused on delivering personalized educational experiences, and this new building allows us to enhance the opportunities we offer to both students and faculty alike.

SCTC Adds New Staff and Programming



Somerset Career & Technical Center welcomes Tori Toothaker as our new Culinary Arts instructor. Ms. Toothaker has settled in quickly: her students have already baked many delicious treats, and the first-year participants have earned their ServSafe Food Handler certifications.

Gabby Schrage will be teaching EMT and Firefighting, both of which will be housed at the former Bloomfield Elementary School. Leading two programs is no easy feat, but her dedication and experience are exactly what this Central Maine community needs to produce the next generation of first responders.

We also have a new JMG (Jobs for Maine Graduates) Specialist, Billie Clark, who previously worked for the district as the JMG teacher at SAMS. Ms. Clark will be developing and facilitating ELOs (Extended Learning Opportunities). The ELOs will provide our students with hands-on experience working in the community and allow them to explore interests outside of our usual programming.

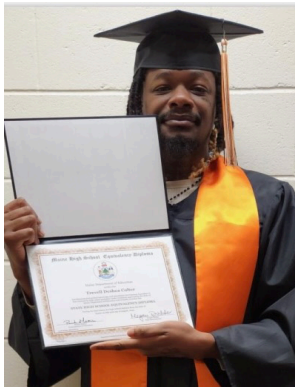


In additional news, Jeremy Bourque's Digital Media program has migrated to our Bloomfield campus. Mr. Bourque now has state-of-the-art space for video production, vinyl printing, computer editing and more.

Finally, we are adding two new programs beginning next school year. To round out our expansion at Bloomfield we are introducing Cosmetology. Anyone interested in hair, makeup, and skincare will soon be able to gain experience in the field of cosmetology right here at SCTC; and, at the main SCTC campus, our own Mike Jones will be launching Cabinetmaking for those students wanting to pursue a career in fine woodworking.

Adult Education at the Somerset County Jail





Many may not know that MSAD 54 Adult Education also works with individuals incarcerated at the Somerset County Jail.

Our lead teacher Cassidy Marsh is supported by Stacy Labbe, who proctors the HiSET (formerly GED) tests. Dr. David Richards, who recently retired from his longtime position as Director of the Margaret Chase Smith Library, teaches a writing class for men and women at the jail.

We are excited to report that this academic year we have already had two individuals earn their HiSET diplomas while at the jail. Pictured is one of our proud graduates, Trevell.

As noted in a 2021 report by the Brookings Institute, approximately 2/5 of those who are incarcerated did not graduate from high school; those who work toward earning their diploma while incarcerated are 30% less likely to reoffend when they are released.

Many thanks to Sheriff Dale Lancaster, Major Michael Welch, and Programs Manager Evan Touchette for supporting our education at the jail.

RSU 54/MSAD 54
61 Academy Circle
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Exciting Career Opportunities in MSAD 54

Are you passionate about making a positive impact on the lives of students and contributing to their educational journey? Consider joining the MSAD 54 team that values dedication, compassion, and the transformative power of education.

How to Apply:

Scan the QR code or call (207) 474-9508 to explore opportunities and start your journey of empowering students and making a lasting impact. Your dedication matters, and we invite you to be a part of our mission to shape bright futures.