

# HARRISBURG CATHOLIC ELEMENTARY SCHOOL SPOTLIGHTS

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2025

## From the Principal

When you hear the phrase “HCE family,” you may think it is a cliché; however, this school year, more than ever, the students, parents and guardians, faculty and staff, and our religious leaders have come together as a family, and exciting things are happening! See for yourself...

Students and their families have shown up in amazing numbers for our family activity nights (pizza and trivia games, lasagna and board games, Culture Night). Board games and books have been sent home with each child during this school year, encouraging families to read and play games together. Parents and guardians have attended teacher conferences and have learned how to practice reading and phonemic awareness with their children at home. *Imagine how these experiences will help our students grow academically!*

Teachers were challenged to get their students out of the classroom this year, to experience other forms of learning, and wow, the teachers rose to the challenge and then some! Our littlest learners saw two plays at The Gamut Theater this year; classes have gone to the Capitol, the State Museum, the Whitaker Center, Indian Echo Caverns, the Baltimore Aquarium and the Dauphin County Library. In addition, Messiah University students put on a play in St. Joseph's Hall, and Bishop McDevitt's Brass Band provided a few music selections

at Christmas. *Imagine how these experiences are helping our students grow culturally!*

We have had opportunities for students to enjoy Food with Friends and chat with adults; we have interacted with guests who talked about social media safety; students provided crafty decorations for tables at the Cathedral's weekend meal programs; we made Valentine greetings for nursing home residents. *Imagine how these experiences are helping our students grow socially!*

A guest speaker explained the history of the Pledge of Allegiance and then for the first time, the entire school went outside and raised the American flag on the school flagpole, a moment full of pride and emotion beyond measure. *Imagine how these experiences are helping our students grow as good citizens!*

We have volunteers in our school on a regular basis, from helpers at recess to a classroom aide to Junior Achievement instructors. What a beautiful example these volunteers set for our entire school body. *Imagine how these experiences are helping our students grow as future volunteers!*

Students and teachers participate in Mass or a Prayer Service weekly; Sister Mary Thomas leads us in **Stations of the Cross** during Lent; we have Penance Services; Father Brommer, Father Dill and Father Lynch talk with our students and visit our classrooms; every class has a classroom saint. *Imagine how these*



*experiences are helping our students grow in their faith!*

The students, faculty and staff, family grown ups, and faith leaders are working hard to be active participants in a successful HCE family. We are so blessed to have parishioners, friends **and** donors behind the scenes, making so many of these opportunities possible. **You are also part of our HCE family, and we are grateful!** The good thing about family is that there's always room for more. Thank you for being part of the HCE Family!

—Miss Bearley

# Celebrating Growth in Learning Support



As the school year comes to a close, we take a moment to celebrate the incredible progress our students in Learning Support have made from Kindergarten through Eighth Grade. This year has been filled with growth, perseverance, and many moments of success, both big and small.

Our dedicated team has worked closely with students to build strong foundational skills in reading, writing, and math while fostering confidence and a love for learning. Through individualized instruction, small group activities, and hands-on learning experiences, students have shown

remarkable improvement in their abilities and resilience in facing challenges.

One of the highlights of the year has been watching students embrace their unique learning styles and develop strategies that help them succeed. Whether mastering new sight words, solving tricky math problems, or expressing creativity through writing, each achievement is a testament to their hard work and determination.

We are incredibly proud of our students for their dedication and enthusiasm. We also extend our gratitude to parents and

guardians for their ongoing support and collaboration. Your encouragement at home plays a vital role in student success.

As we look forward to summer, we encourage families to continue engaging in fun, educational activities. Reading together, exploring nature, and practicing everyday math skills will help maintain the wonderful progress made this year.

Thank you for a fantastic year of learning and growth.

—The Learning Support Team,  
Mrs. Horne and Mrs. Vogt



## CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHTS

### Pre-K

Pre-K at HCE has been very busy learning about measurement and cooking in Math and conducting experiments in Science. During Math, we made fruit pizzas by measuring and combining several ingredients, then adding our favorite fruit. We really enjoyed eating our fruit pizzas and they were delicious! In

Science, we conducted an experiment called "Walking Water." Students made great predictions about what would happen when paper towels are placed between sets of cups, one containing colored water, and one empty. Check out our final results!

—Mrs. Dunlap





## CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHTS

# Kindergarten



**Welcome Spring!** The Kindergarten class has been discussing the changes we see with the beginning of a new season. We read a story called *Little Bunny Follows His Nose* by Katherine Howard and then began our own adventure using our senses to

discover the beauty of God's creation. We took a walk down State Street and into the Capitol Complex. We were able to see the flowering trees, daffodils, a bird's nest, insects and even some landscape workers proving that Spring is upon us. We paused and

quieted ourselves to hear the beautiful sounds of the birds. We smelled the daffodils and the fresh mulch being placed down. We felt the tiny flowers falling from the trees in our hands and the warmth of the sun shining down upon us. Thankfully, no one tasted

anything but it was truly a walk where we could use almost all of our senses. As we progress through the season we will be keeping watch of the nature around us and marveling at the changes we continue to see.

— Mrs. Rushinski

## CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHTS

# Physical Education & Health Class



**While in gym class, the students of Harrisburg Catholic Elementary School learn about sportsmanship, team work, and discipline.** They are also taught the importance of exercising (calisthenics) and stretching before gym activities to help avoid injuries. The activities include basketball, football

(tag & flag), soccer, dodgeball, volleyball, relay-races, kickball, sharks & minnows, red-light green-light, musical hula hoops, and more. In health class, the students are taught about germs, personal hygiene, healthy eating, food groups, exercise, first aid, bullying, seizures, and skin protection. Also, the

children are encouraged to open up in class to improve their social skills and feel comfortable doing so. One example – during Catholic Schools Week, the 5th thru 8th graders had a volleyball tournament and it was a huge success due to the enthusiasm displayed by the kids, the high levels

of sportsmanship, and the excitement from the spectators. The gym was electrified during every match, whereas, employees and residents of the YMCA flocked into the connecting gymnasium and the hallway to get a glimpse of the event.

—Mr. Johnson

## CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHTS

# Eighth Grade

**As the school year enters its final season, it is tempting to look back and reflect on the great things accomplished.**

However, we have many things we are currently working on and much more on the horizon!

In the math classroom, our 6th graders are currently focused on ratios, proportions, and unit rates. Our 7th graders have been focusing on probability and statistics; this includes sample spaces, building probability trees, calculating compound probabilities, and factorials. 8th grade is wrapping up a unit on all things percent (calculating percent, percent increase/decrease, sales tax, tips, and discounts). They will end the year focused solely on algebra.

After finishing *The Giver* by Louis Lowery, our 8th graders have moved onto *Roll*

*of Thunder, Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor. This story takes place in rural Mississippi during the Great Depression, and follows the Logans, the only African-American family that owns their own land in the town, through the many trials that take place.

We had 11 8th grade students confirmed at our Cathedral in March. Beforehand, we were accompanied by Father Brommer, Father Lynch, Eric Failing, Susan Samuels, Mrs. Vogt, and the confirmands from our Cathedral's C.A.R.E program on our annual Confirmation Retreat. This retreat took place at the Padre Pio Center in Barto, PA. Below is a list of our classroom's saints (non-Catholic students must also write an essay and give a presentation



on their chosen saint):

Saint Sebastian  
Saint Luke  
Saint Francis of Assisi  
Saint Joan of Arc  
Saint Jude  
Saint Therese of Liseux  
Saint Barbara  
Saint Paul  
Saint Luigi Scrosoppi  
Saint Padre Pio  
Saint Hermano

Miguel Febres Cordero  
Saint Maximillian Kolbe  
Saint Peter  
Saint Cecelia  
Saint Theresa de los Andes

Saint Martin De Porres  
Saint Mary  
(Our Lady of Guadalupe)  
Saint Mary Magdalene

Looking forward, we have Living Stations of the Cross April 11th, Run for Fun May 9th, a trip to see the Harrisburg Youth Symphony Orchestra May 16, and 8th Grade Graduation June 3rd. Our students, faculty, and staff are all grateful for the support we receive from the parish community. Thank you and God bless!

— Mr. McGee

## CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHTS

# Junior Achievement comes to Second Grade

**Junior Achievement is a five session program where for 45 minutes per session, a volunteer came to our class to teach five social studies-based lessons.** Our wonderful volunteer was Mr. Myles Miller. The theme was "Our Community." During these five visits, Mr. Miller engaged the children in hands-on activities. The lessons were

digital, physical, musical, and interactive.

The five different topics that the children learned about and discussed were:

- Describe a community
- Identify a variety of careers people may have in a community
- How businesses and government jobs help a community

- Explain how taxation supports government services
- Recognize voting as an action of a responsible citizen
- Describe the flow of money in a community economy

The students loved exploring a digital community, being employed, "making" pizzas, getting paid, singing about money, contributing to taxes and voting on community wants and needs. It was a great experience. Thanks Mr. Miller and Junior Achievement!

— Mrs. Kreiser





# Language Arts & Aquariums

In March, Middle School students enjoyed a day at the **Baltimore Aquarium**. While there, I began to ponder the similarities our language arts curriculum and an aquarium share. When we consider how the various elements of English Language Arts (ELA) function together, we might think of them as similar to the intricate components of an aquarium, where each part plays a role in maintaining a healthy and engaging environment. By examining five aspects of language arts and drawing parallels to an aquarium, we can gain insights into how these elements work together to support student learning, imagination, and growth.

## The Aquarium Tank: The Structure of ELA

In an aquarium, the tank holds all of the necessary components, from water to aquatic life, ensuring that each element remains in balance. Similarly, the overall structure of the ELA curriculum serves as the "tank" in which students develop their reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills. Just as the tank holds the water and organisms that depend on each other, the ELA curriculum



holds various components that support each other: literature, grammar, vocabulary, writing, and comprehension. The tank itself needs to be clear and stable, just as students need clear direction and a structured, consistent learning environment that promotes engagement and understanding.

## Water Quality: Grammar and Syntax

The water quality in an aquarium is essential for the well-being of the aquatic life, ensuring that they can thrive and grow. In ELA, grammar and syntax function like the water in the tank. Without proper grammar and sentence structure, communication becomes unclear, cloudy, and ineffective. Just as the water needs to be tested, filtered, and maintained to ensure the health of the aquatic life, grammar rules must be taught, practiced, and reinforced to help students express themselves clearly and accurately. The vibrancy of a student's writing depends on their mastery of grammar, much like the vibrancy of the aquarium's inhabitants depends on the quality of the water.

## Fish in the Aquarium: Literary Elements and Themes

In an aquarium, the fish are the most visible and dynamic element, moving gracefully within the tank. In the ELA classroom, the "fish" are the



literary elements and themes that students explore. These include character development, plot structure, symbolism, and conflict. Just as fish swim through different areas of the tank, students navigate through different texts and themes, each offering new insights and learning experiences. We guide students to observe, interpret, and discuss these literary elements, encouraging them to see the deeper meanings within texts, just as an observer watches how fish interact with their environment.

## Aquatic Plants: Vocabulary and Word Choice

Aquatic plants provide oxygen, shelter, and beauty to an aquarium. Similarly, vocabulary and word choice serve as the "plants" of the ELA curriculum, enriching students' writing and speech. Just as plants help maintain a healthy ecosystem in the aquarium, a strong vocabulary allows students to communicate more effectively, conveying complex ideas and emotions. We encourage students to expand their vocabulary, making it an essential tool for both reading comprehension and creative expression.

## Dolphins: Learning, Observation, and Interaction

Dolphins are known for

their intelligence and ability to learn through observation and interaction with their environment. In the same way, students learn best through active engagement and collaboration. Like dolphins that learn to perform actions through positive reinforcement and practice, students develop their reading, writing, and communication skills through consistent practice, feedback, and observation. We guide students through complex concepts and help them refine their skills. Just as dolphins improve through practice, students grow by revisiting their mistakes, learning from them, and trying again with a deeper understanding.

## All Together, as One

The elements of the ELA curriculum are analogous to the different components of an aquarium. Each part—structure, literary elements, grammar, vocabulary, and the process of learning—interacts to create a thriving ecosystem. We can appreciate the value of observation, interaction, and consistent practice in fostering the growth of our students' language arts skills. Like an aquarium, the ELA curriculum is a dynamic environment where all elements must work together, as one, for success!

— Mr. Mendrzycki,

## CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHTS

# Fourth Grade



**As we turn the corner into spring, Grade 4 has been hard at work learning many new things.**

In religion, we have been learning how God's grace leads us to Beatitude or the true happiness we experience when we live in union with God. We examined how this grace is made available through us and the Paschal Mystery of Jesus' Passion, Death and Resurrection. In addition to our Holy Week and Easter preparation, we are reading through Matthew's account of the Paschal Mystery.

In Math, we are building on basic arithmetic concepts of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division, with more complex concepts like fractions and data analysis. Students have been learning about greatest common factors, common denominators, and simplest form.

Students have been working on different literary skills during our reading time. Through their small group work packets, fourth grade has been growing in their comprehension and critical thinking skills. With this comes a healthy sprinkling

of sporadic readings from The Brothers Grimms' fairy tales and the fairy tales of Hans Christian Anderson.

Science has been a tour through energy and its different forms. The first half of the year focused on macro topics like earth science, atmosphere, and natural systems. We are moving deeper into the mysteries of nature by looking at the fundamental forces that govern the macro level systems. Students have been learning about heat, sound, light, electricity, and soon will be learning about magnetism.

In Social Studies, we investigated the mission of Pennsylvania's founder and how his philosophy influenced the direction of the country. Students also learned about the pivotal role Pennsylvania played in the American Revolution.

We have been blessed to have gone on three field trip trips last trimester. We enriched our knowledge of Social Studies by going to the State Museum. Our trip to Indian Echo Caverns provided a chance for students to see how the forces of nature shape geologic formations. Finally, we experienced the gifts and talents of



## April Fool's Treat

Mr. K asked Second Grade if they wanted a treat for the first day of April. Of course they said yes. He made and gave them all "Brown E's!"

expert storytellers at the Gamut Theatre's rendition of the *Golden Goose*.

We are steadily working through our Pinocchio puzzle and enjoy games and brain breaks during the hard work done in fourth grade.

—Mr. Shaffer



## CLASSROOM SPOTLIGHTS

# Third Grade

**Third grade along with the students in Pre-K to fourth, had the opportunity to see two plays this school year.** Some students even got to perform alongside the Popcorn Hat actors and actresses. The students walked to Gamut

Theater to enjoy *Stone Soup* and *The Golden Goose*.

They then were able to discuss the similarities and differences between the books by the same title and the play. What an awesome experience!!

—Mrs. Hartman



# Fifth Grade

**This year the fifth grade classroom adopted a cow through the Discovery Dairy Program.** The Discovery Dairy Program incorporates interactive lessons and cross curricular activities that teaches students about farming, dairy cows, how dairy farms contribute to our world and where milk comes from. Through this program classrooms are able to follow a cow from its birth to about 6 months. In the lessons provided, we were able to take a virtual tour of the farm, learn about the different jobs on a farm, how they keep our milk safe and how they take care of the cows.

Our cow Milkshake is from Kurtland Farms from Elverson, Pennsylvania. Milkshake was born on September 12, 2024, weighing 100 pounds and she was 30 inches tall. At her 5 month update, she now weighs 314 pounds and now is 45 inches

tall. As Milkshake grows, the farmers feed her a special diet of food to ensure that it is healthy and will someday provide milk for us!

Kurtland Farms invited the teachers to visit the farm for their open house. I got to meet Milkshake in person and was able to tour the farm. Miss Wrightstone brought back some pictures of behind the scenes at the farm to show Fifth Grade. This farm uses robots to milk their cows. Their cows are milked 2-3 times a day. At Kurtland Farms, they have over 200 cows! That is a lot of milk!

It's been a fun experience to follow Milkshake's growth and learn about dairy farming. The program allowed us to learn the steps on how our milk that we drink gets from the farm to our table and see how much work it takes to take care of farms and those dairy cows!

— Miss Wrightstone

**5 Month Update**

## Milkshake

**5-Month Height:**  
45 inches

**5-Month Weight:**  
314 pounds



**She grew  
4 inches**



# First Grade

**First grade is on a journey to learn about Jesus, understand Holy Week and how important Easter is to our Catholic faith.** This inquisitive group of children are on a quest to learn the answers to many, many questions about the week that led to Easter.

In the classroom, we started by creating a long, long list of what we've learned about Jesus this year. The list is in the hallway; many adults have complimented our list and remarked how they didn't know all of the information. The children made connections about the time that Jesus was nailed to the cross (12:00 pm); that's approximately when we return from lunch. The time when Jesus died (3:00 pm) is when we are leaving school for the day.

The children are creating our own Stations of the Cross for their Religion binder. In the classroom, we will create pictorial Stations of the Cross to hang. Using maps, other storybooks, and Google, we are on the search to answer more of their questions about Jesus and this week that led to Easter. A baking activity, called "Jesus in the Tomb", is scheduled before break. The children are planning on adding to their long hallway list, listing facts that we didn't write on

the list yet.

But how can you explain some of the events (of the Stations of the Cross) to a 6-year old? We are reading the story *Benjamin's Box* (by Melody Carlson); it shows the events through the eyes of a child with wonderful illustrations. We utilize the 12 Resurrection eggs to correspond to the book's pages.

The class will build a 3-D model of the town of Jerusalem at the time of Jesus' death. Using a small Jesus statue, we will see the places mentioned in the Gospels and Stations, walking Jesus through the map. The first grade started the year with a very limited knowledge of Jesus (like the dull soil in the spring/blank slate.) Their inquisitive, persistent manner to learn about Jesus and ask questions about him all year, has grown and blossomed into a beautiful blooming flower garden. These children understand about Lent and the Holy Triduum, the significance of the Last Supper, the importance of Jesus dying on the cross for us; the promise of heaven. These children are willing to share their good news to all, not just of the week that led to Easter but about Jesus.

— Mrs. Miller

# Seventh Grade

$$10 \times 2 = ?$$



## Since December, Seventh Grade has been on the move!

Right before our Christmas break we took a guided tour of the Pennsylvania Capitol building. While there, we visited the Rotunda, Supreme Court chamber, and both the House and Senate galleries. We had an opportunity to learn about the spectacular history of the building, the artists who designed the paintings and the architecture of the impressive building. For so many of the seventh graders, it was the first time in their Capitol building.

In February, we visited the

Whitaker Center and saw a 2 D movie and completed a STEM lab. We first completed a Minecraft AI Lab, in which the students needed to “train an AI model to practice responsible habits.” This lab was done in the Whitaker Center’s PNC Innovation Zone. We also viewed a digital movie on Lewis and Clark’s expedition to explore the Louisiana Territory, as we prepare to discuss the Louisiana Purchase in history class.

In March, grades 6, 7 and 8 visited the National Aquarium in Baltimore and had an opportunity to explore

the various exhibits in the Aquarium. One of the most favorite exhibits was watching the trainers work with the dolphins. The three classes were able to attend this trip do a very generous donor who assisted in paying for the coach buses and the admission tickets. THANK YOU!

Finally, in April we will be visiting the Federal Courthouse to learn more about the Federal Judicial Branch of Government. While there, we will be meeting a federal judge and have the opportunity to learn more about the

legal system in America.

We are truly blessed to have so many phenomenal opportunities right in front of us!

— Mr. Rushinski



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