Principal’s Corner

Hello moms and dads. This past Friday marks the end of our second quarter, and with that the official start to the second half of the year. As we arrive at this halfway point I want to take a moment to remind you of our school vision and highlight for you an important piece of work your children and their teachers have been engaged in this year, specifically as it pertains to Higher Level Thinking. There are 3 major elements to our school vision: Feel, Frameworks, and Higher Level Thinking (HLT). For the past three years we’ve been very focused on each of these elements in strategic and purposeful ways.

Highlighted for you here is one method of support that has improved students’ abilities to utilize HLT skills. What I mean more specifically is that we have been focused on improving instructional practices so that students evaluate, analyze, and synthesize information on a daily basis. Teachers have been ensuring students are formulating thoughts and justifying their thinking. One method that has enabled us to do this is a math instructional methods called Problem Based Learning. This method is unique and unlike anything you and I were taught growing up. Here students are given one problem for the math period on which to work. This problem, however, is multi-step, and requires creative and critical thinking to solve. Teachers incorporate reading strategies and cooperative groups into the lesson, and all of this requires students to access math that was previously taught while simultaneously exposing students to multiple methods of solving the problem. Students literally work their way to understanding new math content before teachers give them a formula, and the result of this is a much deeper understanding, improved memory, and problem solving skills that extend beyond any one test. All of our teachers in grades K-6 right now are studying and implementing problem based learning at some level with the support of our instructional coaches. Our after school extended learning which begins next week is utilizing this method as well. This has already impacted our math scores and I believe it will continue to do so. But more importantly, we are developing our children as thinkers, and it excites me to see our kids so engaged in their learning and developing skills that will help them beyond the classroom. Until next time... Have a wonderful month and I hope to see you soon.—Mr. Bennink.

Washington Mill Elementary School
Administration

- Brad Bennink, Principal
- Tara Pensiero, Assistant Principal
- Michael Wilson, Assistant Principal
Saludos! Papas, mamas. El pasado Viernes marcó el final del 2do. Trimestre, y con esto, oficialmente entramos a la mitad del año escolar. Así como entramos a este próximo semestre, o medio año escolar; quiero tomarme un momento para recordarles que la visión de nuestra escuela, algo que ustedes deben mantener en mente, siendo que ustedes son una parte muy importante en el desempeño y trabajo de nuestros niños y de apoyo a nuestros(as) maestros(as), que se comprometieron en este año escolar específicamente con referencia al programa; Pensamiento de Nivel Superior, o Nivel Superior de Manera de Pensar. Hay tres partes en este programa: Sensación, Marco y pensamiento de Nivel Superior (HLT). En los últimos tres años de educación, nos hemos enfocado en cada uno de estos elementos, estratégicamente, con el propósito de cubrir este plan. Remarcar el compromiso de ustedes como padres, es uno de los métodos de apoyo que ha mejorado la habilidad de los estudiantes en utilizar este nuevo programa; Pensamiento de Nivel Superior (HLT). Lo que quiero decir específicamente, es que nos hemos enfocado en mejorar la instrucción práctica, para que así nuestros estudiantes, evalúen, analicen y sinteticen información, en forma constante o diaria. Los profesores se aseguraron de implementar y hacer seguimiento de este progreso, para justificar esa nueva forma de pensar. Uno de los métodos que nos ha permitido usarlo en matemáticas es, Aprendizaje basado en Problemas. Este método es único, como ningún otro de los que se usaron cuando nosotros crecíamos. Aquí los estudiantes reciben problemas que resolver en el período de matemáticas. De todas maneras, estos problemas son con múltiples pasos, para resolverlos y requiere la creatividad y un nivel superior de manera de pensar. Los maestros(as) incorporan estrategias en la lectura y grupos de cooperación durante las lecciones, y todo esto requiere que los estudiantes tengan acceso a matemáticas, que previamente se enseñó, mientras que simultáneamente exponen a los estudiantes a métodos múltiples, para resolver problemas. Los estudiantes, literalmente, trabajan en su propia manera para entender el nuevo contenido de las matemáticas, antes de que los maestros les den la fórmula o forma de resolver problemas. El resultado de esto, es una forma más profunda de analizar, aprender, mejorando la memoria y habilidades de cómo resolver problemas que van más allá de simplemente prepararse para un examen. Todos nuestros maestros de Kínder a 6º grado estudian e implementan el aprendizaje basado en; Resolviendo Problemas; algunos niveles con el apoyo de nuestros asistentes de instrucción.

El programa de, Clases Después del horario de la Escuela, que empiece la próxima semana, está utilizando estos métodos. Esta forma de enseñanza ya muestra como afectó en forma positiva, las calificaciones de matemáticas, y créanme, que esto continuará en esa misma forma. Lo más importante; Estamos preparando a nuestros niños a desarrollar su forma de pensar, esto me emociona, ver a nuestros niños enganchados en su aprendizaje y desarrollando habilidades que les ayudará más allá, de simplemente, prepararse para una clase más de la escuela.

Me despido, deseándoles un mes maravilloso y espero verlos pronto —Mr. Bennink
Counselors’ Corner...

Every year as school counselors we try to give students exposure to planning their future careers. During the month of April, we will be focusing on this in every classroom. It is important for students to understand that you are never too young to think about your future! In our classroom lessons we use websites like http://vocareerview.org/ as well as different books and activities. Our Kindergarteners have some great insight about how many jobs are right here in our school and our sixth graders are learning about what college majors are and what jobs might fit their interests. One thing that we want students to understand is the connection of what they are good at and enjoy doing now could be their career in the future. Along with career lessons, as a school we are also putting a focus on college awareness. Each classroom teacher will share what college they attended and some interesting facts about it. Every morning on the news, different teachers are being interviewed about their college experience and their career path to becoming a teacher. Next time you are in the building please take a look at the college posters our staff made to share their experiences with our students. Please take time to talk to your kids about what they might want to do when they grow up, help them to explore the options around them!

As always please feel free to contact us with any questions or concerns about your children.

Emily Rubin and Kevin Glenn

WMES PTA

Hello WMES Parents!

I hope everyone is having a great New Year! February is a busy month for WMES PTA as we are gearing up for another round of sponsored activities for our kids. Our After School Programs start this week! For this round kids were able to pick between rugby, Lego building, RC Cars and more! A huge thank you to our amazing parent volunteers who came together to make these programs happen. I have a feeling there are going to be some exciting and fun projects coming out of this session. If your child is in one of the programs we’d love to hear your feedback!

We’re also getting everything ready for our annual Running Club that will start March 22nd. You will be receiving more information on how to sign your child up for this in the blue WMES PTA book bag notes coming out the end of February so keep a look out for them! It’s going to be a great time but again we can’t do it without help from our parents. There will be several opportunities for parents to volunteer and you can volunteer as little or as much as you want!

Lastly, the Food for Thought Program needs donations! This is always a hard time of year for collecting food but our kids still need our help! If we want to continue to send home weekend bags with our kids, we need your assistance in collecting items such as canned veggies, pastas, soups and tuna or chicken. As a reminder, there is a box in the front lobby of the school marked as Food for Thought for easy drop off! Thank you in advance!

I hope to see you at school soon or at our next PTA meeting on February 21 at 7pm in the WMES school library!

Sara Raak

WMES PTA President
Reading Corner...

Reading to your child is one of the best ways to teach them to read. When you read to them they hear the way reading is supposed to sound and it gives them a model to go by. Reading to your child also has other benefits:

- By listening to you read, they have access to books that they cannot really read and understand on their own.
- You are showing them that reading is important to you, and should be important to them.
- You are spending time with your child.

Even if your child is able to read an entire book by his or herself, reading additional books with them can bring you together in a world far away from everyday life. Continuing to read to them is a gift you can only give them for a short while – take advantage of it.

Thank you for being your child’s first teacher and for being our partners in literacy.

SCA NEWS

"Cupid's Cans" - during the month of February the student council is teaming up with the PTA to collect donations for our Food For Thought Program to assist families in need in the WMES community. Most wanted food items include:

- Canned vegetables, soup and fruit
- Snack packs of applesauce
- Canned meats such as chicken and tuna
- Snack packs of gold fish, pretzels, and crackers, etc.
- Granola bars

Donation boxes are located in the main lobby and will be placed in each classroom. The classroom that collects the most food donations will be rewarded.

with a surprise treat. GO WMES!!

Upcoming Events:
February 24th Spirit Day – To be announced.

March 2nd – Crazy Hat Day. We will celebrate Dr. Seuss’ birthday and National Read Across America Day.

Follow us on twitter @WashMilles
Dear Parents and Guardians,

It’s hard to believe that we are halfway through the school year and starting 3rd quarter!

We are well underway teaching our critical and creative lessons in all classrooms and will continue throughout the year. Students enjoy these fun lessons immensely!

You may be wondering, what does “creative and critical thinking” mean?

- Critical and creative thinking are essential to problem solving.
- Creative thinking involves designing something original.
- Critical thinking involves logic and reasoning skills.
- As we solve problems, we use both thinking patterns across content areas.

Why Teach Creative and Critical Thinking?

The Nine Critical & Creative Thinking Strategies

- Creative problem solving is an essential skill for successful global citizens in the 21st century
- Higher order thinking skills help students construct meaningful understandings of the curriculum.
- Students need explicit instruction and exposure to thinking strategies in context in order to be able to apply them.
- These strategies are engaging for children!

Please let me know if you are interested in trying them at home and I will send you more information.

*From FCPS Creative and Critical Thinking Activities for Families*
STEAM LAB

Hello

The students continue to have a great year in the science lab. We have conducted science experiments, built and designed interactive touchpads and are currently working on several new and challenging projects. The students really enjoy the creativity and problem solving aspects of our projects. I wanted to share with you some ideas of how you can continue to foster the concepts of STEM at home. These ideas are taken from an online article by Sarah Cornelius.

4 Ways Parents Can Support STEM Learning

1. Encourage questioning
Is your child always asking “why?” and “how”? That’s a STEM mindset—and it can be the beginning of a drive to solve important challenges like protecting our environment, curing diseases, or engineering new clean energy technology. Even if the questions seem relentless at times, embrace this curiosity. Take the time to explain the things that you understand, and when your child poses a question that you don’t have an answer to, look up the answer together (and model good research practices in the process). Who knows—it may spur some new interests for you too!

2. Give educational programming a try
TV and movie time doesn’t have to be mindless—there is plenty of entertaining programming out there that is strongly related to STEM fields and educational in the process. So, the next time you and your child are browsing Netflix together, give the “documentaries” section a look. Long-running programs like the History Channel’s Modern Marvels, PBS’ NOVA, and the Discovery Channel’s Planet Earth are tried-and-true favorites with hundreds of episodes covering a variety of topics, such as civil engineering, space exploration, and evolution. If those shows are a little too much to hold your child’s interest, there are also plenty of kids’ and primetime television shows that have more of a STEM theme than you may expect. Sid the Science Kid is a great option to spur a science interest in early learners, while shows like CSI or Numbers, both of which focus on real-world applications of forensic science and math to solve crimes, can spark an interest for older students.

3. Visit a science museum
What better place to allow your child to get up close and hands on with science than a science museum? And they’re not difficult to find. There are over 150 science centers around the U.S., and about one third of those even have areas designed specifically for children six years old and under. These museums typically include a variety of exhibits that explain complex and fascinating science and technology concepts in creative and accessible ways—giving visitors the chance to run their own experiments, play with gadgets, or check out live and video-based presentations. So, plan a weekend outing to your local science museum, or check out this list of the 10 Best Science Centers, and think about working a visit into your next family vacation itinerary. Most of these institutions have great websites with additional resources, activities, and ideas to inspire STEM interest as well.

4. Seek out STEM extracurriculars
Extracurricular activities, even for young students, don’t have to be limited to sports or performing arts—there are plenty of STEM-based options too. There are numerous science fairs and engineering design competitions that self-directed students can seek out. For students wanting more guidance or a social aspect, math and science competitions are hosted across the country by various organizations (like Science Olympiad). Think of these competitions as a team geography bee for math and science, complete with practices to prepare. The FIRST Robotics and Junior FIRST Lego® League programs have also grown very popular in recent years. These competitions challenge teams of students to solve real-world science and technology problems by building robots with the mentorship of an industry professional. It’s projected that over 400,000 students in grades K–12 will participate in FIRST (For Inspiration and Recognition of Science and Technology) programs during the 2015–2016 school year.
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- Valentine's Day!!!
- President's Day
  - No School
- PTA Meeting 7pm
  - Library

- Mind in the Making
  - Parent Meeting
    - 6:30 pm
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