

Merrill Middle School Presents

The Merrill Gazette

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Merrill Buddies are the Best Buddies

By Tessa Bitner and Harper Egge

"I was teased until I found best buddies in middle school. My bond with my middle school buddy helped me because I felt protected from everyone's teasing and her friendship gave me something to look forward to every day."

-Christina (Best Buddies Nationwide Ambassador)

What is Best Buddies?

Best Buddies is a non-profit organization for kids in middle school and high school that have developmental disabilities like down syndrome, autism, cerebral palsy, Fragile X, Williams syndrome and others. These kids are paired with a fellow student based on common interests to sit with at lunch, walk them to class, and meet once a week. The Best Buddies mission is to grow real friendships and make genuine connections with their peers. Best Buddies at Merrill started about five years ago, and the organization strives to show **all** kids that they belong.

Their motto is **Fun, Friendship, and Respect**. Best Buddies has monthly events like field trips or just fun activities.

We talked to the teachers that worked with the Best Buddies chapter at Merrill Middle School. Ms. Taylor said that Best Buddies has changed the culture of the school and more kids feel accepted--like they belong. She also reminded us that, "we are more alike than different." Something that we could all stand to remember when interacting with the people around us. Taylor is the communications director of Merrill's chapter, but is also an advisor. Another one of the teachers, Mrs. Sage, runs Merrill's Associate Member Division for Best Buddies. She said that their biggest focus is inclusion—not only in the classroom, but schoolwide as well as out into the extended community. "Best Buddies opens people's eyes to kids with disabilities," Sage said.

Finally, Mrs. Dahms, after reflecting on her five years as the Best Buddies faculty advisory, feels that Merrill has truly embraced this program and kids have become more outgoing and developed true bonds of friendship as the program has continued to grow.

Ultimately, Merrill continues to bloom in their efforts to include ALL students in ALL aspects of the school community. "Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone" (George Dei, professor at Ontario Institute for Studies in Education of the University of Toronto).

MERRILL SHINES AT SCIENCE BOUND SCIENCE FAIR

By Gazette Staff

Despite the cold temperatures and rising snowfall totals, Merrill Science Bound students recently bundled up to participate in the annual Science Bound Science Fair, sponsored by Iowa State University and held at Weeks Middle School.

“Science Bound is Iowa State University’s premier pre-college program to empower Iowa students of color to pursue degrees and careers in STEM (science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) fields” (<http://www.sciencebound.iastate.edu/>).

Designed to engage middle school and high school students throughout Iowa’s schools, the Science Bound program seeks to encourage students to explore fields they may have not considered before, but more importantly promotes the development of community centered around its members, facilitators, and alumni of the program.

This community will continue to support and encourage students throughout their entire educational career. Science Bound scholar Maya Ryan states, “Throughout all my memories of Science Bound, I learned that Science Bound is family.”

“The National Science Foundation continues to call for an increase in the number of young people from populations that are underrepresented in the sciences who go on to technical careers” (<http://www.sciencebound.iastate.edu/>).

And answer the call, Merrill has! This year, Merrill has a total of seven students participating in the program under the supervision of Ms. Kimi Evans and Mrs. Gabrielle Smithman. Taytum Boens, Alex Douglas Flores, Maawa Ismail, Arianna Jackson, Ke’Ayla Madison, Abdullahi Mohamed, and Maya Ryan are leading the way by fostering positive attitudes towards STEM programs, themselves, and building skills needed to navigate and negotiate a bright future of higher education.

For students interested in the program, the selection process begins soon! Scholars are selected at the end of their seventh-grade year. Applicants must meet participation and grade point requirements to remain in the nine-year program. For students who successfully complete the full program and meet admission requirements for Iowa State University to pursue a technical degree, the final reward is the potential of a full tuition scholarship from the university. For those who choose higher learning elsewhere, research indicates that overall, students who participate and complete the program develop positive attitudes toward science and improve academically. Please contact Ms. Evans or Mrs. Smithman for additional information.



USED BOOK SALE!!!

@MERRILL AFTER SPRING BREAK

ALL FUNDS GO TO MEALS FROM THE HEARTLAND

BUY BOOKS DURING LUNCH

GREAT DEALS 50 CENTS TO \$3

TO HELP DONTAË BOOKS TO MS. FINN AND MS. SMITHMAN

Why Not Bandanas in School?

An Opinion by Nyelah Robinson

Adults want children to be safe at school. Parents and administrators are afraid their students are in gangs because that is what most bandanas represent, but what if gangs started wearing red or pink sparkly headbands? Would bandanas be accepted, with a new ban created on sparkly headbands?

Most people think bandanas were made in the 1990s or 2000s, but really, some of the first bandanas were made over 200 years ago. The first well-known, printed bandana was made by Martha Washington (<https://www.bandanashop.com/bandanahistory.html>). The bandanas were made to represent the political struggle of the colonies. The first bandana was printed with George Washington on horseback.

Bandanas of today have many popular designs but the basic colors are white, black, and red. Occasionally, blue or purple draw attention as well. Many schools don't allow bandanas with the traditional print, but what about the bandanas with flowers, stars or cats? Or how about plain color bandanas without any print? For the most part, the school will allow us to wear what we want, so why not bandanas? This is my final question. Adults, including Merrill's School Improvement Leader, Mr. Johnson, have given the answer, "We have been informed by the police department that bandanas can represent gang affiliation."

However, if there are not more reasons beyond, "safety", I will continue to question the rule. It is unfair that a small group of people ruins a fashion choice of so many others. Like my 5th grade teacher said, "You can't have a chair with only one leg, or it won't stand because eventually it will fall." The argument against bandanas in schools needs more legs to stand on in my opinion.



Sexist Dress Code Policies Need to be Abolished

By Prior VanHeukelom

As a girl, and as a member of the general student population, one of my greatest pet peeves is dress codes. Now, I'm not referring to clothes that show inappropriate words, drug paraphernalia, graphic images, etc. Those are obviously not appropriate to wear to school. I'm talking about shorts deemed "too short" and shirts that are cut "too low."

Although anyone can get dress-coded, it's usually girls who are who get called out by school administrators for their clothes being "too revealing." I have seen multiple girls being dress-coded, and it makes me sick to my stomach. Getting dress-coded is humiliating and makes girls feel unsafe, targeted, and guilty for something they didn't know was wrong.

I can assure you that no boys, or frankly ANY students are freaking out over fellow classmates' bra straps, exposed shoulders, etc. We have our own stuff going on, we don't have the time to gawk at or even notice low cut

necklines. School administrators worrying about students (especially boys) getting distracted by our clothing tells female students that the male reaction is their fault or that their body causes negativity. It also paints all boys as being totally obsessed with girls, which isn't true. Along with that, in some cases girls can be suspended from school for wearing clothes that are "distracting boys".

In a 2018 study, the National Women's Law Center looked at all public schools in Washington D.C. The study found that 3 in 4 high school dress codes say that students can be pulled out of class or school for violating the dress code. Policies like this show that the school values boys' education more than girls' education. As I said before, no students are noticing how revealing our clothes are. Women are already oversexualized in the media. We don't need to be oversexualized at school as well.

Many people believe that wearing "revealing" clothing is disrespectful to yourself. This statement couldn't be farther from the truth. If a person is wearing an outfit that they feel comfortable and confident in, they are 100% respecting themselves. What's not respectful is when a student is called out by a school administrator for shorts that they have decided aren't long enough, or a teacher asking a student if they have a bra on (which I have seen happen).

In conclusion, dress coding has gone way overboard and has become extremely sexist and humiliating. Short shorts, miniskirts, bra straps, exposed shoulders, and exposed collarbones should be at the least concern of administrators. If a teacher is concerned about a student's clothing for safety reasons, they should speak with the student privately, not in front of their fellow students and friends.

Staff Spotlight Mrs. Majure

By Amanda Hirth



This month's staff spotlight shines on Mrs. Majure! She is the 6th and 7th grade Math teacher; her room located on the first floor. She said that her favorite part about being a teacher is,

"No two days are the same. Every day is a little different. New cool things happen every day and new challenges are always happening."

Whether students realize it or not, teachers DO live awesome lives outside of school! She said that her favorite thing to do out of school is, "I like to cook, I like to knit, I like to read." When asked what her ideal career outside of teaching would be, she replied, "I might be an architect or realtor."

Thank you, Mrs. Majure for letting us get to know you a little better AND for all the hard work you do at Merrill Middle School!



**Special Birthday Shout Out—Happy 50th
Mr. Luft!!**

Good Job!!

“Winter- tainment” 😊

By Maya Ryan

WINTER WORD SCRAMBLE

Instructions: Unscramble the words

SNWO_____
ZDILRZAB_____
SMTNTEI_____
HISALDOY_____
BEREMEDC_____
JYNARAU_____
FYMALI_____
CITCAR_____
RSMFFEUA_____
IBREEDRNGAG_____
LEDS_____
HIYCLL_____
IEFENRZG_____
SOOMTSWNR_____

WINTER RIDDLES

1. What do you get when you mix a snowman and a wolf?
2. What is a snowman's favorite treat?
3. How does a penguin build a house?
4. What kind of math do snowy owls like?
5. What did one snowman say to another snowman?
6. What is it called when a snowman has a temper tantrum?
7. I am cold man without a soul, if there is warmth inside me it will slowly kill me. What am I?
8. There's a carrot, a hat, and a button lying on the ground in the sunlight. What happened?

Answers: 1. Frost Bite 2. Ice Crispy Treat 3. Igloos it together 4. Owlgebra 5. Do you smell carrots? 6. A meltdown 7. I am a snowman. 8. A snowman melted.

Global Perspectives: The Venezuelan Crisis

By Tessa Bitner and Harper Egge

As many of you know or may not know, the Venezuelan government has been on the rocks for quite some time now. The latest development in this crisis is the closing of the border to foreign aid from the U.S. and other countries. This development is creating a massive toll on the Venezuelan people, hundreds of thousands of people are fleeing this conflict.

Donald Trump has been working to organize the delivery of nutritional food and hygiene products to a small city in Columbia that borders Venezuela. The purpose of this is to try and get aid across the border. The current president Nicolas Maduro is refusing to accept aid from other countries. The people of Venezuela are stricken by poverty and are in desperate need of this aid.

The crisis stems from the upheaval of Venezuela's "democratic" government which currently has two presidents. Nicolas Maduro was elected in 2015 but won because of a rigged election. He currently has the support of the military at his command. Juan Guaidó is a senator that has claimed the presidency and has the full support of the people of Venezuela. Guaidó had to flee the country recently and just returned but is facing arrest. He has also expressed many times that he wants the aid given by the U.S. This battle for the presidency has caused great strain on the people of Venezuela. China and Russia have identified Maduro as Venezuela's president, but 50 other countries including the U.S. have identified Guaidó as the current president. The crisis is likely to continue as it appears no agreement is on the horizon. Watch for updates from Gazette Staff as the story continues to unfold. <http://merrillmustangnews.weebly.com/merrill-gazette>