

Persevering in a pandemic

COVID has impacted nearly every aspect of education

One year ago, a previously unknown virus was starting to spread across the world, and all of us wondered what impact it might have on our lives.

Today, COVID-19 has come to influence nearly every aspect of how we function as a society – and as a school district.

The virus shut down schools in March 2020 for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year and forced Penn Manor to implement stringent

cleaning, social distancing and mask requirements so schools could open back up for 2020-2021.

Throughout the pandemic, Penn Manor staff, students and parents have had to be extremely flexible in response to ever-changing guidelines and procedures implemented under the pandemic.

Students returned to school last fall under a hybrid schedule, and in November, Penn Manor transitioned to full in-person learning.

But the virus, after months on the decline, returned over the holidays, forcing the high school to transition back to a hybrid schedule. Our other schools continued in-person instruction but had to switch to remote learning at various times as COVID cases spiked in their buildings.

The pandemic has had a huge impact on our teachers, students and



Sara Masten teaches a strings class in person and remotely at the high school.

parents, who have had to adjust to new teaching modes on short notice and the challenges of learning from home.

But that's just a part of the story. The pandemic has forced us to make major changes to nearly every aspect of our operations, from the way we register students for school to how we transport students, serve them food, clean our schools and safeguard our students.

This edition of Above & Beyond shares stories of how our Penn Manor staff has continued to persevere in spite of the pandemic.

You can read more starting on Page 4.



Cafeteria staff work behind protective shields at Manor Middle School.

First phase of high school project completed

Penn Manor High School is bustling with students and teachers utilizing new science, technology, math and music classrooms as work continues on the second phase of a major construction and renovation project that began in 2019.

A new STEM wing opened in the fall, with agricultural education shops and classrooms, and work was completed this winter on a new auditorium and music classrooms

The pandemic delayed construction for several weeks in March 2020, but the project is back on schedule.

and performance spaces under the first phase of the project.

The STEM wing features an open central corridor that provides access to labs and classrooms via retractable doors that enable teachers to expand

their classroom space and collaborate with other teachers.

English and social studies classrooms have been relocated to the former math and science wing so workers could demolish the original sections of the school that were built in 1958.

Construction is now under way on a humanities wing – with art and special education classrooms, administrative offices and

More **HIGH SCHOOL** on Page 5



Students walk through the central corridor of the new STEM wing of Penn Manor High School.



Penn Manor Virtual School learning facilitator Emily Lyons works with a student in a high school classroom dedicated to online learning.

PM virtual program expanded to K-12

The Penn Manor Virtual School program has been offered for several years for Penn Manor students, but this year, enrollment surged as more parents chose this option over in-person instruction for the 2020-2021 school year.

More than 600 students took advantage of the program, which was expanded this year to include an elementary component for kindergarten through grade six in response to the needs of families with concerns related to COVID-19.

Students enrolled in PMVS maintain an active status in Penn Manor, enabling them to participate in school clubs, athletics and other activities. They also can earn a Penn Manor diploma.

PMVS students also can take advantage of school counseling services, as well as academic help, both online and in person, with their coursework. Courses are provided through Accelerate Learning (K-5) and Edgenuity (6-12).

The rollout of the K-12 program faced some early challenges, mainly because of the tenfold increase in enrollment over the 2019-2020 school year.

"Going from 60 students a year to hundreds, along with tech issues within the programs, made for a challenging start, but families extended great patience and understanding," said Emily Lyons, PMVS facilitator.

Lyons is assisted by Jennifer Korosec.

Free meals offered to all students this year

All Penn Manor students are eligible to receive free breakfasts and lunches through the end of the 2020-2021 school year under a school meals program that was extended as a result of the pandemic by the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

Beginning in mid-September, students were able to receive the standard breakfast or lunch offered at any Penn Manor school at no charge. The meals are available to students who attend in person or remotely, including those enrolled in Penn Manor Virtual School.

Families that may qualify for the free and reduced-price breakfast and lunch program should fill out an application if they wish to continue to receive free or reduced-price meals in 2021-2022.

Message from the superintendent

As I write this column, I am reflecting on the fact that nearly one year ago to the day, Penn Manor School District, along with the 499 other public school districts in Pennsylvania, switched to remote learning as a result of the closure orders issued by the governor in response to the worldwide pandemic.

While Penn Manor was fortunate enough to have experience with distance learning and virtual programs due to the 1-to-1 laptop program launched during the 2013-2014 school year and the Open Campus initiative, the district never contemplated the immediate shift to virtual learning for 5,400 students. Thankfully, we live in a caring community with students, parents, teachers and staff members who rose to the challenge and quickly adapted to our new circumstances and found innovative ways to respond and provide instruction through the end of the 2019-2020 school year.

The start of the 2020-2021 school year saw all students returning to in-person instruction in either a full five-day-a-week mode or in a blended fashion. Additionally, the families of approximately 600 students chose to enroll in the Penn Manor Virtual School program, a fully online option. We have all learned a lot as a result of this new school environment, including how to safely resume in-person learning.

On behalf of the Penn Manor Board of School Directors and administration, I would like to extend a special thank you to a number of groups. **First, to our students**, we appreciate how quickly you have been willing to adjust to the sometimes daily changes in procedures for classes.

While we know it is not easy to make quick shifts to virtual, all of you have displayed tremendous flexibility. We are especially grateful to the Class of 2020 for the grace

that students demonstrated as a result of losing the senior prom and participating in a different kind of commencement, due to the closure of large venues like the Franklin & Marshall College Alumni Sports & Fitness Center.

We also greatly appreciate the support of the parents



Mike Lechlitter

in our school community. The school district realizes that the remote instruction last year and ongoing changes this

year place a greater burden on families. Thank you for your added support to your children over the past year.

Finally, thank you to our faculty, staff, and administrators for your dedication to our students and their education in challenging times. From learning new technology platforms for more effective lessons during COVID, special building cleaning procedures that were implemented, to faculty and staff who volunteered to deliver meals to students during the spring closure, the employees of Penn Manor have universally stepped up to the challenge of providing the highest quality of education possible during the global pandemic.

We appreciate all of your efforts during challenging times.

While no one in our community would have ever chosen the experiences of the past year, we are confident that we will emerge as a stronger school district with a renewed focus on making Penn Manor the best possible place for our students.

Thank you for your continued support of Penn Manor School District and our students!

– Dr. Mike Lechlitter

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Hambricht teacher a Grosvenor Fellow

Hambricht Elementary's Katie Harnish has been selected to participate in the Grosvenor Teacher Fellowship, a professional development partnership between the National Geographic Society and Lindblad Expeditions.

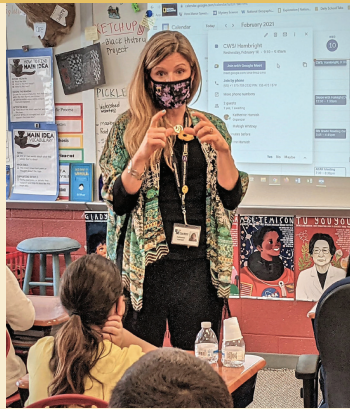
Harnish, who teaches fifth grade, is one of only 50 educators in the United States and Canada selected for the program.

As a Grosvenor Teacher Fellow, she will embark on a voyage aboard a Lindblad Expeditions ship to one of the world's most remote and rich environments, such as the high

Arctic, southeast Alaska, Central America or the Galápagos Islands.

She and other Grosvenor Teacher Fellows will work with marine biologists, geologists, historians, undersea specialists and National Geographic photographers to learn more about these environments, returning home with curriculum resources to share with their students and colleagues.

Katie Harnish is one of only 50 educators in the U.S. to receive the honor.



Katie Harnish leads her fifth-graders in the classroom, left, and during a stream study.



The Teacher Fellows were selected through a competitive application process based on their "impactful work to further students' understanding of the planet and its people, empowering them to generate solutions for a healthier and more sustainable future," according to National Geographic.

In recent years, Harnish has introduced her students to new technology while exploring the wetlands, woodlands and farmland surrounding Hambricht in a research project titled "The World in Our Backyard."

She also led a teaching unit on refugees in which her students Skyped with a refugee in a camp in Kenya and interviewed refugees and immigrants from Cambodia, Syria, Iraq, Somalia, Nepal and Nicaragua.

This year, her students are completing a project funded by the Lancaster County STEM Alliance that involves researching the human impact on the ecosystems of nearby waterways and raising 200 rainbow trout from eggs to be released into a local stream.

Congratulations to Mrs. Harnish, and best wishes on her upcoming adventure!

Commencement goes virtual

Due to the pandemic, Penn Manor could not hold many rites of passage that mark senior year for our high school students.

The district was forced to cancel the prom and in-person senior academic and athletic awards ceremonies, as well as commencement, for the Class of 2020.

But that didn't stop the administration from giving graduates the sendoff they deserved.

A small patch of grass at Comet Field was pressed into service as a film studio inside a tent to create virtual ceremonies to announce recipients of senior awards and scholarships.

Although the traditional commencement at Franklin & Marshall College could not be held, we wanted to replicate it as closely as possible in a safe manner.

A film crew at Comet Field recorded the commencement speeches and addresses to create a virtual ceremony. A second



Class of 2020 graduates and family members were filmed at Comet Field for a virtual commencement ceremony that aired May 28.

tent was set up at Comet Field so students could arrive in small groups to be filmed receiving their diplomas and celebrating with their family members.

Every student had the opportunity to participate in this important milestone in their lives, and cheers and hugs broke out throughout three days of filming under sunny skies at Comet Field.

After the videos were

pieced together, they premiered at the original time and date of commencement on May 28. You can view the videos on the Penn Manor YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/user/pennmanorschools/videos>.

We'd like to thank the high school staff, the film crew at Penguin Productions, the graduates and their families for making this a truly memorable event.



Staff rises to the challenges posed by the pandemic

We couldn't be more proud of the way our staff members have responded to the challenges of keeping Penn Manor schools functioning safely during the pandemic.

Teachers

On short notice, teachers have had to shift to remote instruction, learn new technology, implement mask and social distancing requirements and keep their students, and themselves, safe and healthy.

They've also been tasked with providing alternative instruction for students who can't attend in person because of quarantining. And some teachers have had to quarantine themselves, requiring them to teach from home.

Particular subjects have faced unique challenges. Some music classes, for example, can't perform as a group because of the pandemic, and



Protective gear is used on a trumpet in a music class.

teaching students how to play an instrument remotely via laptops has been difficult, at best.

Other classes that involve hands-on learning, such as engineering, technology and ag classes, have forced teachers to be creative when students must learn from home.

The pandemic also meant physical education classes were moved outdoors whenever possible. Teachers shifted to activities that involve minimal physical contact, and all P.E. equipment is sanitized before and after each class.

School Nurses

The pandemic has dramatically reshaped the role of Penn Manor's school nurses.

Much of their time is now spent on tasks related to COVID-19, including reporting, tracing, and



Members of the Penn Manor nursing staff include, from left, Pam Nichols, Ashley Zook, Kimberly Braun, Gretchen Ayers and Lisa Heisler. Below, Ashley Brubaker teaches a remote lesson at Hambright Elementary while dressed in Christmas holiday garb.

documenting positive and probable cases; responding to questions from staff, parents, and students about quarantining, isolating and traveling; and ensuring that health and safety protocols are in place at our schools.

For each of the nearly 300 cases reported among students and staff over the school year, nurses led the contact tracing, a painstaking process that averages about four to six hours per case. Nurses walk a person through his or her day, from the time they leave their house, starting 48 hours prior to the start of symptoms or a positive COVID test.

Nurses check classroom and bus seating charts and must determine who the student or staff member came into close contact with for 15 minutes or more throughout the 48-hour period. If a student participates in sports or other co-curriculars, those potential contacts also must be considered.

Once direct contacts are identified, the information is shared with the state Department of Health, and nurses call the individuals to inform them of their status and the need to quarantine. A single case often results in multiple calls that can extend into evenings and weekends.

Nurses also notify classroom teachers of students who must quarantine at home so they can make arrangements for remote learning.

Because they're on the front lines, nurses, themselves, have been identified as direct contacts who also must quarantine from home for 10 to 24 days, creating staffing shortages.

"COVID has definitely put a strain on the nurse staffing,"



said Kimberly Braun, head nurse at Penn Manor High School. But the detailed contact tracing procedures nurses follow "are extremely important in breaking the COVID-19 chain of spread," she said.

Food Service

Our food service staff has had to adjust to the ever-changing status of our schools in response to the pandemic.



A volunteer loads meals onto a school bus for delivery to Penn Manor families.

When schools were initially closed in March 2020, a meal distribution plan was quickly implemented, using bus drivers and volunteers to deliver bagged meals prepared by the food service staff.

When enrollment in Penn Manor Virtual School surged,

More PANDEMIC on Page 5



High school head custodian David Sellers, above, sanitizes a classroom. Below, Eshleman Elementary students eat lunch.



Persevering during a Pandemic

Continued from **Page 4**

food service staff set up a system to provide “grab and go” meals to any virtual student who requested them.

The staff also had to meet the increased demand resulting from a federal program that offered free meals to all students this year.

COVID requirements forced a change in how meals are prepared and served – only in closed containers – and more lunch periods were added to ensure social distancing.

Keeping cafeterias staffed was a challenge, as several workers were forced to quarantine as a result of contact with positive cases.

“The Penn Manor food service department has been so resilient this year because they know that there are a lot of kids and families that need the meals we are serving them,” said Courtney Kolp, food service director. “No matter what happens, at the end of the day that is the most important thing.”

Transportation

Due to the pandemic, students are now assigned seats, with siblings seated together, on buses to aid in contact tracing. When a student tests positive for COVID-19, that bus is pulled out of service for a deep cleaning, and the driver may have to quarantine.

Through the end of January, 30 bus drivers for Penn Manor had to quarantine at one time or another, and finding replacements has been a challenge because many backup drivers are retirees who don’t want to risk exposure.

Another challenge has been keeping track of changes in school schedules and busloads resulting from closures and quarantines.

“With changes occurring with little warning in most instances, it’s challenging to communicate with drivers and parents what is happening at bus stops,” said Jason McClune, transportation coordinator.

“It’s been the most challenging year by far that I’ve experienced in my 19 years.”

Buildings & Grounds

Penn Manor’s custodial staff has had to learn new procedures for sanitizing schools and often must act quickly when a decision to close a school or classroom is made. Early on, it was difficult to procure cleaning materials and protective gear because demand from schools nationwide was so great.

And custodians have had to quarantine several times, creating staffing challenges.

Technology

On short notice, the technology department had to design, build and launch a remote learning activities website after schools were ordered closed last March.

The department also had to get an online learning platform up and running and add enough laptops to meet the needs of students in all grades at a time when every district nationwide was scrambling for technology.

The department added the Seesaw learning platform for teachers and

students, replaced and upgraded dozens of wireless access points in schools, provided nearly 100 mobile internet hotspots for families and implemented Google G Suite Enterprise for Education.

Tech staff also supplied cameras and support services for live video instruction for quarantined/remote students and teachers and met the technology needs resulting from the sudden dramatic expansion of Penn Manor Virtual School to more than 600 students.

At the same time, the department was responding to twice as many staff requests for support as in the previous school year.

Kudos to these, and all our Penn Manor staff members, for their efforts this year!



An aerial view of the first phase of the high school project, which includes a new entrance (far right), auditorium (brown building) and STEM wing. Below, orchestra members rehearse in the auditorium, and students work at their desks in a science classroom.

High school

Continued from **Page 1**

a media/technology center – that is expected to be completed by the end of summer 2021. Also under construction is a field house next to the football practice field and track, to be completed in the spring of 2021.

During the summer, the modular classrooms that have been in use for the past two years will be removed to make way for demolition of the former ninth-grade building.

The third phase of the project will include new physical education and health facilities to complement the existing gymnasium, scheduled for completion in summer 2022. Final completion of all site work is expected by December 2022.

The pandemic delayed construction for several weeks in March 2020, but the project is now back on track.



Special education services at PM schools

Penn Manor School District is required to provide a free, appropriate public education (FAPE) to children with disabilities who are determined, through the evaluation process, to need special education and related services under IDEA and 22 Pa. School Code §14.

A school-age child with a disability who is determined to be in need of special education and related services is identified as a child in need of specially designed instruction.

The following are disability categories under IDEA:

- Autism
- Deafness
- Deaf/blindness
- Emotional disturbance
- Traumatic brain injury
- Hearing impairment
- Specific learning disability
- Intellectual disability
- Multiple disabilities
- Other health impairment
- Orthopedic impairment
- Visual impairment, including blindness
- Speech and language impairment.

A full description of the services and programs available in Penn Manor is accessible at: www.pennmanor.net/special-education/ or by contacting Theresa Kreider, director of student services, at (717) 872-9500, extension 2227.

Annual notices

Federal and state laws require school districts to provide students, parents and/or the public with notices on such topics as privacy, nondiscrimination, child nutrition, open records and homelessness.

Penn Manor invites parents and guardians of students to review the information on notices at www.pennmanor.net/annual-notices/.

Please contact your child's principal with any questions or concerns about the information contained in these notices. You may also contact the superintendent's office at (717) 872-9500, ext. 2223.

Pequea's Raff named PA Teacher of Year finalist

For the second time in two years, Penn Manor has a Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year finalist.

Elizabeth Raff, who teaches sixth grade at Pequea Elementary School, was named one of just 12 finalist for the state honor for 2021.

Raff was nominated by two previous Teacher of the Year nominees, Jeff Kuntz of Punxsutawney, and Maria Vita, who teaches psychology at Penn Manor High School and was a finalist for the 2019 award.

"It is truly an honor and a humbling experience to become a finalist for Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year," said Raff, who has taught at Pequea since 2014. "I am grateful for the opportunity to share my passion and enthusiasm for education!"

"Our family is so grateful that our daughter found a place in Mrs. Raff's unique sixth-grade classroom."

— Parent Marlisa Thomas

"None of this would be possible without the leadership and support from my administrators and fellow teachers," she said.

In a letter of recommendation to the review committee, parent Marlisa Thomas had high praise for Raff.

"Our family is so grateful that our daughter, Stella, found a place in Mrs. Raff's unique sixth-grade classroom. She was nurtured each day and challenged to grow and succeed, not just academically, but in her awareness and maturity."

Raff's classroom is decorated in



Elizabeth Raff instructs her students on how to conduct a science experiment in their Pequea Elementary sixth-grade classroom.

an Alice in Wonderland theme and features a large library with books in every genre, as well as a raised stage where students can present poetry, book reports and original music to the entire class. Raff encourages movement among her students and leads them through physical exercises that help them understand parts of speech, literary conventions and other lessons.

"Whether she was engaged in conversations about our current political climate, building a bat house, chanting the parts of a story, dancing, singing, drawing with erasable markers on her desk, finding her way through a spy laser maze, or participating in a 'book tasting' ... my daughter was consistently engaged in kind and respectful dialogue around important issues and the value of learning from each other," Thomas said in her letter.

Raff taught in Philadelphia for two years before joining the Pequea staff. She graduated from Messiah College with a degree in elementary education and completed her master's degree in curriculum and instruction from Penn State University. She is currently pursuing her principal certification through Penn State.

Elizabeth and her husband, Jeremy, live in Lancaster Township with their son, Owen.

The Pennsylvania Teacher of the Year program was put on hold as a result of the pandemic, and the winning teacher is expected to be named sometime in 2021-2022.



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Engineering & tech program earns honors

Faculty member Molly Miller lauded as 'Emerging Leader'

Penn Manor High School's Applied Engineering and Technology Education program has been honored with a national award, and faculty member Molly Miller has been cited as a leader in the field.

Penn Manor has received the Program Excellence Award from the International Technology and Engineering Educators Association – the only high school technology/engineering program in Pennsylvania to receive the honor this year.



Molly Miller

In addition, teacher Molly Miller was named an Emerging Leader in the field of technology and engineering education by ITEEA. She was cited for her outstanding performance, leadership, and accomplishments.

The Program Excellence Award recognizes "superior K-12 technology and engineering education programs that reflect contemporary technology engineering education and serve as a standard for comparison and models for the development of other programs," according to ITEE.



Teacher Joey Garrett instructs a high school Electronics, Robotics and Prototyping class.

Penn Manor has recently expanded its applied engineering and technology curriculum to add two new computer science courses – Creating and Making and Connecting and Communicating – along with Honors Architectural Design, which enables students to take a deeper look into how buildings are designed.

Other courses include AP Computer Science Principles; Woodworking Technology; Product Design; Advanced Materials Technology; Electronics, Robotics & Prototyping; and Computer Animation.

Skills learned in these courses are

directly linked to careers in engineering, computer science, electronics/robotics, drafting, manufacturing, production, construction and visual communications.

"I am extremely proud of our Applied Engineering and Technology Education program," said Penn Manor High School principal Baron Jones. "Thank you to the national committee for recognizing our teachers and highlighting the consistent efforts of our faculty members to advance their profession."

In addition to Miller, the high school faculty includes Joey Garrett, John Brubaker, Barry Groff and Alisha Bawiec.