Esports offers new, innovative options for JCB students

To bolster participation in extracurricular activities and reach more students, the Phoenix Central School District is launching an esports team this spring.

The innovative program is the first of its kind in Oswego County and will provide an opportunity for high school students to engage in video game competitions against other students across the country. Participants work in three or five-person teams to achieve various gaming tasks as part of the STEM accredited program.

“This is such a cutting-edge idea, and we’re excited to be able to form a team for our Phoenix students,” said Robert Edwards, PCSD’s executive director of instruction and personnel. “It’s set up like any other varsity sport. We’ll have a pre-season, practices and games.”

Edwards, who will coach the team alongside Nicole Covell — the district’s director of data, RTI and instructional technology — said esports have shown to increase student engagement by reaching a broader population. On top of the increase in participation numbers, team members also develop several key skills working in a team environment.

“The students work together on strategy, logic and communication, all while playing video games on a PC,” Covell said. “If participants hone these skills and excel in esports, they even have an opportunity to earn scholarships.”

Covell noted that she and Edwards are thrilled to launch the inaugural season, which will begin with tryouts at 2:30 p.m. Jan. 14 at Emerson J. Dillon Middle School. Participants will have the opportunity to play either “League of Legends” or “Rocket League” during competitions.

Cathy Lee earns first-ever ‘Making a Difference Award’

When the Phoenix Central School District put out the call for nominations for its first-ever “Making a Difference” Award, one name resonated loud and clear: Cathy Lee.

For nearly three decades, Phoenix resident Cathy Lee has served the district as a volunteer and community liaison. She has spearheaded many of the student leadership and community service efforts. She instituted the Leadership Council and Presidential Youth Service Awards, oversees homecoming traditions and connects students to elderly residents for shopping trips and dances.

“She brings students to feed the homeless in Syracuse, she spearheads all of our community-based food drives which go to the local Phoenix food pantry, and she oversees the students when they create a ‘Shanty Town’ to truly understand what it’s like to be homeless and live in the elements,” said English teacher Lisa Spereno, who nominated Lee for the award.

“Determined and dedicated, Cathy Lee has brought the community together in so many effective and creative ways,” Spereno said.

Superintendent Christopher Byrne lauded Lee for her contributions and noted that her actions have left an indelible mark on the entire community.

“If anyone embodies the ‘Making A Difference’ Award and deserves recognition — as much as she dislikes being in the spotlight — it is the face, the spirit and the love of Phoenix: Cathy Lee,” Spereno said.
A Message from the Superintendent: PCSD Poised for a Great 2020

Happy New Year! It is hard to believe the school year is almost half over. December was an excellent month to attend a wide variety of events in our school district. I hope that you and your family found some time to enjoy one or more of our sporting events, concerts and/or community service activities.

Our Capital Project continues to move forward and is on schedule.

To date, we have:
• Renovated and opened sixteen (16) classrooms at John C. Birdlebough High (JCB) School.
• Completed the music addition at JCB.
• Completed the new turf stadium at JCB.
• Completed all roof work at JCB and some roof work at Emerson J. Dillon Middle School.

Between now and the end of August 2020:
• The new wrestling room will be completed at JCB
• Additional wall tile will be replaced at JCB.
• Two (2) more classrooms will be completed at JCB.
• Renovation will begin on the new District Office at the back of Michael A. Maroun Elementary (MAM) School.
• MAM roof work will be completed.
• JCB’s auditorium will be completed.

As a reminder, if you have a son or daughter under the age of five (5), please be sure to register them for Dolly Parton’s Imagination Library. This program is completely free. Each month a new, carefully selected book will be mailed in your child’s name directly to your home. Registration forms can be picked up at the United Way of Greater Oswego County, the Phoenix Public Library or in the MAM main office. For more information, go to phoenixcsd.org/imaginationlibrary.

Thank you for taking the time to read this edition of our district newsletter. I hope the contents help you feel more informed about all the great things taking place in our school district.

As always, thank you for your ongoing support of the Phoenix Central Schools!

Sincerely,
Christopher J. Byrne
Superintendent
315-695-1555
cbyrne@phoenixcsd.org
@cbyrnepcsd

EJD students explore career opportunities during annual event

As part of the school’s annual career day, students at Emerson J. Dillon Middle School recently got to explore a number of career possibilities.

After completing a survey in advance to select their preferences, students went around to various rooms to learn from experts in a variety of fields.

In total, more than 40 professionals welcomed interested young minds to explore different possible career avenues. This annual event allows students to see nearly a dozen presentations throughout their years at EJD.

“We really had a lot of great support this year with dozens of different fields represented,” said EJD school counselor Andrew Quirk, who helped plan and organize the event. “The students had an opportunity to explore fields that interest them, and hopefully it helps impact and guide them in the future.

“We want to thank the professionals who came out for the event along with the support of the staff and administrative team for making the event such a success every year.”

Event organizers noted there was something for everyone between jobs in trades, the armed forces, sciences, health services, veterinary medicine, the arts, law enforcement and more.

The Student Services Department helped plan and put together the event, and the team included Quirk, school counselor Kathy Barber and student services secretary Christi Sharkey.
Polar Express makes spirits bright

Hundreds of Emerson J. Dillon Middle School students recently had an opportunity to shop for family members as part of the annual Polar Express event.

The holiday tradition provided selected students in fifth through eighth grades with shopping passes to purchase gifts for their loved ones. Passholders browsed thousands of donated toys, clothes, jewelry, household items and electronics to give to family members. Once students selected the perfect gifts, they joined teachers and volunteers to label and wrap each present.

“Every year this event gets bigger and bigger,” said EJD psychologist Jill Lunn. “We have so many teachers, faculty and community members that donate not just items, but their time as well. Their generosity makes the Polar Express such a success!”

Lunn also wanted to thank local businesses that donated, including Elite Personal Fitness and Exelon.

Karen E. Cusenz Memorial Playground Unveiled

As part of the ongoing capital project in the Phoenix Central School District, students at Michael A. Maroun Elementary are enjoying a new playground this year.

The new playground, named in memory of former student Karen Cusenz, boasts state-of-the-art equipment from the ground up. Rubberized flooring material provides an additional layer of safety for students, while new equipment offers access to all.

“The students love it,” said MAM Assistant Principal Amy Godkin. “They are over-the-top excited.”

According to Godkin, the excitement that the students have on the playground reflects the personality of its namesake. Cusenz was in sixth grade when she sadly passed away in 1989. At the time, the entire community rallied around her family and raised money to build the playground.

“It was a community build in the early ‘90s,” Godkin said. “The cool part is that her family was very much involved in the new construction process. They wanted to include some of Karen’s favorite colors, castles and slides to maintain the integrity of the original design. The students are certainly happy with it!”

Mathematicians

John C. Birdlebough High School math teacher Cheryl Fassett recently hosted her annual brunch with famous mathematicians, and a number of students portraying some of the greatest minds of their generation. Superintendent Christopher Byrne and JCB High School Principal Thomas Bailer also stopped in for the breakfast to see the students’ hard work and presentations.

Caitlyn George earns national recognition

Phoenix high school student Caitlyn George’s athletic and academic prowess recently landed her among the nation’s best in a scholarship competition.

George, a senior three-sport athlete and a top student, was chosen among thousands of applicants as a national semifinalist and $1,000 winner of the Heisman High School Scholarship, which honors the nation’s most accomplished, community-minded high school senior athletes.

“This is such an honor,” George said. “I wasn’t expecting this at all, but it’s nice to see all my hard work pay off.”

George is no stranger to hard work and perseverance. She manages to successfully juggle her athletic commitments with academics, while also serving as a leader and volunteer in the greater Phoenix community. She’s a member of the JCB volleyball team, indoor track, and track and field. In addition, she is class president, National Honor Society treasurer and a Presidential Gold Medallion Award winner for completing more than 1,000 hours of community service.

“It takes a lot of sacrifice and I have to balance my schoolwork and athletic commitments with life outside of school,” George said. “It’s not always easy, but it’s rewarding.”

George hopes her drive and determination will translate well at the collegiate level next year. She is considering attending either St. John Fisher College or Binghamton University.
Mission Statement
The Phoenix Central School District is committed to a challenging educational program that promotes academic and personal growth for all students. Each student will become a confident, productive, responsible individual with a strong academic foundation, and the ability to make positive ethical choices. Our goal is to cultivate a sense of pride, character, and accountability in our students and community. The Board of Education, staff, parents, students, and community share responsibility for this mission.

Fifth-graders build, ride hovercrafts
An experimental science lesson at Emerson J. Dillon Middle School recently swept fifth-graders off their feet as hovercrafts became the primary source of travel.

The all-day activity, dubbed “The Hovercraft Project” and led by educational consultant Matthew Chase, provided students with a combination of learning and fun. Students were divided into teams and tasked with assembling fully functional hovercrafts. Throughout the day, fifth-graders collaborated to measure, cut, calculate, troubleshoot and test their air-powered devices before racing them in a culminating event.

“This is an engaging lesson that goes beyond STEM learning,” said EJD Assistant Principal Jessica Ariola. “Students really have to work together, communicate and persevere in order to achieve success. The Hovercraft Project is all-encompassing, and we’re grateful to provide our students with such a wonderful learning opportunity.”

Students Perform Holiday Concerts