

BUTLER SCHOOL DISTRICT 53

# newsline

Winter 2020

## Genius Hour highlights students' passion projects

In Brook Forest 4th grade classrooms, teachers set aside one hour a week for students to explore their interests and create something that solves a problem or makes the world a better place.

In one room, a group of three girls are constructing a rolling chair rack for their classroom, in another a student is composing a song for piano and in another a student is making her own line of greeting cards.

This is Genius Hour, a time for students to think, create and learn about

whatever interests them. This self-guided exploration fosters creativity and critical thinking, ignites passions and boosts imagination. It's also a time when students are

actively learning instead of consuming.

"Genius hour is the best part of Thursday," said Amira Kapadia. "We can explore things, we can learn new things and we get to do whatever we want," said the 4th grader, who is in Adam Nicholson's class. She is designing a locker shelf using 3D software called TinkerCad and will print it out on a 3D printer.

Genius Hour at Brook Forest is mirrored after the global search engine company Google, where employees are able to spend 20 percent of their time working on projects they are passionate about.

"Genius Hour helps students get ready for the future by improving their teamwork, problem-solving and communication skills," said 4th grade teacher Colleen Tarantino.

"They are finding the joy in creating something," said Alison Nelson, an instructional assistant in Peter Sompolski's 4th grade class who is trained as a gifted teacher and teams with Sompolski on the unit.



At top, Reda Dib shows off his meme-o-rama, a device he made during Genius Hour, designed to "make people laugh and be less stressed." Above Talia Miceli, Colleen Murphy and Piper Weselak are building a surf chair cart for their classroom.

Teachers help guide and nurture students in finding a suitable project. Some projects take weeks; others take months.

Half of Genius Hour in Sompolski's class is devoted to mini lessons. Students are taught to tap into the four elements of creativity: fluency,

flexibility, originality and elaboration.

Students are also taught to think critically using the SCAMPER method. SCAMPER means substitute, combine, adjust, magnify/minify/modify, put to other uses, eliminate and reverse or rearrange.

The teachers urge students to start off with plans. "The students bring all of their own materials and guide their own research," said Nicholson who shopped after school with students and parents for building materials for one project. "I help steer them and continually point out that the design process takes time, considerable planning and many trials to get things just right."

Lexi Zalik, who is in Tarantino's class said her group's goal was centered on animals. "It just evolved into creating awareness of what's happening with the rain forest," she said "We wanted to start with our class but then we did some research and decided we wanted to go bigger," said teammate Sahana Raju.

In visits to all three classrooms during Genius Hour, students were absorbed in their work. This isn't just an exercise for them, but a real motivator to make a difference. "They have an opportunity to change the world," said Tarantino.

### Other Genius Hour projects

- Designing original Pokemon cards
- Building a desk organizer from wood
- Designing a prototype to save sea turtles and clean the ocean
- Writing a book
- Creating a 3D treehouse
- Designing a puppet show with scenery
- Choreographing a dance
- Building a finger soccer arena
- Creating a computer animation story
- Creating a blueprint for a tsunami wall



All of Butler Junior High went on a field trip to help pack food for children in poverty. The food will be sent across the globe. Pictured are Nathan Wu, Noah Pelinkovic and Ibrahim Khan.

## Schools build on community and global service

This winter, students traded learning in the classroom for working in a warehouse. The 200-some student body at Butler Junior High and 50 adults packed meals at Feed My Starving Children (FMSC) in Schaumburg during an all-school field trip.

"What our students get out of this trip is so much more than what we're giving," said Principal Andrea Prola. "This helps them see how fortunate we are and helps transform them from students to responsible citizens in a global society." It also helps build teamwork and connects students with adults.

Alongside parent volunteers and teachers, the students hand packed, sealed, boxed and carted food

to the storage room.

"You can talk with your friends and help people at the same time," said Jacqueline Fang, whose efforts were tagged to be sent to Kenya.

Community service is a mainstay for all District 53 students. The field trip at FMSC was not the first for District 53 students, but it was the largest. Members of the Student Service Board at Butler Junior High and the Brook Forest Student Council had volunteered there before. The PTO is also sponsoring an outing there in April.

"The students wanted to participate in an activity where they were serving others and helping to make a difference in the world outside Butler," said

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TECHNOLOGY

# Teaching and the flurry of new technology

Teachers use dozens of different kinds of software, apps and websites to teach, and are invariably exploring and learning more. The flurry of new tools is a constant for educators. Then there is software for grading, scheduling conferences, communicating with parents and the course management tool Google Classroom.

To support them, the District uses teacher leaders, called Digital Learning Facilitators (DLF), as a resource.

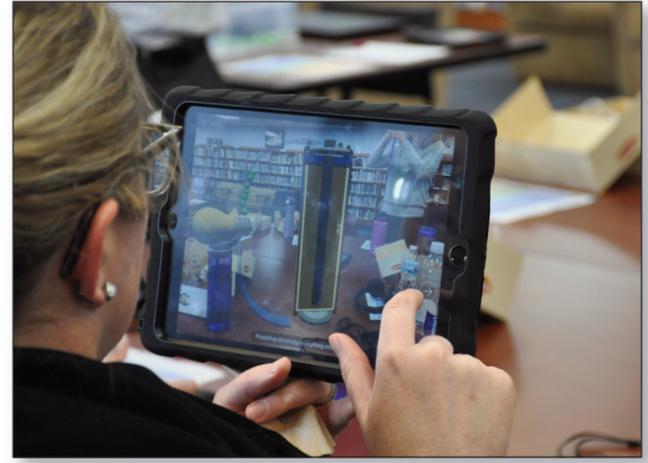
“We reward early adoption of technology, innovation and risk taking and this is one way to help support our teachers,” said Director of Technology Farheen Beg.

The facilitators test drive and help integrate new technology. Most recently, they learned the new digital masterboard for students and the new gradebook system for teachers. They test out the product so they can later serve as a resource for others when the new software is launched.

“They get us farther with our new initiatives,” said Beg.

The facilitators are also available to collaborate and brainstorm with teachers on how to tweak a lesson using new technology or integrate technology into curricular goals.

In addition, facilitators often present on new technology or contribute to round table discussions on a tech topic. Recently, Butler Junior High Digital Learning Facilitator and teacher Robbie Philipp showed teachers how to use new Augmented Reality apps. He researched the apps, curated ones suited to junior high teachers and helped the educators test drive them during a Lunch and Learn. The Lunch and Learns are frequent voluntary professional development sessions on



Augmented Reality was a recent topic at professional growth sessions for Butler teachers. Lunch and Learns and Digital Learning Facilitators help teachers wade through and learn a plethora of new technology.

topics of interest for teachers. At the recent session on Augmented Reality, teachers decided which app suited their needs. For example, a history teacher learned how to take students through some 360-degree scenes in ancient Egypt, and a math teacher discovered how to create 3D images like spheres and cones.

Sessions on Apple Classroom and Khan Academy have also been presented by facilitators. In addition to Philipp, Brook Forest teachers Adam Nicholson and Phyllis Sutton are Digital Learning Facilitators.

“As a small district, this model works really well for us,” said Beg. “We want our teachers to be empowered by technology that drives students toward meaningful learning.”

## It's "Bee Time" for District 53 students



came in Second Place. James will go on to the DuPage County Spelling Bee later this winter.

The Bee is a tradition in District 53. “Every year is a different story, but this year was a group of enthusiastic, prepared participants who were also great sports,” said Moore.

Teacher Amanda Moore explained the rules and the process to the 10 students who came to the library after school for the District 53 Spelling Bee. There were two students from Brook Forest; the rest were from Butler Junior High.

“I’m super proud of you for being here,” she told them. “It’s awesome that you’re willing to challenge yourselves.”

One by one Moore recited words off the lists of the Scripps National Spelling Bee and one by one students spelled their word. Sometimes, they asked for the word to be repeated, used in a sentence or to be given a definition. After 16 rounds and over one hour later, 7th grader James Philipneri was the last participant at the table and declared the winner. Fourth grader Neha Khankari

A similar contest is the Geo Bee. Six students competed in the December contest, which is held in accordance with National Geographic's rules and requirements. The winner will take a qualifying test for the state bee in March. Sixth grader Nabeel Hussain earned First Place, 7th grader Andy Buchupalli placed Second and 8th grader Arjun Shah earned Third Place.



Three faculty members served as judges in the Spelling Bee.

## SPANISH LANGUAGE

# Meaningful topics and authentic experiences are goals of Spanish

Students in 8th grade Spanish honors class are skyping with a musician in Argentina who has a band. They are conversing in Spanish about what music they like, what instruments they play, their involvement in Butler's chorus and the artist's favorite instruments – bass and saxophone. The discussion turns to art, sports and the Superbowl.

The chat was a lesson in authentic learning – real experiences that pique students' interests.

The next day, students will have a quiz on what they learned and how it connects to a book they read on music and entertainment in Argentina.

"When they talk to someone they get a richer perspective of the language, country and culture," said teacher Rebekah Stathakis.

Next door in Andrea Korhonen's 8th grade Spanish class, students are watching a video of Selena, a famous Mexican singer. They were using target vocabulary and structures to discuss images from the video.

"Language instruction needs to happen as naturally as possible," said teacher Jennifer Vargoeko. In class, students need to discover grammar rules as they did in their original language. They also read novels in the target language and discuss them and in the process learn grammar, vocabulary and sentence structure. The curriculum deliberately focuses on areas of interest to students. Units highlight music, sports, journalism, personal history, health and art, to name a few.

"We want our students to be excited about coming to class because they know they will have the opportunity to understand, share their ideas, and connect with



Students converse in Spanish with an Argentinian band member. Classes are designed to instill conversation, understanding and engagement in the language and culture.



Spanish teachers Jennifer Vargoeko, Andrea Korhonen and Rebekah Stathakis at the Culture Day, which featured learning, food, art and more.

others as they discuss topics that are important to them," said Korhonen.

Teachers use a wide variety of materials in their classes to maintain interest – novels, music, videos, pictures, activities and more. A large part of their philosophy is providing students with opportunities to learn about and engage with other people, cultures, and traditions. In addition to Spain and Mexico, units feature other countries, including Argentina, Ecuador, Dominican Republic and the Spanish culture in the U.S.

Instead of relying on English to help students understand Spanish, classes are almost entirely taught in the target language. The three teachers strive to immerse students in a Spanish environment that is filled with language that is compelling, meaningful to them and understandable at their level.

"That's why language happens – because people desire a connection and want to communicate," said Stathakis. "We help them do that."

## Community service *Continued from page 1*

Service Board Sponsor Kim Krupicka.

Student Service Board at Butler is 40-students strong. Its work is diverse, serving those in the school community, in the region and globally. At school, members run Lunch Buddies where students are encouraged to sit at lunch with students with special needs. They organize the Star Board, a bulletin board to highlight students at Butler who make a positive difference.

The group also holds a canned food drive, a coat drive, book collection, Halloween candy drive

for the troops and a 3 vs. 3 basketball tournament with proceeds going to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. Now, they are making flower vases for a nearby nursing home for Mother's Day.

Student Council at Brook Forest also has a history of service. "The students have such positive energy, enthusiasm, selflessness and caring hearts," said teacher and Assistant Principal Lisa Owen, who sponsors the group with teacher Ellen Wozny.

Since September, the council has collected

Halloween candy for the troops, held a Thanksgiving food collection, organized a toy, candy, mitten, clothing and toiletry drives, and sold raffle tickets to raise money to help animals harmed by the Australian bush fires. If that's not enough, the group organizes pop top drives for Ronald McDonald House and encourages families to pack extra lunches for a local food pantry.

"All their work gives us hope for a better tomorrow," said Owen.

## Good News

### Women in STEM focus

Fifth and eighth graders were treated to a conversation with Shaesta Waiz, who was born in an Afganistan refugee camp and later became the first certified civilian female pilot from Afghanistan. Waiz is flying around the world to promote STEM and aviation education. She paused on her journey to conduct a Google Hangout with District 53 students, who were equally mesmerized and motivated by her message of overcoming poverty and learning obstacles to excel. She told them that she sees STEM in almost every aspect of her life.

### Innovative questions

Can you learn how to cure diseases by analyzing data? Or, can you prevent hacking on a supercomputer? Those were questions students pondered during Computer Science Education Week and Hour of Code. Third graders heard from one of Fermi Lab's cyber security experts, who talked about her role, hacking and supercomputers. Likewise, 6th graders welcomed Argonne's data team project leader, who

discussed the power of data, and how it can be analyzed to help learn more about how diseases spread and how best to manage them. Both experts were women. "It was an opportunity to shine the spotlight on diverse women in STEM careers," said Director of Technology Farheen Beg. The talks were a culmination of week-long STEM activities.

### Science Olympiad heads to regionals

The District 53 Science Olympiad team is heading to regionals in March after a successful season testing, studying, experimenting, and competing at contests and invitationals this season. Alumni also returned for a clinic to help students prepare.

### Teacher nominated for national award



Brook Forst STEAM teacher Amanda Longtin was nominated for the Presidential Award for Excellence in Math and Science Teaching. She was nominated by STEAM curriculum consultant Meg Van Dyke.



Winners in the Spanish poster contest are Esha Sahu, Elena Koulouris, Jenna D'Souza, Lena Li and Campbell Jones.

"I want to prepare students for jobs that don't exist yet," Longtin said. That means helping students connect the dots, using both creativity and logic, soft skills like communication, and technical skills, like coding. She was appointed to her role at Brook Forest in August 2018.

### ¡Felicitaciones! students

Five Butler Junior High students were honored by the American Association of Teachers of Spanish and Portuguese for their winning posters.

# Creating transparency for Board meetings

The District 53 Board of Education recently launched BoardDocs to share, manage and store its online documents. BoardDocs is a cloud-based service that provides efficient public access to meeting agendas, minutes, and recaps of Board meetings, called Board Reports. It also serves as a portal to the District's Policy Manual.

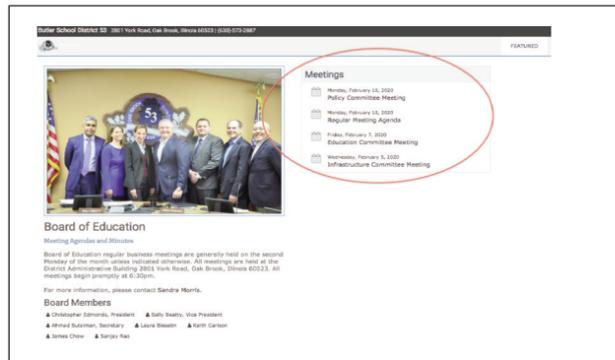
In addition, BoardDocs provides a secure login area for Board members and District staff, thus increasing efficiencies and reducing the need for paper.

## How to Use BoardDocs

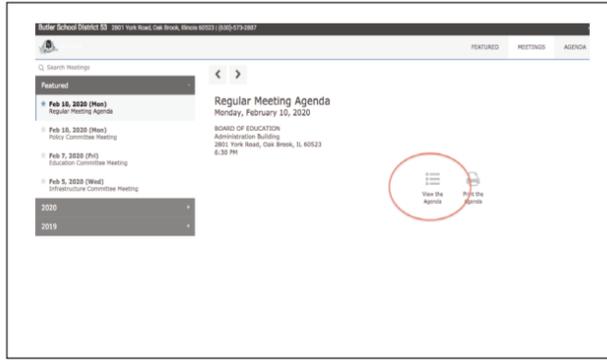
Members of the public may access the District's BoardDocs site at [www.butler53.com](http://www.butler53.com) by clicking on Board of Education and finding BoardDocs in the drop down menu.



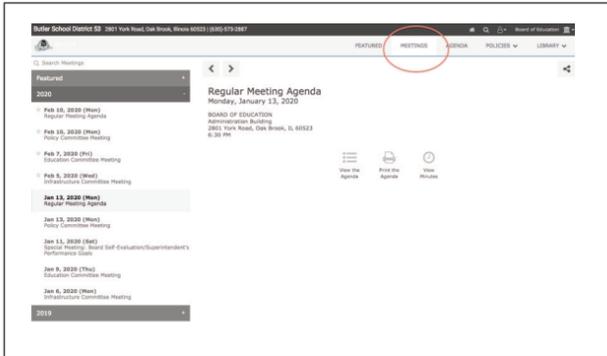
BoardDocs will then be launched and after entering the public site, the page below will follow. Click on the meeting you would like to know more about.



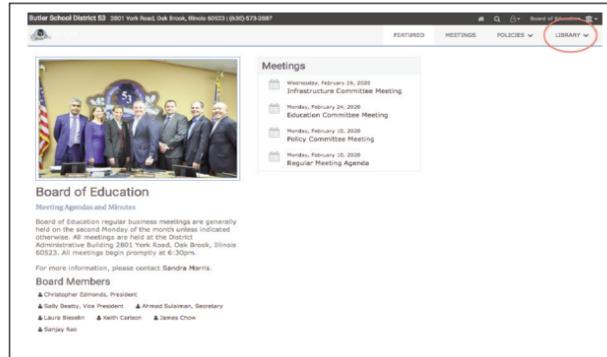
To access the agenda for that meeting, click in the white area of the box (circled in red):



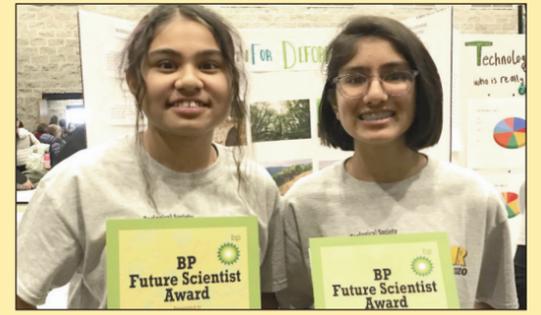
To see agendas and minutes from previous meetings, click "Meetings" in the upper right corner of the page (circled in red) and click on the year and meeting of interest. There you can find minutes and detailed background topics related to discussion and action items.



Minutes are made public after they are approved at the following regular business meeting. However, you can get a recap of the meeting by going to the Board Report. This is found under the "Library" drop down menu in BoardDocs. Board Reports are usually made public within 2-3 days after the meeting.



# Science Fair at Brookfield Zoo



Toral Bhatt and Samrah Syed won the BP Future Scientist Award for Vocation for their Deforestation project.



Sara Izhar and Saanvi Mylavarapu won the BP Future Scientist Award for their Wave Power project.

Butler Junior High students showed off their science and engineering projects at the annual science fair at Brookfield Zoo on Feb. 20. The students presented their projects to a panel of judges from the Chicago Zoological Society and Chicago area corporate executives.

Winners included:

- Toral Bhatt and Samrah Syed who won the BP Future Scientist Award for Vocation for Deforestation
- Sara Izhar and Saanvi Mylavarapu who won the BP Future Scientist Award for Wave Power
- Akshay Naik and Rian Mendi tied for First Place in the 7/8th grade category for their project Pollution Planters
- Amal Arora and Campbell Jones earned second place in the 7/8th grade category for their project Generational Technology Use.

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## Art Board

Here we feature a sampling of recent artwork by students in Butler District 53. These works (at right) are by Brook Forest 5th graders and are "Artist Trading Cards." They will be swapped with other artists around the world through the Global Artist Trading Card Swap.



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