



## System expands robotics program, focus on STEM

Exciting things are happening behind closed doors in a science classroom at William B. Wade Elementary School. Science teacher Margaret “Peg” Whiting and a group of fifth graders are learning about motor rotations and sensor controls for robots, aquatic and marine life in the Chesapeake Bay, and how to draft and produce an environmental-based research proposal.



**NSWC engineer Tom Palathra, top left, works with Wade science teacher Peg Whiting, top right, and a group of her fifth graders during the in-school robotics program.**

These students are one of six groups of Charles County Public Schools students participating in the 2009-2010 National Defense Education Program In-School Science Technology Engineering and Math Program (STEM).

The program is provided to fifth graders at Wade, Indian Head, Dr. Thomas L. Higdon, Eva Turner and J.P. Ryon elementary schools, and to seventh graders at Benjamin Stoddert Middle School, through a partnership between the school system, the Naval Surface Warfare Center (NSWC) and the National Defense Education Program.

This year’s theme is “Save the Bay” and the goal is for students to learn and investigate current environmental problems with the Chesapeake Bay, to understand the impact of

See STEM, Page 2

## Board challenge: to build or not to build a new high school

The Board of Education must decide on Tuesday whether to send a request to the state to build a new high school or delay construction until the economy rebounds.

Planning and construction approval for the new high school, to be built on Piney Church Road, is the highest priority in the school system’s fiscal year 2011 Capital Improvements Program (CIP) request, but Board of Education members question whether the school system can afford to open a new school while receiving continual budget cuts from the state and county.

Board members held a work session with the Charles County Commissioners on Sept. 28 to request assurances that funding would be available in 2013 to cover the \$18 million in opening and operating costs of the new school. The Board also asked the Commissioners to commit to funding \$14 million recurring operating costs. Both boards agreed on the need to

build a new high school to relieve overcrowding; however, they did not come to a consensus on whether to move ahead with construction of the school without a long-term funding commitment for operating costs.

Following the meeting, the Commissioners voted in one of their regularly scheduled meetings to dedicate a \$10 million, one-time funding commitment to the Board to help open the new high school. The \$10 million would be funded from the county’s Developers’ Rights and Responsibilities Account (DRRA), which is money contributed by developers for school-related construction costs.

Over the past two years, the school system has implemented a number of budget cuts and redesigns to reduce construction costs for the school. In order to ask for state approval, the Board must submit its request by the end of October.

### *Two-hour early dismissal*

The next two-hour early dismissal for students is Wednesday, Oct. 21.

### *Schools closed for MSTA*

Schools are closed for students and teachers on Friday, Oct. 16 for the Maryland State Teachers Association Convention.

### *Celebrate staff!*

National School Lunch Week is Oct. 12-16 and National School Bus Safety Week is Oct. 19-23. Be sure to thank the food service staff and school bus drivers for their hard work.

### *Adult Education graduation*

The Adult Education program graduation ceremonies are Thursday, Oct. 22, 7 p.m., in the Westlake High School auditorium.

### *County seniors recognized*

The Maryland Higher Education Commission recently named two La Plata High School seniors as finalists in the area of academic achievement through the Distinguished Scholars Program. They are Tyler Fini and Rosemary Garcia. Additionally, 83 other Charles County Public Schools students were recognized for national achievement, national merit and talent in the arts.

The Distinguished Scholar program rewards finalists with a \$3,000 scholarship per year for four years as an incentive to attend a two-year or four-year Maryland college or university. Students apply for the program during their junior year and are eligible for awards in three areas: academic achievement, talent in the arts, and national merit and achievement. A complete list is available at [www.cchoe.com/pr](http://www.cchoe.com/pr).



## Notebook

### Upcoming Road Shows

Charles County Public Schools is hosting Road Show information sessions this fall for parents and community members. Sessions are scheduled by high school regional locations, and include middle and elementary schools.

La Plata High School's Road Show is 6 - 8 p.m., Oct. 14 at the school. Other participating schools include Dr. Thomas L. Higdon, Mary H. Matula, Walter J. Mitchell and Dr. James Craik elementary schools, and Milton M. Somers and Piccowaxen middle schools. Possible topics covered include technology - web resources, school communication, building partnerships for success, ACT/SAT test information and school safety.

Thomas Stone High School's Road Show is 6:30 - 8 p.m., Oct. 21 at the school. Schools also participating include Dr. Samuel A. Mudd, Malcolm, J.P. Ryon, T.C. Martin and Mary B. Neal elementary schools, and John Hanson Middle School. Possible topics covered include tips for reading with children at home, helping children learn mathematics, how sports and academics go together, a parent's role in course selection, bullying, understanding assessments and communication tools for parents.

### On the cover

Pictured on the front cover are employees from Indian Head Elementary School. Pictured, from left, are: Charyn Scrivens, gifted education teacher; Patrick Kennedy, first-grade teacher; Rita Koenig, school nurse; and Ralph Johnson, building service manager.

## Board agenda - October 13

The Board of Education's next monthly meeting is Tuesday, Oct. 13 at the Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building on Radio Station Road in La Plata. The public portion of the meeting begins at 1 p.m. and Public Forum is at 6 p.m. The meeting is televised live on Comcast Channel 96 and rebroadcast throughout the week. All televised Board meetings are also streamed live on the school system Web site at <http://www2.cboe.com/boe/live/>.

**Executive session** – 12 p.m.

**Call to order** – 1 p.m.

• Pledge of Allegiance, Maurice J. McDonough High School's JROTC unit

**Superintendent's update to the Board Reports of officers/boards/committees**

- Correspondence/Board member updates
- Education Association of Charles County
- Student Board member update
- Safe schools with Sheriff Rex Coffey
- Audit report
- Budget update
- CIP update

- High school security cameras
- Summer maintenance projects
- Fine and Performing Arts curriculum and events
- Title I parent policy
- Testing update
- Recruiting update

**Unfinished business**

**New business and future agenda items**

- New business – New high school
- Future agenda items

**Recognition** – 4:30 p.m.

- Students
- Staff
- Resolution: American Education Week, American Freedom Week

**Public Forum** – 6 p.m.

**Action items**

- Minutes
- Personnel
- FY 2010 Comprehensive maintenance plan
- Record retention policy #2470

**Adjournment**

## STEM

Continued from page 1

those problems, and brainstorm to create potential solutions through a research proposal. The program runs for 16 weeks and will end in a robotics, research proposal and team interview competition between all participating school teams.

Engineers, environmentalists and students affiliated with NSWC serve as mentors to help students work with robotics, engineering challenges and scientific investigations studying the Chesapeake Bay. Each mentor spends at least one and a half hours of class time per week with students.

The program also requires students to conduct scientific investigations on different Chesapeake Bay issues. Expert lecturers will visit each school to talk to teams about water and marine life in the Chesapeake Bay. Students will take field trips to study fish seining and Bay conditions. The experts, along with the robotic mentors, will help guide and focus student teams on their research topic proposal.

Monique Varlas, instructional specialist for STEM programs, said the goal is to provide all schools with an in-school or after-school robotics program. "The hope is that this program will be self sustaining, even if

the partnership ends. Six schools are participating in the program this fall, and an additional six schools will participate this spring. The majority of the schools participating in the program this spring worked with the Save the Bay challenge last year, and will learn a new robotics program that has a stronger math focus," Varlas said.

At the end of the 16-week program, students will compete in a Save the Bay Robotics Challenge on Dec. 19 at North Point High School. The event will feature two levels of competition: one for fifth-grade teams and one for seventh-grade teams. All teams will be required to complete eight challenges with their robots, including cleaning up a power plant, delivering oysters to the Bay, preventing land erosion and algae blooms, upgrading water treatment plants and removing sediment from the Bay.

Students will also participate in teamwork and technical interviews, and will be judged on their research projects, which will be based off one of the eight robotics challenges. Trophies will be awarded to winners in each category and to the top three teams.

## J.C. Parks Elementary School raises funds through focus on wellness

Wellness was the focus at J.C. Parks Elementary School on Friday, Oct. 2, as students from all grade levels, as well as staff members, marched in circles around the parking lot to raise more than \$10,000 for the school. The event was the school's Mustang Marathon Wellness Walk-a-Thon, which focused on raising funds for the school through health-related activities.

The walk was coordinated by Parks physical education teacher Melissa Moorehead and Betsy Keesler, Parks' school nurse, as a way for students to learn about wellness while raising funds for the school. "This event is a home-grown, grassroots effort. All proceeds feed back into the Parks school community," Keesler said.

Students were assigned a 50-minute period to walk laps around the school parking lot, and were encouraged to ask family members to sponsor them with donations. Water stations were set up along the



**J.C. Parks Principal Kristin Shields, center, walks laps in the school parking lot with a group of students as part of the Mustang Marathon Wellness Walk-a-Thon held Friday, Oct. 2. The school raised more than \$10,000.**

designated walk area and parent volunteers recorded the number of laps walked for each student. During the month of September, students received instruction in their physical education class about the benefits of walking, safety in walking, fun trivia about walking as a sport, as well as health benefits of any exercise program.

Additionally, both Moorehead and Keesler used the morning announcements as a tool to talk with students about wellness. "In class, we had events like Wellness Wednesday, a fitness testing unit and provided wellness tips for students during announcements," Moorehead said.

The school also provided custom made shirts for staff and volunteers, and school spirit items for students, such as bracelets, to thank them for their participation. This was the second marathon fundraiser coordinated to benefit the school and its community.

## Seniors meet state testing requirement, graduation rates increase

Charles County Public Schools' class of 2009 met the challenges of the new state High School Assessments (HSA) graduation requirement and increased its graduation rate, according to data released last month by the Maryland State Department of Education.

No Charles County high school student failed to graduate solely because of the High School Assessments (HSA), which is a graduation requirement that took effect with the class of 2009. Other graduation requirements include student service learning and completion of a minimum of 23 credits as specified by law.

HSA data shows that of the 2,104 Charles County Public Schools graduating seniors, 100 percent met the HSA requirement with 1,537 students passing all four tests. Additionally, 404 students, or 19.1 percent, met the requirement by achieving a combined score of 1602 points across the four assessments. Another 7.7 percent, or 163 students, used the Bridge Plan for Academic Validation to pass the HSAs. No Charles County students received a waiver.

"Our high schools and instructional staff worked hard to track the progress of individual students and to provide a plan to help them be successful on the HSA. I commend each staff member for making sure our students graduated with their class," said Superintendent James E. Richmond.

The graduation rate also improved slightly in 2009, rising from 87.24 percent in 2008 to 88.26 percent.

HSA is a requirement for the Maryland High School Diploma, which started with the class of 2009. HSAs include algebra, English II, government and biology. The algebra and English II scores are also used as part of the Maryland School Assessment (MSA) and to determine Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) at the

high school level. All six Charles County public high schools met AYP for the 2008-09 school year.

Newly released HSA data also shows that the class of 2010 is making progress toward meeting the graduation requirement. Already, 83.3 percent of the class of 2010 has met the HSA requirement, with 1,427 of 2,153 enrolled students passing all four tests, 359 scoring a 1602 composite score and seven completing Bridge Plan projects. These results are as of the May administration of the HSA, and do not include results of any students who completed Bridge projects over the summer. There are 360 seniors who still must meet the requirement. Many of these students have transferred to Charles County Public Schools and have not taken all the tests for various reasons. There are three additional opportunities for students to take or retake the tests this year. Richmond said he anticipates that once these students have completed all four exams, they will meet the HSA graduation requirement.

There are several ways that students can meet the rigorous HSA requirements. Students can pass all four tests outright; earn a combined score of 1602 on all four tests; or complete the Bridge Plan, which offers students who have not achieved passing scores on assessments an optional way to meet the HSA requirement. Students failing to pass an HSA can complete a single eight- to twelve-hour project for every twenty-one points they fall short of the passing score.

Students who have not passed the tests are being offered additional classes, support and program adjustments to help move them toward graduation.

All 2009 school and systemwide data is available online at [www.MdReportCard.org](http://www.MdReportCard.org).

## Personnel

Apply for positions online at [www.ccboe.com/hur](http://www.ccboe.com/hur). Positions are open until filled unless otherwise noted. All teaching positions require a bachelor's degree and MSDE certification requirements.

### Job openings

**Secretary, Human Resources** – Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building; 12-month position. Apply by Oct. 15.

**Communications Multimedia Assistant** – Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building; 12-month position. Apply by Oct. 15.

**Building Service Worker** – Matthew Henson Middle School; 12-month position. Apply by Oct. 15.

**Building Service Assistant Manager** – John Hanson Middle School; 12-month position. Apply by Oct. 15.

**Special Education Instructional Assistant** – Henry E. Lackey High School; 10-month position. Apply by Oct. 15.

**Secretary, Instruction** – Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building; 12-month position. Apply by Oct. 16.

**Title I Instructional Specialist for Technology** – Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building; 11-month position. Apply by Oct. 12.

**Instructional Specialist for Special Education, Pre-K** – Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building; 12-month position. Apply by Oct. 14.

**Admissions Officer** – North Point High School; 10-month position. Master's degree and teaching experience required. Apply Oct. 9.

**Gifted Education Resource Teachers** – Future middle school openings; 10-month positions.

**Speech Language Therapists** – Openings at all age levels; 10-month positions.

**Family & Consumer Science Teacher** – High school level; 10-month position.

**Physics Teacher** – High school level; 10-month position.

**English Teacher** – High school level; 10-month position.

**Reading Resource Teachers** – Future openings at all levels; 11-month positions.

**Science Teacher** – Benjamin Stoddert Middle School; 10-month position.

**Reading Recovery Teacher** – Location to be determined; 10-month position.

**Library & Media Specialists** – Openings at the elementary school level; 10-month positions.

**Special Education Teacher for Science** – Benjamin Stoddert Middle School; 10-month position.

**Kindergarten Teacher** – Location to be determined; 10-month position.

**Elementary Teacher** – Location to be determined; 10-month position.

**Life Skills Teacher** – Piccowaxen Middle School; 10-month position.

**Special Education Teacher for Social Studies** – Benjamin Stoddert Middle School; 10-month position.

**Special Education Teacher** – Westlake High School; 10-month position.

### Extra pay positions

**North Point High School** has the following openings:

- Assistant boys' basketball coach
- Assistant girls' basketball coach

Contact Principal Kimberly Hill, 301-885-2012, to apply.

### Staff notes

#### CCPS accepting award nominees

Charles County Public Schools is accepting nominations for its 2010 Principal of the Year and the *Washington Post* Distinguished Educational Leadership Award (DELA). The annual award honors exemplary principals and recognizes those who go beyond the day-to-day demands of their position to create an exceptional educational environment.

Nomination criteria will soon be available and will be forwarded to all school principals and secretaries through e-mail. All nomination packets are due to Human Resources by 4:30 p.m., Friday, Dec. 11.

For more information call Jeanette Sudik, 301-934-7356, or visit the *Washington Post's* Web site at [www.washingtonpost.com](http://www.washingtonpost.com).

School News is published by  
Charles County Public Schools  
301-932-6610  
301-934-7220  
Fax: 301-932-6651

#### Board of Education Members

Donald M. Wade, Chairman  
Roberta S. Wise, Vice Chairman  
Jennifer S. Abell  
Collins A. Bailey  
Charles E. Carrington  
Maura H. Cook  
Pamela A. Pedersen  
Kyle Grusholt, Student Member

#### Superintendent of Schools

James E. Richmond

#### Editor/Writers

Katie O'Malley-Simpson  
Shelley Buter

The Charles County public school system does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age or disability in its programs, activities or employment practices. For inquiries, please contact Keith Grier, Title IX Coordinator, or Patricia Vaira, Section 504 Coordinator (students), or Keith Hettel, Section 504 Coordinator (employees/adults), at Charles County Public Schools, Jesse L. Starkey Administration Building, P.O. Box 2770, La Plata, Maryland 20646. 301-932-6610/870-3814. For special accommodations call 301-934-7230 or TDD 1-800-735-2258 two weeks prior to the event.

Charles County Public Schools  
Post Office Box 2770  
La Plata, Maryland 20646  
(address service requested)

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
PERMIT No. 66  
La Plata, Md.  
20646

*The mission of Charles County Public Schools is to provide an opportunity for all school-aged children to receive an academically challenging, quality education that builds character, equips for leadership, and prepares for life, in an environment that is safe and conducive to learning.*