

MARCH 2023

LION'S ROAR

AN E-PUBLICATION FROM THE SOUTH FAYETTE TOWNSHIP SCHOOL DISTRICT

MUSIC IN OUR SCHOOLS

PAGE 6

**LIONS TAKE HOME
GOLD IN WPIAL, STATE
CHAMPIONSHIPS**

SFMS ARTWORK

**MINI-THON 2023 HAS
AMBITIOUS GOAL IN
SIGHT**





LION'S ROAR

MARCH 2023

The Lion's Roar E-Publication shares and celebrates the stories of the South Fayette Township School District.

South Fayette Township School District
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**Future-Focused
Student-Centered
Innovation-Driven**



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WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

DISTRICT LAUNCHING KEY COMMUNICATOR COUNCIL

As part of the South Fayette Township School District's commitment to fostering effective two-way communication with families, staff, and community members, we are excited to announce the launch of our Key Communicator Council!

The Key Communicator Council will meet quarterly to have conversations about the district's communications strategy and initiatives and discuss ways to enhance its efforts. Any parent/caretaker, staff member, or community member is encouraged to apply to serve a term on the council.

Online applications are now open and will remain open through Tuesday, April 18. The first meeting of the district's Key Communicator Council is tentatively scheduled for May 2023.

To apply online, [click here to access the online application](#). If you have questions, please contact Patrick Harrigan by emailing paharrigan@southfayette.org or by calling (412) 221-4542, extension 358.



ON THE CALENDAR

- Apr 3** Two-Hour Late Start, Staff Professional Development
- Apr 6-10** Spring Break
No School
- Apr 17** No School for K-11 Students
Senior Exit Interviews
- Apr 18** School Board Meeting,
High School Studio, 7:30 p.m.
- Apr 20** Early Dismissal (HS: 10:30 a.m.,
MS: 11:15 a.m., IS/ES: 12 p.m.)
- Apr 21** No School for Students,
Professional Duty/Staff Development
- Apr 25** School Board Meeting,
High School Studio, 7:30 p.m.

Dates and Times are Subject to Change
Check southfayette.org for Updates

South Fayette Foundation for Excellence 10th Annual Golf Outing at Hickory Heights, Bridgeville, PA Monday, July 17, 2023



Registration Is Now Open!
Golf/Sponsor Information

Contact Maureen Pedzwater at
mapedzwater@southfayette.org

CELEBRATING MUSIC IN SOUTH FAYETTE SCHOOLS

For more than 30 years, schools across the country have celebrated the importance of music education during "Music In Our Schools Month" every March.

Music holds a powerful place in South Fayette schools and is meaningful in the lives of so many of our Lion Learners. This month, we visited music classes throughout the district and spoke with our passionate music educators about South Fayette's commitment to inspiring a love for music.



Our mission statement says it all.
In most districts, you don't see the arts placed right into the mission statement.
And here at South Fayette, we are so passionate about it that it is literally in our drive to what we do.

Charlotte Rudolph
SFIS Music Educator



Music In Our Schools Month Celebrated at South Fayette



STUDENT-MUSICIANS REPRESENT SF AT LOCAL, REGIONAL PERFORMANCES

Earlier this month, South Fayette High School student-musician **CJ Inkenhaus** participated in the PMEA Western Region Orchestra Festival. While this year’s festival at State College High School was abbreviated due to weather, CJ, who led his section, qualified for the PMEA All-State Festival this spring.



Student-musicians **Gautham Rajanikanth, Jackson Stevens, Jillian Hurbanek, Phil Leya, and Victoria Dietrich** performed in the PMEA District 1 Junior High Band West Festival at Mt. Lebanon High School earlier this month.



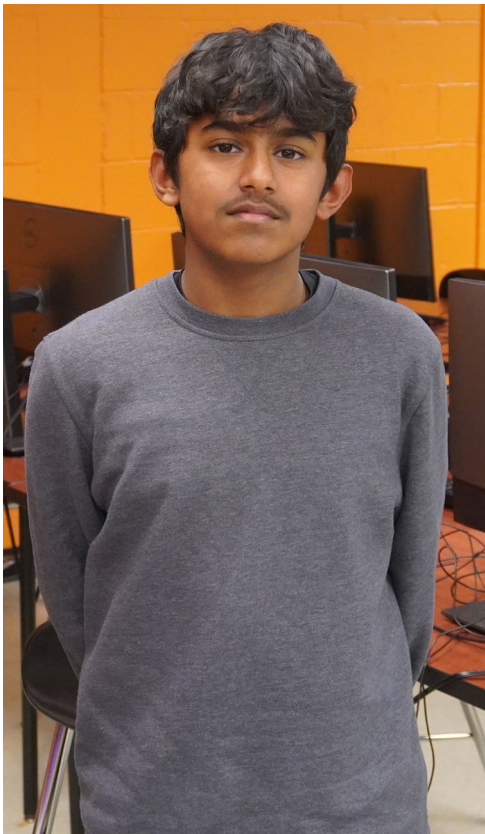
Student-musicians **Ella Schiro and Alycia Stier** participated in the PMEA Region 1 Band Festival March 23-25. The festival was held at Butler Intermediate High School and concluded with a concert on Saturday, March 25. At the festival, Schiro earned a spot through audition for the PMEA All-State Concert Band Festival!



South Fayette fifth-grade students **Faith Kaine, Rory Melville, Saanvi Gutta, Samantha Klisavage, Adelyn Kohnfelder, Diya Thirumurugan, Greta Gray, and Addison Zych** represented their school at the Pittsburgh Youth Chorus Singing Saturday Festival on Saturday, March 18. The daylong event at Gateway High School featured 130 singers and vocal learning lessons.



MS STUDENT’S APP FOCUSES ON MENTAL HEALTH



In their technology education course, South Fayette seventh graders explore the process of developing a mobile app using MIT App Inventor. Using the skills they learned throughout the course, Lion Learners are challenged to create an original app to benefit their school or community.

Middle school student **Aarav Shah** saw the need to create a resource for individuals who may struggle with mental health. According to the National Institutes of Health, an estimated one in four American adults suffers from a diagnosable mental disorder in a given year. Shah, recognizing the power of technology, used what he learned in **AJ Mannarino’s** technology course to develop the app he calls “FeelAI”.

Shah describes FeelAI as a therapist bot with which users can interact. The app begins as a normal chatbot, giving users the space to describe how they are feeling or what they are experiencing. Shah said FeelAI lets users vent their emotions. Based on what the user provides, Shah’s app connects them with mental health resources, organizations, and contact information. The app, created by Shah in just a few class periods, combines his love of coding with a practical and powerful purpose.

SF MUSICIAN BRINGS TALENTS TO SFES

South Fayette’s own **Anthony Brown** visited South Fayette Elementary School on Wednesday, March 22 for two assemblies. Brown has traveled the world sharing songs that stress the importance of the oneness of the human family.

During his time at South Fayette Elementary School, Brown performed several songs and spoke with students about growing up in South Fayette and the role music has played in his life. He ended the program by asking our Lions to perform a song for him, and they obliged by singing the school song.



NATIONAL MERIT FINALISTS

South Fayette High School seniors **Viraj Urs** and **Himanish Kolli** have been named 2023 National Merit finalists. Himanish and Viraj were among the 16,000 semifinalists announced last fall. Semifinalists represented less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors.

Students become a finalist after submitting a detailed scholarship application highlighting their academic record, participation in school and community activities, demonstrated leadership abilities, employment, and honors and awards received.

Finalists are now eligible for the 7,250 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$28 million. Every finalist will compete for one of 2,500 National Merit \$2,500 scholarships awarded on a state-representational basis. Nearly 1,000 corporate-sponsored scholarships will be awarded to finalists who meet the specific criteria. And approximately 160 colleges and universities are expected to finance 3,800 college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards to those who will attend the sponsor institution.

National Merit Scholarship recipients will begin to be announced this spring.



LGM RETURNS TO PITTSBURGH PARADE



On Saturday, March 11, South Fayette's Little Green Machine made its long-awaited return to Pittsburgh's St. Patrick's Day Parade! Their parade performance earned them the 2023 County Executive's Award for Best School Band from Allegheny County.



FIFTH GRADERS HOST BUSINESS EXPO

From marketing materials to jingles, **Dana Populo's** fifth-grade students truly experienced what it is like to run their own business during a business expo last month.

The expo was the culmination of a "World of Work" lesson on entrepreneurs. "World of Work" is being piloted by the South Fayette Township School District, Avonworth School District, Duquesne City School District, and the Elizabeth Forward School District through funding from the Grable Foundation. Each participating district is implementing this transformative career initiative in a grade-level, with plans to grow it to another four grade-levels next school year.

After learning about entrepreneurs, Mrs. Populo's students simulated the career by developing a business plan, creating advertising materials, and presenting them to classmates and educators.



SOUTH FAYETTE SWIMMER WINS GOLD



South Fayette junior **Zoe Poe** is a WPIAL gold medalist! Poe set a new school record with a 4:58.27 in the girls' 500 yard freestyle at the WPIAL 3A Swimming Championships at the University of Pittsburgh on Friday, March 3, 2023.

SOUTH FAYETTE HOCKEY WINS FIRST STATE CHAMPIONSHIP

The South Fayette hockey team skated its way to school history on Saturday, March 25 when it won the school's first PIHL AA championship.

The team finished the 20-game regular season with a 15-3-2 record and earned a second-seed in the 2023 Penguins Cup. In the Penguins Cup quarterfinals, the Lions scored a pair of third period goals to defeat Franklin Regional 3-2, advancing to the semifinals against Greater Latrobe.

After a scoreless first period of the semifinal game, the Lions took the lead in the second period and never looked back, winning 4-1 and earning their chance to play for the Penguins Cup.



In a match-up between AA's top two teams, South Fayette shut out Armstrong 2-0. The Lions would play for the state championship just four days later.

In the state title game, the Lions used a late surge to beat the Flyers Cup Champions, Pennsbury. In the final

minutes of the game, the Lions scored three goals, one an empty-netter, to secure a 7-4 victory at the RMU Island Sports Center. The Lions celebrated their first state championship in front of their families, friends, and a packed student section.

Photos taken by high school educator **Andrew Marinzel**.



LADY LIONS CELEBRATE BACK-TO-BACK WPIAL CHAMPIONSHIPS & INCREDIBLE STATE RUN

The Lady Lions' remarkable journey through the WPIAL and PIAA girls' basketball playoffs included a WPIAL championship, a buzzer-beating, game-winning three-pointer, and a trip to Hershey.

The Lady Lions entered the WPIAL playoffs as the top-seed in the 5A playoffs, and they proved why they were. With a 43-point victory in the first round over Plum, a 21-point victory over Penn-Trafford in the quarterfinals, and a 43-point victory over Woodland Hills in the semifinals, the Lady Lions set their sights on another WPIAL championship when they took on Oakland Catholic at the Petersen Events Center on Saturday, March 4. While it was a much closer game than the three previous WPIAL playoff games, the Lady Lions still defeated Oakland Catholic by 15 points and brought the WPIAL title back to South Fayette.



The PIAA playoffs began with two more one-sided victories, 73-33 against West York in the first round and 69-29 against Mechanicsburg in the second round. The drama returned in the PIAA quarterfinals against Cathedral Prep at Sharon High School. Tied at 37 in the final seconds of the game,

Maddie Webber sank a buzzer-beating shot from well-behind the arc to send the Lady Lions to the PIAA semifinals against a familiar opponent, Oakland Catholic. In a WPIAL rematch, the Lady Lions prevailed again, winning by four points at Peters Township High School.

The Lady Lions' made their first trip to Hershey in school history and brought along their families, friends, and fans. The Lady Lions finished their incredible season as the PIAA runners-up, falling to Archbishop Wood 61-54.



SFHS WINTER SPORTS RECAP

BOYS' BASKETBALL

The Lions boys' basketball team entered the WPIAL 5A playoffs as the eight-seed. The Lions enjoyed a thrilling last-minute victory against Shaler, 34-33, in the first round of the WPIAL playoffs. Despite a 68-60 loss to Peters Township in the WPIAL quarterfinals, the Lions won the next two play-in games to earn a trip to the PIAA 5A playoffs.

The Lions entered the state playoffs as the five-seed in District 7 and lost a close game to Erie's Cathedral Prep 47-45.

After the season, **Elijah Hill** and **Michael Plasko** received Big 56 First Team All Selections.

GIRLS' BASKETBALL

Erica Hall, Ava Leroux, Maddie Webber, and Lainey Yater received Big 56 First Team All Selections.

WRESTLING

Ella Trahan finished third at the 2023 Western PA Girls Wrestling Championships and advanced to states where she finished fifth.

Brock Dennison, Jonathan Baiano, and Jacob Potts advanced to the WPIAL AAA Individual Wrestling Championships. There, Jonny Baiano medaled (sixth).

SWIMMING & DIVING

Maddie Berg, Joshua Grimenstein, Sarah Grimenstein, Triya Katta, Yatin Katta, Macy Koerner, Carolyn Morelock, Abby Poe, Zoe Poe, Sydney Restivo, Mohammad Shedeed, and Brady Wiggers went to the WPIAL swimming championships. Maddie Berg (fourth) and Zoe Poe (fifth) medaled in the girls' 200 yard freestyle. Berg (third) and Carolyn Morelock were additional medalists in the girls' 500 yard freestyle. The team of Abby Poe, Zoe Poe, Macy Koerner, and Maddie Berg placed fourth in the girls' 400 yard freestyle. Joshua Grimenstein set a new school record and medaled (fifth) in the boys' 100 yard backstroke.

At the PIAA Swimming Championship, Berg medaled (eighth) in the 500 yard freestyle.

Diver **Ethan Yeaman** qualified for the WPIAL Diving Championships.

INDOOR TRACK

At the PTFCA Indoor Track Championships, **Jake Borgesi, Tim Danziger, Roman Galioto, and Zack Warchol** set a new school record in the 4 x 800m and placed third. They also placed fifth in the distance medley relay.

Borgesi, Lily Colombo, Danziger, Galioto, Alaa-Eddine Guetari, Grace Howard, Olivia Renk, Delaney Schumaker, and Warchol competed at the national championship in Boston. All teams set new school records.

FEELING THE FREEZE FOR A GOOD CAUSE

A group of South Fayette High School students and educators were feeling the freeze as they braved brutal cold and biting winds during the annual Special Olympics Polar Plunge. This bone-chilling event helps to raise funds for Special Olympics athletes and programs. This year, the South Fayette Township School District partnered with Special Olympics to create a Unified Bocce team at South Fayette High School.

After volunteering to take the frigid leap, South Fayette High School students and educators spent more than a month collecting donations for Special Olympics. In their first year of participation, the Lions raised more than \$500! On Friday, February 24, more than a dozen Lions braved the cold and headed to Acrisure Stadium to take the plunge. Flanked by their fellow classmates or colleagues, the Lions bravely leaped into a swimming pool set up on Art Rooney Avenue.

While their time in the swimming pool was brief, the impact they created for Special Olympics athletes throughout the area will be felt for years to come.



WITH LESS THAN MONTH TO GO, MINI-THON LOOKS TO SHATTER RECORD...AGAIN

The 2022 South Fayette Mini-THON raised more than \$258,000 – a record amount in its ten-year history. But if the students organizing the 2023 Mini-THON, taking place April 28-29, have their say – this year's will set another record.

Over ten years, South Fayette High School's Mini-THON has raised more than \$1 million for Four Diamonds, an organization dedicated to the fight against pediatric cancer at Penn State Children's Hospital. Four Diamonds covers the cost of treatment that insurance or other means do not cover. The organization also helps with other emergency expenses for the families of children battling cancer, as well as pediatric cancer research aimed at finding a cure and more gentle treatments.

"When your child is diagnosed with cancer, first you feel the weight of that diagnosis," said **Tina Shearer**, associate director of Mini-THON with Four Diamonds. "But then very quickly, you might be concerned with how you're going to pay for this. Battling cancer is expensive. That's a critical part of Four Diamonds, and why I think so many students throughout our program really enjoy raising funds. Because then all that family has to worry about is getting that child healthy."

What sets South Fayette apart from the other 200 schools that participate in Mini-THON, besides the hundreds of thousands of dollars students raise, is how it is embedded in the high school's curriculum.

The most ambitious and anticipated fundraising event of the year is the capstone of **Brandon Flannery's** honors management and marketing applications course. In this second-semester, senior-level course, students rely on their critical understanding of event management, promotion, ticketing, corporate sponsorship, and fundraising to plan, manage, and market Mini-THON.

While Flannery is the teacher and sponsor of Mini-THON, he admits he takes a hands-off approach, which enables his 32 students who work in one of four groups to be involved in every single aspect of the event.

From recruiting participants, developing sponsorship packages, soliciting donations, managing social media, to planning a 12-hour event, honors management and marketing applications students do it all. And if they briefly go off track, Flannery steps in.

"All I have to do is remind them of their center," Flannery said. "We're here for the kids."

While the class does not officially meet until the second semester, the work leading up to Mini-THON begins the summer before students' senior year. That's when fundraisers begin, sponsorships are created, and discussions on how to top the previous class' total start.

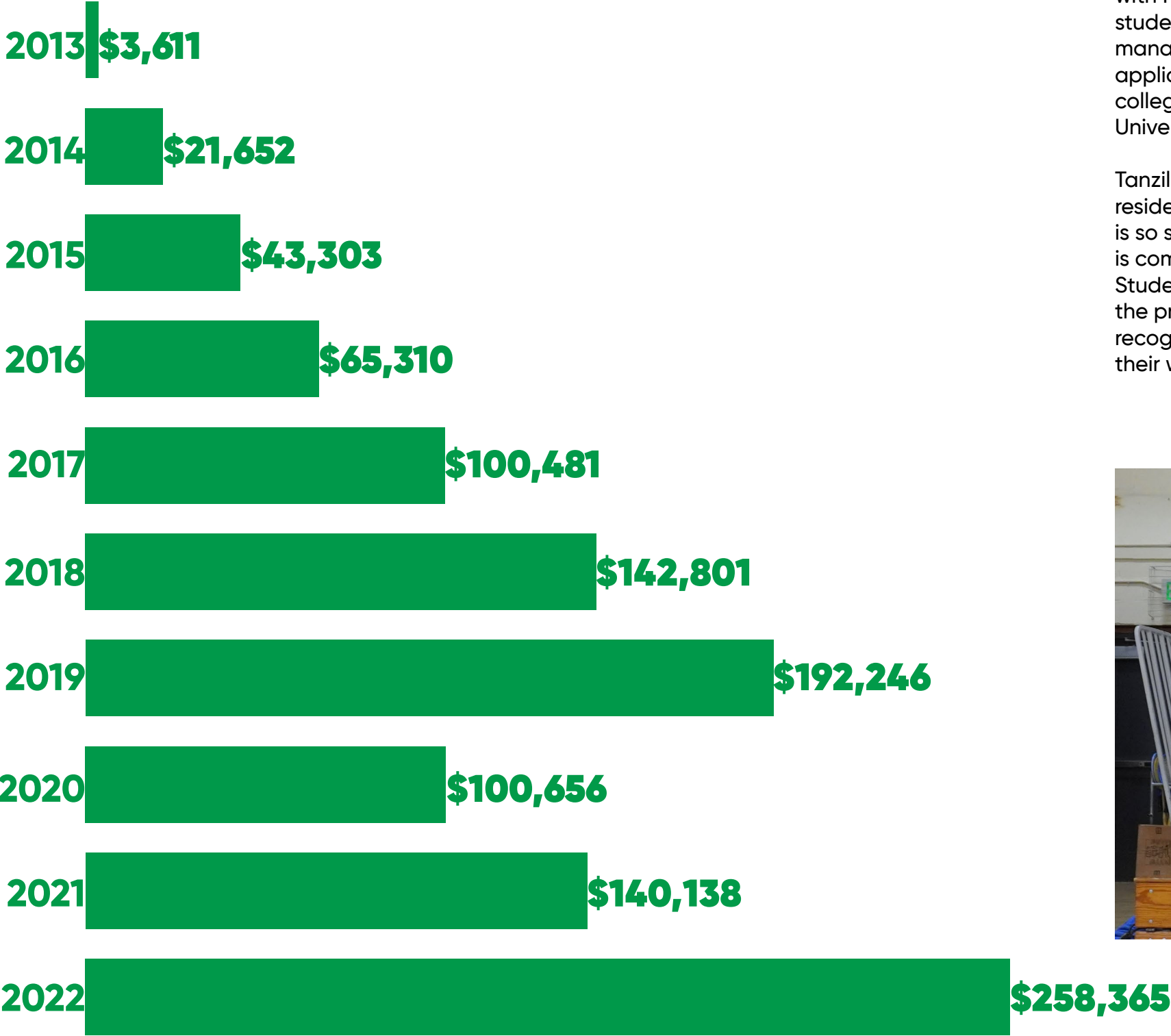
"There are two primary objectives. First, these students must be competitive by nature, all in the name of the cause. Second, they have the responsibility to bring the school together," Flannery explained.

So far, the Mini-THON Class of 2023 has done just that. Approximately three in four high school students have signed up to participate in this year's Mini-THON. Flannery's students have secured approximately \$100,000 in sponsorships from local businesses. Those sponsorship dollars go toward the expenses of the all-night event. The remainder goes into that year's donation. And the 2023 online donor drive just topped \$140,000. Flannery said his students are well on their way to reaching their \$275,000 goal.

(Continued on next page)



SOUTH FAYETTE MINI-THON'S IMPACT THROUGH THE YEARS



It's an amount of money that Dean of the Rowland School of Business at Point Park University **Stephen Tanzilli** says some professionals do not raise in their entire careers. South Fayette High School has a partnership with Point Park University, and students enrolled in the honors management and marketing applications course can earn college credit at Point Park University.

Tanzilli, a South Fayette resident, says the Mini-THON is so successful because it is competitive, but collegial. Students have the drive to top the previous year's total, but recognize the purpose behind their work.

"I think what's successful at South Fayette is because there is that focus on [Mini-THON], and it has become a culture," Shearer said. "Community involvement is probably one of the biggest success factors, and one of those that other schools look to South Fayette to do."

On Friday, March 3, that Mini-THON Culture was seen during a district-wide Blue Out and Stall Day at South Fayette Middle School and South Fayette High School. During Stall Day, students donate money directly to South Fayette's Mini-THON and Four Diamonds to stall their classes. The sixth-grade class alone raised more than \$2,200 for Mini-THON on Stall Day, resulting in a bonus edition of the Sixth Grade Games.

"South Fayette always comes back to the 'why?' 'Why are we Mini-THONing?' That's where you will see tears of joy on a student's face after the big reveal, where at the culmination of their event they raise the numbers that signify how much they raised that school year. The amount of emotion in the room at that time is why all of us love what we do," said Shearer.

This year's big reveal will happen at 6 a.m. on Saturday, April 29. Donations for the 2023 Mini-THON can be made online towards any participant's Donor Drive by clicking [here](#).



SCENES FROM SOUTH FAYETTE
MIDDLE SCHOOL'S PRODUCTION OF
SHREK THE MUSICAL JR.



SCENES FROM SOUTH FAYETTE
HIGH SCHOOL'S PRODUCTION OF
CRAZY FOR YOU



GAME ON!

ESPORTS INCUBATOR PROJECT BEGINS AT SOUTH FAYETTE MIDDLE SCHOOL

Even before four sixth-grade students approached middle school administrators this fall to gauge interest in their school hosting an esports tournament, South Fayette school leaders were already working on a plan to bring organized, competitive video gaming to Lion Learners. The request by those middle school students confirmed what district administrators already believed – esports can foster teamwork, critical thinking, and inclusivity.

South Fayette Middle School Associate Principal **Dr. Kevin Maurer** is leading the district's charge into the esports arena. Students who compete in video gaming are not in their rooms, isolated from others. Rather, esports fosters teamwork by bringing students with a passion for video games together in a supportive environment that builds STEAM-based skills and social-emotional attributes, according to the North America Scholastic Esports Foundation. Those attributes, including communication, collaboration, and problem-solving abilities, are what students need to thrive in school, careers, and life.



The work to bring esports to South Fayette began with Dr. Maurer; Director of Innovation and Strategic Partnerships **Dr. Matthew Callison**; and Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging **Dr. Chuck Herring** touring esports labs in local school districts and at Robert Morris University. These visits along with a meeting with the Pittsburgh Knights esports team and a membership through Vanta Esports meant it would be "Game On" for an esports incubator project at South Fayette Middle School this school year.

Those four Lions who were interested in a school-sponsored esports tournament are now members of the eleven-player South Fayette Middle School esports team. During a 12-week season, the Lions compete against students from schools across the country in Rocket League and Super Smash Brothers in Vanta League play. The weekly matches are hosted in a middle school classroom that has been transformed into a makeshift esports lab, complete with gaming chairs, monitors, and lights. For now, students compete in the matches using their own gaming devices.



Dr. Maurer said the program has quickly created a community among the eleven participants who have skills and interests in gaming. The Lions wear their esports jerseys to schools on match days. The middle school's screen printing club even made South Fayette Esports t-shirts.

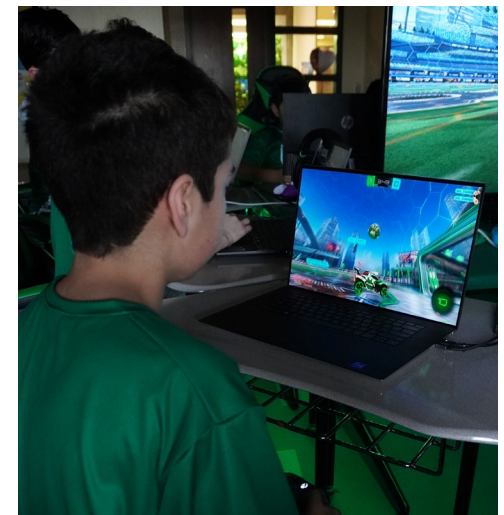
"Esports provides a safe, structured environment where our students are players and teammates," Dr. Maurer explained. "That's what makes esports so special. It's competitive, but it develops so much more than just skills in a game."

Dr. Maurer, who also serves as the team's coach, said he can already see the growth that has taken place in the first group of esports players.

"Students have varied skills in gaming, and we can meet them where they are, work on those, and develop them further," Dr. Maurer said. "The unique part of the program is that I can focus on leadership, teamwork skills, overcoming challenges, and character development all while the students are gaming."

Gaming also holds incredible post-secondary education and career potential. With more than 100 colleges and universities having their own esports teams including 23 in Pennsylvania, high school students who participate in esports are receiving large and sometimes full scholarships. And careers in gaming extend beyond e-athletes. Content creators are graphic designers; team managers are responsible for marketing, logistics, public relations, and talent acquisition; esports broadcasters work on and off camera; and talent agents represent a growing number of esports professionals.

District administrators hope to expand this incubator project both at the middle school and at South Fayette High School in the near future. Dr. Maurer also hopes to get into league play against local school districts to tap into those western Pennsylvania sports rivalries.



SENIOR NAMED SEMIFINALIST FOR PRESTIGIOUS NHS SCHOLARSHIP



South Fayette High School senior **Mohammad Shedeed** has been selected as a National Semifinalist for the National Honor Society Scholarship. Shedeed is the first South Fayette student to be named an NHS Scholarship semifinalist. As a National Semifinalist, Mohammad will receive a scholarship award of \$3,200.

Since 1946, more than \$21 million in scholarships has been awarded to NHS senior members to support college access and student success. The program is supported by the parent organization of NHS, the National Association of Secondary School Principals (NASSP).

Members of the National Honor Society demonstrate commitment to the four pillars of NHS: scholarship, service, leadership, and character.

Pictured with Shedeed are NHS sponsors **Mary Quirk** and **Gary Smith**.

FAMILY READING NIGHT AT SFES

To celebrate Read Across America Week earlier this month, the South Fayette PTA hosted its Family Reading Night event on Wednesday, March 1 at South Fayette Elementary School. South Fayette families enjoyed an evening all about growing a love of reading. The stories our young Lions read and heard sprouted to life during this spring-themed event through creative and engaging activities and presentations by children's author Natalie Lawrence Rush, elementary school teachers, and South Fayette librarians.



FOREIGN LANGUAGES CELEBRATED

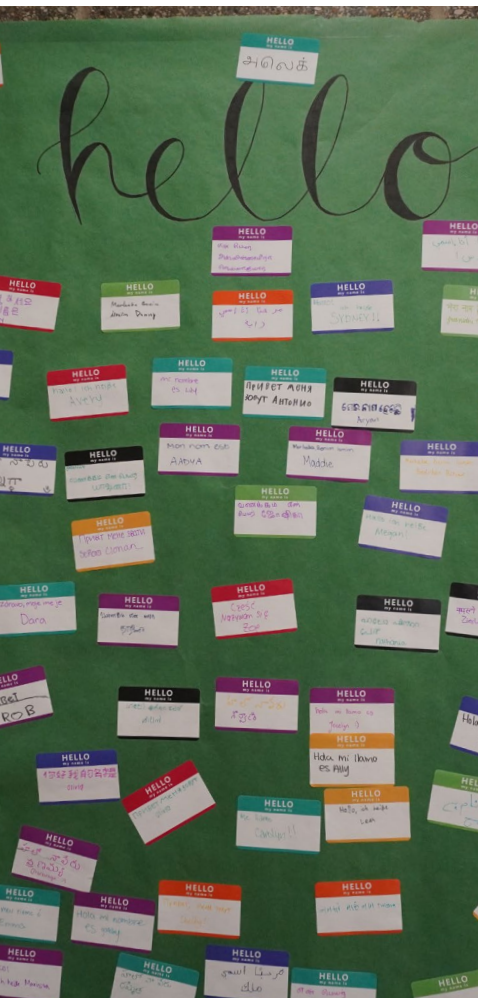
The South Fayette World Language Department celebrated National Foreign Language Week from March 5-11. First established nearly 70 years ago by the National Council for Languages and International Studies, National Foreign Language Week raises awareness of the importance of learning foreign languages and celebrates linguistic and cultural diversity.

Three world languages are offered at South Fayette: French, German, and Spanish. At South Fayette High School, all three languages offer four levels of courses, as well as a college in high school course, in which students can earn college credits. The high school also offers French and Spanish as AP courses.

The South Fayette World Languages Department's mission is to guide students in becoming global citizens capable of communicating and connecting with people from other cultures and communities with open minds and empathy.

Students not only learn about the language and culture, but have the opportunity to experience it, as educators **Frau Wiernik** and **Frau Minnetti** are currently planning a trip to Germany for summer 2024.

As part of National Foreign Language Week, South Fayette world language educators sponsored a week of activities, including a "Hello Mural." During all lunches from March 6-10, students were encouraged to create a "Hello, My Name Is..." name tag in a language of their choice. All the name tags were displayed on a large mural in the high school, creating a beautiful representation of the many languages of our world.



MIDDLE SCHOOL LIONS HELP INCOMING SIXTH-GRADERS

As current fifth-grade students prepare for the transition to middle school, they received some helpful guidance from sixth-grade Lions. Current middle school foreign language students met with fifth-graders at South Fayette Intermediate School to discuss their experiences with world languages at the middle school. These conversations are designed to help next year's sixth-grade class choose a foreign language class that is best for them.



SOUTH FAYETTE EDUCATORS LEADING EFFORTS TO CREATE TEACHER OF COLOR COHORT



By the year 2030, Pennsylvania is expected to need 10,000 additional teachers than it has today due to projected job growth, according to projections by Pennsylvania's State System of Higher Education (PASSHE). This is as the pipeline of certified teachers in the state has dropped by 67% over the past 12 years.

Two South Fayette educators are among a leading group in western Pennsylvania that sees a concurrent issue facing the region – the disproportionate number of teachers of color working in schools. Now, they're working to build out a solution with the backing of a national non-profit organization.

"Teaching Is My Favorite Color" is a cohort through the collaborative efforts of the South Fayette Township School District, Avonworth School District, and Hampton Township School District. The group, supported by funding from Digital Promise, aims to develop a network for educators of color through professional learning, mentorship, and a culturally-centered connection.



Pharlan Ives

"What I find most important about our work is creating space," said South Fayette Elementary School Assistant Principal **Pharlan Ives**. "It's about creating space, time, and networking for educators of color to come together, converse, and find community."

The idea for "Teaching Is My Favorite Color" came in 2020 when Ives, then working in the Avonworth School District, attended a virtual conference with educators of color from across the country. During the conference, she heard stories similar to hers from educators who shared the struggles of being one of the few, if not the only, teachers of color in their respective schools. Working alongside administrators and educators from Avonworth and Hampton Township, "Teaching Is My Favorite Color" began to take shape.

As the initial group met, they discussed their vision. They wanted to host frequent convenings. They wanted to build a robust support system for educators. They wanted their work to create a pipeline for future educators of color. As Ives transitioned to her current role in South Fayette, the vision started to become a reality, and the South Fayette Township School District with the support of Superintendent **Dr. Michelle Miller** and Director of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging **Dr. Chuck Herring**, joined the efforts.

High School educator **Dr. Payal Mital** who has joined the "Teaching Is My Favorite Color" team said the encouragement and assistance the team has received from leaders in all three school districts have moved them forward.



Dr. Payal Mital

"In having the three districts be part of this, one advantage we have is that we have a bigger reach," explained Dr. Mital. "We have different experiences, different challenges, and maybe different supports that we can build into this cohort in different ways."

The group has held two convenings of educators from throughout the region. Both events, one in the fall and one in the winter, provided the space for conversations and creativity with an eye towards a better tomorrow.

"I think having that partnership will show the necessity for growth," said Ives. "And we hope that other districts will come along. And I think what I've already started to see is it's moving. We've had other districts come to the table and say, 'I want to do this in my area,' and 'I want to bring this to Washington County. I want to bring this to Crawford County.' This is a very important cause, and we want to shift our mindsets about our educators of color and what that means for our perspective educators of color."



YOUNG LIONS READ WITH LAMBS

Read Across America Week came in like a lamb for the youngest Lions at South Fayette Elementary School. Students in kindergarten through second grade spent part of the day on Friday, February 24 reading to and interacting with two, one-week old lambs.



The “Let Me Read to Ewe” program was the idea of California Area School District Superintendent **Dr. Laura Jacob** in 2021 to both celebrate reading and provide opportunities for animal therapy in her district’s classrooms. The unique learning experience has had such a tremendous impact on students that she offered to expand it to districts throughout the region. The two lambs from Schwirian Farm, owned by Dr. Jacob’s family, were rejected by their mother and now are raised by their human family until they can be on their own.

“We know the educational benefits of reading to animals,” said Dr. Jacob. “They don’t judge you; they aren’t critical of your reading. And the lambs are gentle by nature with the kids.”

Students brought their favorite books to the elementary school’s learning lab, which became the lamb’s home in Lion Country for the day. Some classes read together, while other classes read independently. No matter the structure of the 20-minute sessions, the visit resulted in exactly what Dr. Jacob envisioned – a greater love of reading.



South Fayette Elementary School Assistant Principal **Pharlan Ives** saw many of the other benefits of the program.

“The children had the opportunity to learn to be caregivers, to learn to be nurturers,” explained Ives. “They’ve been so caring and kind to our little lambs. They’re one week old, so we talk about how you have to be calm, quiet, gentle in touch.”

While only a week old, the lambs also visited students in the California Area and Duquesne City school districts.

NINTH-GRADE STUDENT PARTICIPATES IN HARVARD RESEARCH PROGRAM

South Fayette High School student **Aanya Angadi** was selected to participate in Harvard University’s Learn with Leaders program this school year. The initiative pairs students in eighth through twelfth grades with a Harvard Student Agencies mentor to learn the fundamentals of research and research writing.

Angadi’s research focused on the use of color in artwork in relation to emotions. Angadi, with the assistance of **Melissa Contis**, high school art educator, conducted experiments connected to her research topic. In the experiment, Angadi showed students an image of a lily and each student was to recreate that lily, drawing their

emotions through it. On the back of the students’ artwork, they were to write how they were feeling at that point.

Angadi quickly discovered that color can powerfully convey people’s emotions. Generally, those who were upset used a dim lighting and color scheme. Those feeling happier tended to use more calming colors.

Throughout her work, Angadi attended a Harvard course to work through the research process with coursework and actionables, leading to the development of a seven-page research paper under the direction of a Harvard student. Angadi’s work will soon be published.



MUSIC EDUCATOR PRESENTS AT REGIONAL CONFERENCES



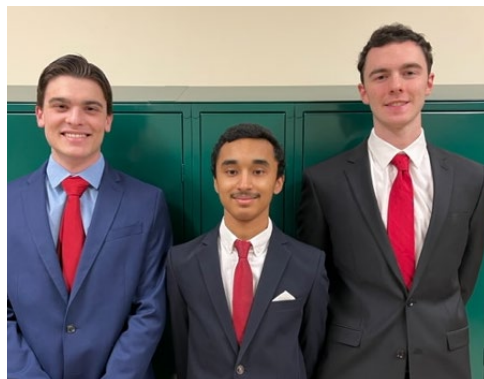
South Fayette Intermediate School educator **Charlotte Rudolph** was selected by the Pennsylvania Music Educators Association District 5 to be a presenter at the group’s annual spring professional development conference. Rudolph’s presentation “The Recorder – A Vehicle for Deeper Music Learning” took place at Grove City College on February 20. Educators from Beaver, Butler, Lawrence, and Mercer counties attended the seminar.

Rudolph also presented a short lesson at the PGTAOSA (Pittsburgh Golden Triangle American Orff Schulwerk Association) Chaptershare on February 25. The event was held at South Fayette Intermediate School. The district has hosted the PGTAOSA for the past nine years.

LION TALES

A Recap of What's Happening in South Fayette

LIONS ADVANCE TO QUIZ SHOW PLAYOFFS



South Fayette High School students **Tyler Passyn, Vishram Urs, and Daniel Miller** recently competed on KDKA's High Q quiz show. The Lions took on students from Canon-McMillan and Hampton high schools in a back-and-forth battle that aired on Saturday, March 4. All three teams were in it until the end, but South Fayette came through with a final-round victory. The Lions now will compete in the High Q playoffs this spring.

DEIB ADVISORY COMMITTEE HOLDS FIRST MEETING

The South Fayette Township School District's Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB) Committee met for the first time this month. The group of parents, caretakers, educators, and community members, led by **Dr. Chuck Herring**, the district's director of diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging, has a shared mission of advising the district on areas of DEIB resulting in thoughtful actions that respond to the needs of all students, faculty, staff, and community members.

The committee's work will focus on formal studies about DEIB, making recommendations to the district about DEIB initiatives that maximize learning opportunities, learning about the district's existing DEIB programs, and sharing that information with the South Fayette community. Currently, the members are participating in a book study on growing an equity and inclusion mindset.



MS STUDENTS INTRODUCED TO ROWING



Middle school students in **Nancy D'Angelo's** aquatics class recently welcomed representatives from Three Rivers Rowing. For nearly 40 years, the organization has promoted the benefits of rowing and paddling to western-Pennsylvanians.

During the middle school visit, rowers helped students analyze Olympic rowing competitions and learn different rowing techniques. Then the Lions got in some cardio by using rowing machines.

JUNIOR CAST IN LOCAL PRODUCTION

South Fayette High School junior **Cooper Bruce** has been cast as Maurice in Little Lake Theatre's production of "Lord of the Flies." This Little Lake production will take place September 7-24.



PODCASTING COLLABORATION

Last month, South Fayette High School educators **Gary Smith and Brandon Flannery** met with educators from Upper St. Clair School District to discuss South Fayette's podcasting course. As Upper St. Clair High School looks to add a podcasting course to its program offerings, South Fayette educators were eager to share their insight.



SENIOR RECEIVES NATIONAL AWARDS



South Fayette High School senior **Sejal Verma** has been recognized by the National Center for Women & Information Technology (NCWIT). Verma received the National Honorable Mention for Aspirations in Computing (AiC) and was the 2023 western Pennsylvania affiliate winner. The award recognizes ninth through twelfth grade women, genderqueer, or non-binary students for their computing-related achievements and interests, as part of an effort to encourage a diverse range of students to choose careers in technology.

Four hundred award recipients were selected from high schools across 44 states and all U.S. overseas military bases for their outstanding aptitude and aspirations in technology and computing as demonstrated by their computing experience, computing-related activities, leadership experience, tenacity in the face of barriers, and plans for post-secondary education.

Each recipient will receive recognition and prizes; induction into the AiC Community of more than 22,000 women, genderqueer, or non-binary technologists; access to resources, scholarships, and internship opportunities; and more.

SFHS STUDENT NAMED PARKWAY STUDENT OF THE MONTH

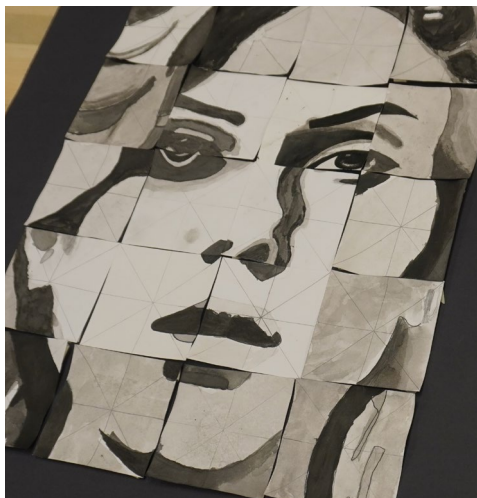


South Fayette student **Nathan Spolnik**, an electrical systems technology student at Parkway West CTC, was named the February Student of the Month.

SOUTH FAYETTE MIDDLE SCHOOL FIRST SEMESTER ART DISPLAY

South Fayette Middle School student-artists created real masterpieces under the guidance of teacher **Diane Lally**.

Sixth-grade artists created exotic color character drawings and Greek/Roman god and goddess paintings. Seventh-grade artists reflected on their favorite song through drawing, created “Labyrinth” linear and atmospheric perspective drawings, and painted seasonal landscapes and seascapes. Eighth-grade artists’ night stand drawings were auto-biographical or about a famous person. They also used watercolor paintings for mythological-themed company logos.



SFHS STUDENTS OF THE MONTH

Congratulations to **Jesse Edwards, Charlotte Beck, Maeve Vega-Kaczmarek, Carah Leadbitter, Julianna Rossi, Kalynn Poole, Rishika Panda, and Chloe Snyder** for being named High School Students of the Month for February. February's theme was cooperation.

Also, congratulations to **Cooper Hillebrand** who was named the January Rotary Student of the Month.



THREE HIGH SCHOOL LIONS NAMED STUDENT VISIONARIES



Visionaries have their sights set on effecting change, and do it. High school students **Anna Fraps, Cooper Hillebrand, and Aiden Martincic** were accepted into the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society's (LLS) 2023 Student Visionaries of the Year campaign. The national seven-week challenge raises funds and awareness for the fight against blood cancers and ends on March 31, 2023.

For months, Fraps, Hillebrand, and Martincic have organized fundraisers in school and throughout the community, including at Primanti Brothers and Blaze Pizza, to support the Leukemia & Lymphoma Society. The funds raised benefit the LLS mission: to find a cure for leukemia, lymphoma, Hodgkin's disease and myeloma, and to improve the quality of life of patients and their families.

Participants in the scholarship and fundraising challenge are nominated for their leadership, passion, and community-involvement



The Lion's Roar is produced
by the South Fayette Township
School District's
Communications Department

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In partnership with the community, the **mission** of the **South Fayette Township School District**, *a leader in innovation*, is to elevate academic, artistic, and athletic excellence of the whole learner by inspiring the strength to be dynamic, ethical, and empathetic citizens who flourish in a global society.