

INSIDE TRACK

FALLS CHURCH CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

One kind word can warm three winter months.

— Japanese proverb



Proposed Budget to Include Blackboard

Lois Berlin, Superintendent

When it comes to technology in the home, our school division has a clear advantage. More than 90 percent of our FCCPS families have access to a computer and the World Wide Web at home, which further supports our efforts to utilize electronic tools to better communicate with our students and families.

Earlier this year, administrators and technology staff explored the option of adding the Blackboard education learning management system to our school division. This technology tool is already widely used in other K-12 school systems as well as in colleges and universities. There are so many ways the software could be used for both internal and external communications, including posting homework assignments, offering online homework help and collaborating with students, teachers and others. The possibilities are many and our administrators are enthusiastic about the prospect of tailoring Blackboard to support our K-12 classroom initiatives. I plan to include funding for Blackboard in my proposed budget for the 2007-2008 school year.

The FCCPS Technology Committee has been asked to gain input from staff and develop an action plan, which would include a timeline for implementation and teacher training. It would also include accommodations for students who do not have access to a computer at home. Blackboard would most likely be implemented at the middle and high school levels first, and at the elementary level in phase two.

Obviously, it is still early in both the budget process and the Blackboard planning process. However, many FCCPS teachers, administrators and technology resource personnel are fully supportive of Blackboard. We'll keep you posted on this exciting new initiative as plans develop.

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Left: Mim McFarland, Rory Dippold prepare to sample a selection.

Below: Official taste testers ponder their palate between samplings. Pictured (l-r) Mim McFarland, Pat Smith, Diane Harrington, Pam Wilkie and Sarah Shaw.



What's Cookin'?

A little friendly kitchen competition brought the Mary Ellen Henderson Middle School staff together recently for a chili cookoff. Eight staff members put their culinary concoctions to the test as fellow staffers kicked in a dollar each to serve as official taste testers and judges.

The final tally was so close that Debbie Baird and Pam Wilkie tied for first place. Debbie hasn't revealed her winning recipe. Pam Willkie credits chef Emeril Lagasse for her success with Chili con Carne and Chili con Queso with Tortilla Chips. You can find the recipe at www.foodnetwork.com.

Gifts With Meaning

Just prior to the holiday season, staff members were asked to share memories of the most meaningful gift they had ever received or given. Here are some of the responses.



I went to Ghana three years ago, just after the Christmas holiday. It was one of the most moving experiences of my life. When I was there, I met a little girl, Rita, who just stole my heart. She started calling me Mama while we were there and stayed with me as often as she was able.



Robin and Rita rest up for the next stop on a 2003 holiday shopping trip in Ghana.

Every December, I send money to cover her school uniform and schooling for the next year, which runs from January to January. I hope to be able to do that for her as long as she is in school.

I receive letters from her from time-to-time, and each year, I see an improvement in her writing abilities. What I receive in return is the joy of knowing that I am helping her to better herself and giving her the possibility of a better future.

Robin Borum
FCCPS Social Worker



The music plays on for Janet Kremer's son.

I'll never forget when my son found his Martin guitar under our Christmas tree and started playing and playing and playing. The music continues. I will also always cherish the poem my son wrote called, "I Believe."

Janet Kremer
Mount Daniel Guidance Counselor

I must have been around eighteen years old, fresh out of high school. I came upon a late season yard sale on one of Arlington's back streets where I noticed an old piece of furniture, a pie safe, worn, wobbly and showing its age, but with some definite potential. It was stretch for me, more money than I had with me, and in need of a lot of work to restore. With no more than a couple of moments to think about how much my Mom would like that old pie safe, I went to the bank, came back and bought it.

Over the next couple months I disassembled and "restored" the old pie safe. I stripped the old finish off the wood, straightened and repainted the punched tin panels. Once I put it back together, it was still sort of wobbly,

worn and showed its age. But when my brother and I carried it in the living room on Christmas Eve, the look on Mom's face was inspirational. She was blown away, little tears of joy leaked out of the corners of her eyes, and at that moment, I was truly filled with the joy of giving.

It became so much more than a gift exchange. It was one of life's lessons. It showed me the wisdom of the old adage, *It is better to give than it is to receive.*

Bob Nissen
Maintenance Supervisor

Back when my husband and I were down to only one salary, every Christmas present purchased was a great sacrifice. I wanted to buy something special for my best friend, who was in the same boat, financially. Knowing I could only invest about \$10 for the present, I happened upon a beautiful scarf. As much as I coveted that scarf for myself, I knew my friend would enjoy its shiny, silver and pink colors.

When we got together to exchange gifts, I insisted she open mine first. Oh the happiness this present brought to my friend! She wrapped it around her neck and danced around the room in delight. But, as happy as she was with my gift, she said I would love hers to me as much.

As I unwrapped the little package, you can imagine my pleasure when I realized she had purchased the same scarf for me!

Leila Levesque
FCCPS Data Information Specialist



My favorite gift I ever gave wasn't during the holiday season but it is one I will never forget.

During a summer while I was in college, my sister invited me to come work with her at Habitat for Humanity. We spent the summer working with various groups to help build 7 houses.

One afternoon we were wrapping up work on site and my sister invited me and another summer intern to come with her on special project. We spent the next few hours visiting several families and announcing to them they had qualified for a Habitat house. That was one of the few times I have seen pure joy in the face of so many individuals.

I was filled with such excitement for each family and learned it how true it is that it is better to give than to receive.

Suzanne Rowe
Mount Daniel Teacher



The most meaningful holiday gift I've received is my daughter, Kaitlyn. She was not due until St. Patrick's Day, but came 14 weeks early on December 4th. She weighed in at a whopping 1 pound, 6 oz. Everyone said she just didn't want to miss Santa!

Although very sick, she was also quite determined to stick around. She's now in the 7th grade and you'd never know what a preemie she was. For me, it proved that it is possible to find your biggest blessings in something that, at first, seems tragic and unfair.

Keep looking for those silver linings and have a wonderful holiday season!

Maria Houston
Speech-Language Pathologist



The most meaningful material gift I ever received was my tenth anniversary band. The main diamond in it is from my mother-in-law's engagement ring. We were very close and she passed on shortly before my husband gave me the ring.

The other thing that makes it so special is that he designed the ring himself – anyone who knows Rick knows just how unlikely that is.

Marcia Schumann
Guidance Counselor
George Mason High School

Did You Know?

By day, Ann Sommers works part-time in the FCCPS Special Education Office, and used to work in the old community education office. Did you know that for the same ten years, she has also worked for The Washington National Opera singing in the chorus?

Anne has been in 33 productions with approximately 275 performances in the Opera House at The Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts. This coming spring she will be in new productions of *Macbeth* and *The Daughter of the Regiment*.

"Singers have to audition every year for the coming season and that is probably the only part of the job I don't like," Sommers said. "Otherwise, it is great fun keeping the brain thinking, pretending to be characters I'm not, and enjoying so many wonderful musical experiences."



Ann Sommers (front row, left) waits backstage with other chorus members for her cue to take the stage. On this occasion, they performed in Verdi's "La Traviata".

FCCPS Baby News



Jamison McAndrew with her mom, Suelynn, and dad, Craig. Suelynn is Leila Levesque's daughter.

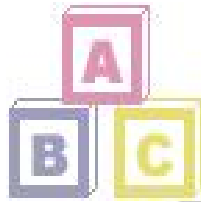
Congratulations to FCCPS Data Information Specialist Leila Levesque on becoming a first-time grandmother. The family welcomed Jamison Rose McAndrew into the world on Saturday, November 18 at 9:40 p.m. The baby weighed in at 8 lbs. 4 oz. Leila is looking forward to her new role as grandma!



Alyssa Lauren Kwon

Congratulations are also in order for TJ Guidance Counselor Janice Kwon and her husband, Harry.

Their daughter, Alyssa Lauren Kwon was born on November 27 at 7:00 p.m. She weighed in at 6 lbs. 9.6 oz.



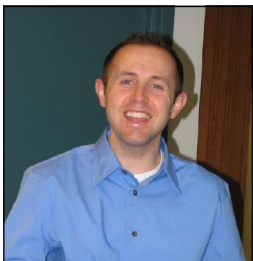
Welcome New Employees



Christine Morton

Two new employees recently joined the FCCPS staff. Meet Christine Morton and Seve Padilla.

Christine recently signed on as a special education paraprofessional at Mount Daniel Elementary School. Christine has had a lot of great experience working with young children in both general and special education.



Seve Padilla

Seve Padilla started working for the FCCPS in March as an Aramark contract employee serving as the FCCPS Facilities Coordinator. Now he is an official member of the FCCPS serving as the facilities and security coordinator. Seve will work closely with school resource officer Steve Rau and school security staff to identify and address school security needs.

Keeping Stress at Bay

Here are some easy ways to avoid holiday stress and to keep smiling during this hectic time of year.

Keep It Simple.

Don't fill your schedule to the brim with shopping, card writing, visiting and cooking. Be realistic about what you have time for, and cut back where you can. You'll find you enjoy the things you do a whole lot more.

Plan Ahead.

Bake casseroles and other dishes ahead of time and freeze them for quick, healthful dinners during the hustle and bustle of the holidays. Order gifts by catalog or Internet to save time and avoid going to the mall more than you have to.

Keep Good Company.

Surrounding yourself with positive and upbeat people during the holidays will leave you feeling happier too. Optimism is contagious. Catch it!

Put On A Happy Face.

Research shows that even faking a smile can brighten your your mood. Try it and see for yourself!

If you need assistance during the holiday season or throughout the year, your Employee Assistance Services (EAS) stand ready to help. Contact Courtney Atkins-Miller LPC, CEAP, the Senior Program Director of New Millennium Employee Assistance Services at 703-863-6680.