



SPS Today

Winter 2007

www.springfieldpublicschools.org

Snapshots of resiliency

Twelve days after the devastating ice storm, district students and staff returned to school ready to learn. Many felt bonded by the crisis they'd similarly endured and were eager to share stories. Here's a look at that first day back:

Attendance averaged 97 percent at Pershing K-8 School. That's a great number on any day, particularly a day when only half the school had electricity.

Robberson Elementary School students in grades 3-5 resumed class work with a practice Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) graphing exercise based on the numbers among them who'd lost power, had broken branches, and were unable to cook due to the ice storm. First- and second-grade students wrote stories describing their ice storm experiences.

A Westport Elementary School student shared that he'd learned how to pop popcorn without a

An ice storm to remember

Superintendent Dr. Norm Ridder referred to it as "the ice age." For many students and staff at Springfield Public Schools, the ordeal of last month's ice storm seemed to last a lifetime.

Storm damage estimates to the district will approach \$250,000; food losses - about \$55,000. But as the cleanup continued district staff, teachers and principals welcomed students back to class Jan. 23, signaling that life would return to normal.

Even before that first day back, the district was reaching out to help families crippled by prolonged power outages. At Weller Elementary School, they prepared POWERPACKS of food for 320 school families.

"I think every single child got one," said Weller principal Marilyn Monroe. "For several students, it was the only food at home."

The district also provided assistance to more than 400 families who came for help to the Red Cross' Multi-Agency Resource Center, a one-stop shop for crisis relief. Volunteers directed needy families to the PTA clothing bank, the Kiwanis shoe bank and to school services such as counseling, nursing and attendance.

Some families were unable to do laundry due to the extended power outage. The district's Underprivileged School Children's Fund received donations to help with laundry services. Donations are being accepted through February.

After days without power, the return to school gave students a safe, secure setting, and an important return to familiar routine, Dr. Ridder said. "Students were anxious to get back to their relationships with their teachers and each other."

microwave. Another learned to stay warm by heating rocks in a pan of boiling water, then putting the rocks in his bed. He also learned that the rocks should be wrapped so as not to burn his feet.

At Field Elementary School at least 30



students returned to school still without power, two without homes - lost to fire - and one lost a trailer to a fallen tree. All Field students were encouraged to contribute to a book being written about the experience. Said principal Dr. Nancy Colbaugh: "We need to record this event!"

Preparing for the MAP

Students across the district are gearing up for this spring's Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) tests, which begin as early as April 2. Testing will be completed by April 20.

MAP scores are the main criteria for determining if a school meets Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under the federal No Child Left Behind Act.

Most schools plan MAP testing activities to inspire students and provide parents with helpful information. Here are some examples of what teachers and parents are doing to help students succeed on MAP tests.

Weller elementary has a "MAP Attack" family night where students and parents make posters and do puzzles and other activities that focus on test taking tips.



Crystal Kovach and her children with Jeffries teacher Glenda Thurkill.

Jeffries elementary parents Crystal and Fred Kovach prepare their children for MAP testing by clearing their schedules for extra study time, making bedtime a half-hour earlier and preparing a healthy breakfast each morning. The Kovach's also make up games based on test questions to demonstrate that the MAP can be fun.

"We might come up with a silly wrong answer and make them say the right one," said Crystal Kovach. "Kids pick up on what you say as a parent so we try to be positive so they will be, too, and not get overwhelmed."

Boyd elementary students and parents create posters with messages encouraging testing students. The posters are placed in local business windows or on marquees.

Williams elementary was on the state's "School Improvement" list but in 2006 met AYP requirements for the second consecutive year. As a result, the school is no longer in "School Improvement." "Staff has been through intense professional development and have made systematic changes to find out how to best reach our students," said principal Dr. Lynn Miller.

MAP PREP TIPS FOR PARENTS

- Get to know what is expected of your child on the MAP
- Promote a positive "can do" attitude
- Encourage creative problem solving at both home and in school
- Make sure your child gets enough sleep and eats a good breakfast before testing

Bond projects rolling along...

Wilson's Creek 5-6 School: Add eight classrooms for about 225 students.

Cost: \$1.25 million.

Timeline: Construction began November 2006; completed by summer 2007.

Weller Elementary School: Expand and upgrade, new classrooms, multi-purpose room and restrooms.

Cost: \$4 million.

Timeline: Construction began November 2006, completed by fall 2007.

New southwest elementary school: to be built near corner of Golden Avenue and Weaver Road for about 600 students.

Cost: \$10 million.

Timeline: Construction bid awarded in spring or early summer 2007.

Cherokee Middle School: replace portions of existing school, increase building space by 22,000 square feet.

Cost: \$15 million.

Timeline: Construction bid awarded in spring or early summer 2007.

Hillcrest High School: new science/technology labs, renovated classrooms, new student services area, upgrade safety and security.

Cost: \$5.75 million.

Timeline: Construction bid awarded in spring or early summer.

Glendale High School: new science/technology labs, renovated classrooms, remodel student services area, upgrade safety and security.

Cost: \$5.75 million.

Timeline: Construction bid awarded in spring or early summer 2007.

Air conditioning projects start this summer at **Bissett**, **Watkins**, and **Jeffries** elementary schools; **Study Middle School**, and **Pleasant View** and **Pershing K-8** schools.



Getting to school smarter, safer

More free bus transportation and safer school walking routes may result under recommendations being offered by two district committees.

Since early fall, the committees have looked for ways to increase free busing options for students and eliminate the need for walking students to cross barrier streets between home and school.

A barrier street is defined as a roadway with a speed limit of 45 mph or faster or a traffic volume of 30,000 vehicles a day. Examples include Kansas Expressway, Sunshine Street and Chestnut Expressway.

The committee proposed making school zone boundary changes that would eliminate the need for 56 district students to cross barrier

streets. Changes are proposed between Boyd and Rountree, McGregor and Westport, Pershing and Pittman (16 students impacted), Williams and Bowerman (35 students impacted) elementaries and Pipkin and Jarrett, and Pershing and Hickory Hills (five students impacted) middle schools.

“We need to take care of the barrier streets, no question about it,” said district Superintendent Dr. Norman Ridder. The ultimate concern is students’ safety.

The bus ridership committee proposed reducing the eligibility distance for free ridership from 1.5 miles to one mile, picking up students who live within a mile of school if they live within identified barrier street pockets, and potentially changing the current two-tier starting time system (8 a.m. and 8:45) to

three tiers (7:30, 8:15, and 9:00).

There’s much to consider when discussing changing school start times. It has been suggested that start times should be determined based on the ideal hours of learning for each age group.

“My kids certainly do better early in the morning,” says Crystal Miner, parent of two Pittman Elementary School students. “Overall I think (the committees had) wonderful ideas, and I only wish that this had happened sooner.”



Input key to long-range plan



The public input phase is nearly complete. And this spring Springfield Public Schools will release drafts of its long-range plan - SP5. The 15-year strategic plan will empower

the district to focus on key education goals and set priorities in five-year increments.

Enhancing district options for school choice is among the ideas being considered. Last fall a research team visited 18 select schools in Columbia, Kansas City, St. Louis and Colorado Springs, Colo. They looked at specialty programs at those schools in areas such as science and vocational training. A committee is forming to examine vocational training opportunities.

The district also sought input through focus groups and staff surveys. Marc Maness, SPS Director of Community/Academic Development and Grants, says

voters, parents and teachers have many similar priorities for the school district: maintaining facilities, keeping salaries competitive, and providing school choice options. Staff surveys showed additional interest in technology, programs for at-risk students, and increased vocational training.

About 70 parents, voters and teachers took part in the focus groups; 1,300 to 1,400 staff members will turn in surveys. “Overall, (people) have been excited about the opportunity to provide input,” says Maness.

Results from the public input phase will be available by the end of February at www.springfieldpublicschoolsno.org. Click the SP5 logo at the bottom of the front page.

District officials will present a draft of the plan and seek more public input at a Battlefield Mall event on April 21. A final copy of the plan will be presented to the board in August.

For more information contact Marc Maness at 523-0021.





School pride shines after the ice

I looked forward to returning to school after the ice storm with greater anticipation than during any first day of school I've ever experienced. Pipkin Middle School students live in the neighborhoods among the hardest hit by the storm. I was concerned about how they fared, but inspired by the response from our students and my school.

That first day back we quickly assessed needs and determined how Pipkin could help. For starters, donations of food and money from local businesses and school staff provided food baskets to 41 student families.

We asked students to talk and write about how the storm affected them. Students described the amazing struggles their families faced, how they'd coped, and even grown closer together. Many students left their homes and stayed at motels, with extended family or at a parent's work place. Though one in eight of my students were without power, their attendance reached 95 percent within a few days. They seemed happy to be back to the business of learning.

The News-Leader front-page photo of Pipkin students Fabian Rivera and Jessica Rowden raising the American flag signified our return to normalcy. The collective support of local businesses, relief agencies, fellow teachers, and students, validated my strong feeling of pride as a Springfield citizen, district employee, and teacher at Pipkin Middle School.

Steve Ingalsbe
SPS Teacher of the Year