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Chess Club Takes Off Among Poplar Bluff Middle Schoolers

DECEMBER 13TH 2021 BY DEE LOFLIN

Chess Club Takes Off Among Poplar Bluff Middle Schoolers

About 100 students signed up for the opening day of Chess Club at the Poplar Bluff Middle School, immediately placing the after-school group next to Junior Beta as the upper elementary's most active.

"I didn't know chess is this popular," fifth grader Elan Hocke commented. Elan previously was a member of a small community club, but since he no longer has the time after riding the bus home, he said he usually just plays chess alone

When Principal Dr. Josh Teeter took over at the Middle School last year, he had plans to launch a club, but COVID-19 protocols prevented it. He also attempted to start one in his former post at Junior High, but said he was never able to put in the time necessary to promote it, plus he was contending with other interests like gaming.

"My goal for this whole thing, you know, if I ruled the world, would be to turn this into an elective class," Teeter said. "Like sports, it gives kids another outlet.

"I struggled in math in Middle School, but no one could beat me at chess," continued Teeter, "so I knew I had brainpower."

The Middle School purchased 30 chessboard sets with instructions included from Wholesale Chess, and borrowed 10 more from another campus. Several students brought their own boards as well.

For the inaugural meeting this month, students who already knew how to play were paired with those who did not. Going forward, Teeter said the format would operate much like class in that there will be whole group as well as individual instruction. Tournament teams may emerge if enough students become serious.

The activity was so well-attended that it already has been divided into two weekly sessions instead of one, with multiple teacher chaperones. Fourth grade meets in the cafeteria from 3-4:30 p.m. on Tuesdays, and grades five and six gather on Thursdays.

“Chess is what smart people do,” Teeter stated. “The kids don’t know this yet. They just think it’s fun.”

According to the principal, there are more possible variations in the first 20 moves of chess than atoms in the observable universe. Students who play for just one hour per week can improve their academic outcomes by 10 percent, he went on, and even higher when they compete at the tournament level.

Teeter noted on the permission slips to parents and guardians that chess could improve a child’s social-emotional development, cognitive abilities, communication skills and strategic planning.

Having played since he was 12 and competitively by age 14, Teeter was one of the founding members of the community chess club earlier this spring alongside Junior High math teacher Brett Russell, and an educator from Westwood Baptist Academy.

With a stroke of luck, Dane Mattson, a grandmaster from Minnesota now residing with his wife in the Doniphan area, began participating with the group. Teeter hopes to invite Mattson, who is employed by Chess.com, to serve as a guest speaker for the students in the future.

Pictured: Fourth graders Baylee Ward and Elijah Mohr of Madison Copeland’s class contemplate the ending sequence of a chess game.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Middle School Receives STEM Donation from Educational Talent Search

NOVEMBER 01ST 2021 BY DEE LOFLIN

Middle School Receives STEM Donation from Educational Talent Search

The Three Rivers College Educational Talent Search program has donated a stockpile of gently used STEM kits to the Poplar Bluff Middle School for its hands-on elective.

The recent donation included “two cars worth of drones and other really cool gadgets,” reported sixth grade guidance counselor Britney Stahl, who serves as the Middle School’s ETS point person. She noted that program representatives offered the items to enrich the science, technology, engineering and math program out of the “kindness of their hearts.”

The new tools for classroom activities include Animation Labs, Vortex Labs, KiwiCo Tinker Crate Glowing Pendulums, Laser Projectors, Light-Chasing Robots, Electroluminescent Wire Sculptures, Drone and Test Tubes for Mentos Geyser Experiments, Snowmaking, Jelly Marbles, Water Absorbing Polymer Cubes, Growing Plants in Test Tubes, Rainbow Tubes, Magic Sand, Energy Beads, Water Gel and Orbs, according to STEM instructor Melanie Schalk.

The kits were left-over from the end of the program's five-year grant cycle, during which officials applied for additional funds to start a STEM club to help keep Junior High students engaged, and used the products for weekly Zoom sessions through the pandemic, according to ETS Director Brandi Brooks.

"We were asking around to see who could possibly use the kits, and 'Bingo,' this was the perfect fit," Brooks said. "I'm excited to see what they do, and thrilled that someone can use it; it's really cool for the students. I was terrified it would sit here."

Funded through the U.S. Department of Education, the ETS program provides monthly in-school workshops, college campus tours and cultural enrichment opportunities for Poplar Bluff students, beginning in grade six. Established locally over three decades ago, ETS at Three Rivers is the largest such TRiO program in Missouri, with a seven-person team of outreach specialists.

Eligibility is based on whether students will be first-generation college attendees, their free or reduced school lunch status, and if significant assistance would be needed in order to finance higher education. Around 1,000 students are served in the region, comprised of 10 school districts, with Poplar Bluff being the largest.

"We provide that link for them—whether it's exposure to college campuses, or helping them go through the application process—to show the importance of something postsecondary in terms of education or a certification program that will advance whatever training it is that you need," Brooks explained. "We work with the whole student, not just college heavy stuff; tutoring services, soft skills. And every year we build just a little bit more until they get to that [pivotal] junior year."

Pictured: STEM students of the Poplar Bluff Middle School pose next to a representation of the activity kits generously donated by the Three Rivers College ETS program.

Photo and article provided by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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College Fair Returns to Campus After Going Virtual Last Year

OCTOBER 29TH 2021 BY DEE LOFLIN

College Fair Returns to Campus After Going Virtual Last Year

Poplar Bluff, MO - Fifty universities, technical trade schools and branches of the military were represented during the return of the College Fair on Tuesday, Oct. 19, at Poplar Bluff High School.

“Our juniors have not had a normal year since eighth grade,” pointed out Sara Woodard, PBHS counselor. While the public health crisis “created some virtual opportunities students didn’t have before,” she continued, the opportunity for students to have questions answered in person is unparalleled.

The hope, Woodard noted, is to offer students “as much exposure” to postsecondary options as possible. The annual event, organized through the Missouri Association for College Admission Counseling, is open to PBHS juniors and seniors, as well as Top 30 sophomores.

There were a few institutions represented for the first time in recent memory, according to the counseling department, including the University of Mississippi and the Nossi College of Art in Nashville.

Michelle Donovan, Nossi admissions representative, explained how the art school was looking to branch out into the Missouri market, and the St. Louis National College Fair

was canceled. Specializing in just five select programs, Nossi offers a fixed-tuition policy with no out-of-state fees, and recently added dormitories.

Another resource available for high schoolers is a full-time college and career adviser, Jade McCain, who began at her alma mater last month. A collaboration between the Missouri College Advising Corps under the University of Missouri Extension and AmeriCorps, the position is offered at host schools with a high percentage of low-income, underrepresented and prospective first-generation college students.

Advisers, like McCain of the PBHS Class of 2017, are often from backgrounds and schools similar to the students that they serve. The “near-peer approach” is different than other programs in that the advisers are available to all students on campus for postsecondary planning, apprenticeship opportunities and coordinating group activities, according to MCAC literature.

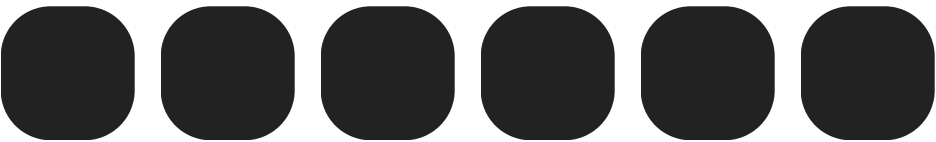
Pictures: Students stop to learn about culinary arts and other degree programs offered at Sullivan University in Louisville.

Photo and article by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Past Valedictorian Advocates for Engineering Career Field

OCTOBER 05TH 2021 BY DEE LOFLIN

Past Valedictorian Advocates for Engineering Career Field

Poplar Bluff, MO - An alumna returned to Poplar Bluff Schools, not long after she graduated at the top of her class, to speak with the Junior High design and modeling class about her experiences thus far studying engineering.

Valedictorian and student body president of the PBHS Class of 2019, Sophie Rowland, who served as guest speaker on Thursday, Sept. 29, is a junior at Missouri University of Science and Technology in Rolla and works for Proterra, an electric vehicle technology manufacturer.

“All engineers have one objective, and it’s to solve problems,” Rowland told the class, which included exploring careers students for part of the school day. She broke down the different branches of engineering, noting that she works as a system engineer, “designing processes to be more efficient.”

Following a short presentation, Rowland led a group exercise that involved constructing a boat out of a 6-by-6 inch piece of aluminum foil using a single pair of scissors. The team with the structure that holds the greatest number of pennies without sinking in a tub of water won a treat.

Instructor Jodie Berry’s team “taco” led the challenge during third hour, with 111 pennies. Eighth grader Bryant Miller explained that their victorious strategy was to make the sides of the structure the most compact. “We kept packing [the tinfoil] in and packing it in,” he commented, speculating that if they doubled up on layering the bottom of the boat as well, the boat could hold even more coins.

When the class reconvened to analyze the experiment, Rowland revealed that the top team created a boat with the highest surface area to distribute the weight. During the Q&A portion of the lecture afterward, Rowland advocated for the engineering career field, comparing the salary range to that of a doctor, without the additional years of post-

graduate schooling.

She will complete her engineering degree in just four years, and then take the principles and practice of engineering exam in order to be declared a professional. Part of the Missouri S&T program is to complete an engineering co-op, and Rowland has ambitiously landed apprenticeships at C.E. Norton Construction & Plumbing, Hunter Engineering Company and her most recent job.

Serving as project manager, helping to build battery-powered buses, Rowland shared how Poterra makes the only bus in the world fabricated entirely out of composite material so the lightweight, aerodynamic vehicle can travel further. She worked full time at the South Carolina operation over the summer, she said, when the fifth-generation bus was released.

“I wish I had something like this when I was in school – even at the high school level,” Rowland later observed of the new Project Lead the Way elective, which is one of three Gateway courses offered this year. She said she was just fortunate to connect with local engineers to gain some initial exposure in the field.

According to Berry, the PLTW design and modeling class will continue to expose the students to as many STEM-related careers—in science, technology, engineering and math—as possible. The next guest speaker lined up will be an orthotist.

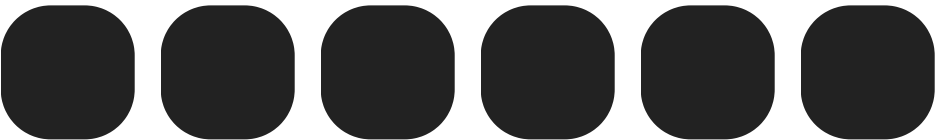
Pictured: Sophie Rowland of the PBHS Class of 2019 shows PLTW design and modeling students a picture of an electric bus she helped build.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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Mark Twain Students Team Up with the Bread Shed

OCTOBER 03RD 2021 BY DEE LOFLIN

Mark Twain Students Team Up with the Bread Shed

Mark Twain School students are gaining perhaps just as much as they give while helping to address the food insecurity in the community, organizers say.

Since the beginning of the calendar year, teacher Darla Nunn has served as chaperone over the volunteer students at the Bread Shed. The group assists with the nonprofit's A Better Childhood program, which supplies monthly food baskets to R-I families in need; the senior food distribution in cooperation with the SEMO Food Bank; and diaper drives in collaboration with the Diaper Bank of the Ozarks.

“Kids can always find the negative, but what do you bring to the table to make it positive,” asked Nunn, who leads the Jobs for America’s Graduates program at Mark Twain. “I can’t do it all by myself, but as a collective group like the Bread Shed, we can work together to make things better.

The community service functions as a resume enhancer for students, she noted, fitting in with JAG-Missouri’s project-based learning model. In addition, the short field trips serve as a motivator for life skills students who enjoy a change of pace in the school day, and meet the requisite building expectations.

“I know I have food in a home where I can get a drink when I want, and go to sleep in a bed,” high school student Tristan White commented. “There are people out there who are hungry and homeless and don’t have anything, and I can help them.”

Jim Ward, executive director of the Bread Shed, said the work could not be carried out without helpers like the students from Mark Twain. Besides greeting guests, he said that the young people load the boxes, which often include produce, cereal, snacks, eggs, meat,

bread, canned goods, bottled water and more.

The arrangement initially began about five years ago with Junior High assistant principal Corey Jameson, then lead teacher at the former Poplar Bluff Graduation Center. “The worth ethic translated to the classroom,” he recalled.

“Each student that participated in the Bread Shed volunteer opportunity became better students in school,” Jameson said. “Helping others gave them a sense of self-worth and accomplishment, some of them hadn’t experienced in a long time or possibly ever.”

In addition to the programs that the students help with during the workweek, the faith-based organization rotates counties providing a mobile food pantry and clothing giveaway on weekends. Lastly, the Bread Shed serves a free hot meal on Sundays through its Breaking Bread program at its North D Street location, where mobile shower units were recently added. For more information on services available, please visit breadshed.org.

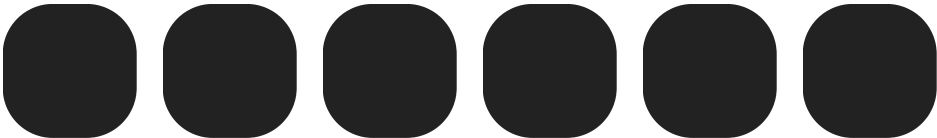
Pictured: Students (right to left) Tiffany Womack and Kennedy Robertson help load up a laundry basket carried by Caiden Politte of Mark Twain School on Wednesday, Sept. 22, at the Bread Shed.

Photo and article submitted by Tim Krakowiak, Communications/Marketing Director, Poplar Bluff R-I School District

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