

insights

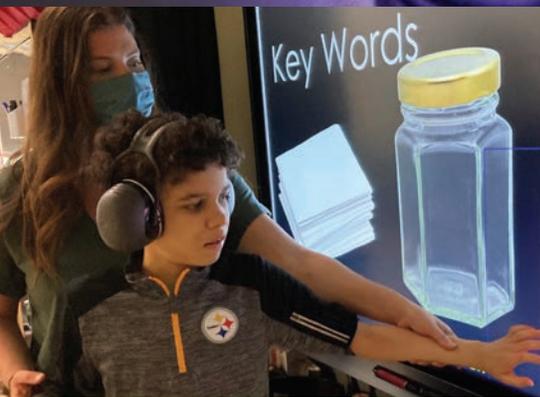
Western Pennsylvania
School for Blind Children

Summer 2021

Congratulations Class of 2021

.....
WPSBC celebrated the accomplishments of this year's graduates at the Senior Recognition Ceremony in June. Congratulations to each of the four graduates and their families on this important milestone!

5



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Nurturing the unique abilities of individuals with blindness and visual impairment through educational excellence and a lifetime of learning.

insights

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LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends:

I hope you and your loved ones are beginning to enjoy the summer months and all the fun that summer brings, perhaps a bit more fully than last year.

As a truly unforgettable school year comes to an end, I think you'll find the following pages reveal stories of triumph. Despite the setbacks, challenges, and yes, disappointments, our students rose to meet new challenges and succeeded in countless ways, thanks to you. Without your support, and that of all who have surrounded and supported our school community, particularly this past year, few if any of these successes would have been realized.

On behalf of the Board of Trustees, I want to express my deepest gratitude. We sincerely appreciate your contribution and dedication to the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children, today more than ever. And as we look to the future, we do so with hope and optimism, inspired by our students and all who comprise the WPSBC community.

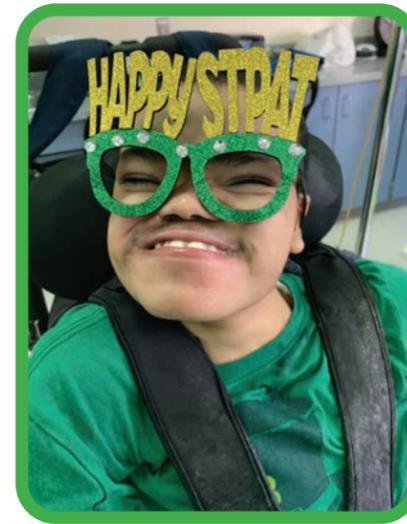
Sincerely,



Heidi Ondek, Ed. D.
Superintendent and Executive Director

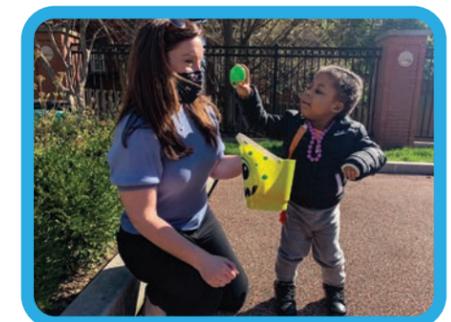


SPRINGTIME CELEBRATIONS



Spring was filled with celebrations and traditions. Each one held a special significance despite having to modify, or in some cases cancel, many celebrations last year due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

- In February, we celebrated the achievements of African Americans and recognized their role in U.S. history
- Our students and staff wore green attire for St. Patrick's Day in March
- Students in the Primary Program participated in the Annual Egg Hunt in the children's garden using colorful plastic eggs with beepers and flashing lights
- Students in the Secondary Program danced the afternoon away during a "Totally Awesome 80s" virtual prom held on Zoom
- The class of 2021 was recognized during the Senior Recognition Ceremony in June





Congratulations
Class of 2021

This year's graduates have excelled since arriving at WPSBC. Congratulations on this important milestone!



LET'S GET TO KNOW THE GRADUATING CLASS OF 2021:

Jacob Edward Kramer

Jacob's favorite activities are playing the drum, singing, creating art, listening to the singing bowl, dancing, making others laugh and playing the games "Don't Break the Ice" and "Don't Wake the Baby."



He excels at expressing himself, throwing things away and cleaning up, singing, greeting new people, requesting assistance and supporting his peers with encouragement. Jacob has worked really hard at walking, learning to feed himself and expressing his opinions.

Jacob's classroom responsibilities include folding linens, cleaning his personal space, delivering messages, shopping at the student-run store Paw Prints, and choosing and returning library books for his classroom.

Jacob is social with his peers and has a great sense of humor (he loves playing pranks)! He is described by his team as independent, strong-willed, decisive and caring.

Daron Moses Bradford

Daron's favorite activities are composing music, playing video games, using the iPad and playing card games.



He excels at socializing, has a great sense of humor and can make everybody laugh. Daron is an excellent musician and singer. He has a great memory and does not forget anything. Daron has worked really hard at typing on the computer, maintaining composure, following directions, learning new social skills and learning to tie and double-knot his shoes!

Daron's responsibilities include stocking office supplies and filling supply orders for staff. At Paw Prints he had several responsibilities from stuffing, labeling and sealing envelopes in the print shop to re-stocking store merchandise, bagging and pricing items and preparing the coffee cart. Daron has assisted the School during the pandemic by delivering masks to staff mailboxes and packaging iPad's to be sent home for remote instruction.

Daron is described by his team as friendly, comical, competitive, hard-working and kind.

Christopher William Ukasik

Christopher's favorite activities are listening to music, using the computer, working on science experiments, spending time in the greenhouse, dancing to music in culture class and playing sports in gym class.



He excels at participating in therapy sessions, learning new skills and actively listening. Christopher loves to make others smile with his great sense of humor, and he always cheers on his classmates.

At the School, Christopher is a helper at Paw Prints by wiping the shelves and tables and stocking snacks. Christopher does a great job with assisting with the creation of balloon displays.

Christopher is sweet, joyful, friendly, smiley, attentive and alert.

Rykeem C. Evins

Rykeem's favorite activities are moving around the classroom, listening to music and spending time with friends.



He excels at greeting his friends and is a great listener. Rykeem loves to travel all around the school and is always up for an adventure to explore new environments. He has worked very hard at feeding himself and mastering his vocational skills.

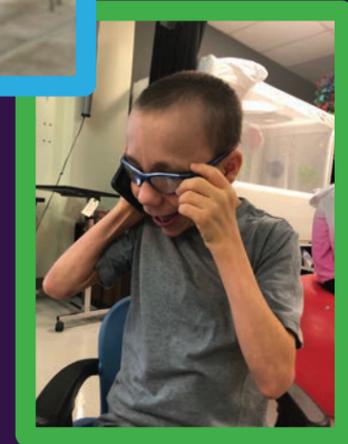
At Paw Prints, Rykeem stocks the snack displays, helps to create seasonal and holiday displays and completes deliveries. He also helps out on campus by assisting with the Battery Recycling Program.

Rykeem is described by his team as funny, a jokester, friendly and charming.

LET'S celebrate WPSBC STUDENT ACCOMPLISHMENTS!

Despite the challenges and uncertainties of the past year, our students continued to show up, virtually or in-person, excited and ready to learn. We celebrate student achievements and accomplishments and thank each student's family and educational team for encouraging and supporting student success.

All of our students shine. Get to know a few of them and their unique accomplishments:



Meet Max

Middle Program

Max self propels his one-arm-drive wheelchair throughout the school while practicing therapeutic listening or helping with classroom jobs. He has actively participated all year—both during remote and in-person instruction. Max recently transitioned from using 3D tactile symbols to using a new picture-based communication system. Using this system, Max can request toys and build his daily schedule.

"Max is showing great maturity in handling objects appropriately, self feeding and using a new communication device," said Julia Vorobiev, Middle Program Teacher.

Meet Darlene

Middle Program

Darlene has been working on her vocational, reading and literacy skills this year. When working in the greenhouse, she welcomes and assists customers, receives and tracks payments, and delivers profits to the accounting office at the end of her shift. Darlene applies her communication, math, reading and writing skills to real-world scenarios. Darlene enjoys reading stories to her classmates.

"Darlene comes to the greenhouse independently and prepared with her apron and name tag," said Debbie Frank, Horticulture Therapist. "She is very friendly with the customers and is a great asset to our Vocational Program!"

Meet Jasper

Secondary Program

Jasper comes to the classroom ready and excited for the day. He is a great dancer during the morning group song, and he enjoys catching up about the weather or how he is feeling. Jasper keeps up with his routine daily. He enjoys learning concepts related to science, literacy and culture. Jasper uses his cane and speech-generating device to help him travel through the school and communicate.

"Jasper is responsible and has improved his independence," said Katherine Andrews, Speech and Language Pathologist. "He cleans up after himself, packs his backpack and carries his speech device. He feeds himself and uses coping and replacement behaviors to manage his emotions."



Meet Rowan

Primary Program

Rowan joined his classroom when he was three years old and quickly learned new skills at an impressive rate. He was engaged in remote learning and participated in therapy sessions each week. Rowan's vocabulary has expanded, and he is becoming a more effective communicator. He is motivated to move, explore and sit up on his own. Rowan uses a gait trainer to walk independently and enjoys playing adapted soccer with his peers. He loves to dance to music and clap his hands.

"Rowan is filled with joy," said Allison Burke, Primary Program Teacher. "We are so very proud of how far he has come, and we cannot wait to see what the future holds for him."

Meet Illiyen

Primary Program

Illiyen (Illy) joined the School during the pandemic. Illy's first meetings with her educational team and classmates took place virtually. When Illy returned to in-person learning, she faced the challenge of adapting to her new classroom environment and being away from her parents during the school day. Illy's hard work, consistency, determination and courage quickly helped her to adjust, make friends and actively participate in learning.

Illy has made amazing progress in her nutrition, using her vision throughout the day and using her words to communicate with her team. She uses her hands to complete tasks and manipulate objects while participating in games, cooking class, story time and art.

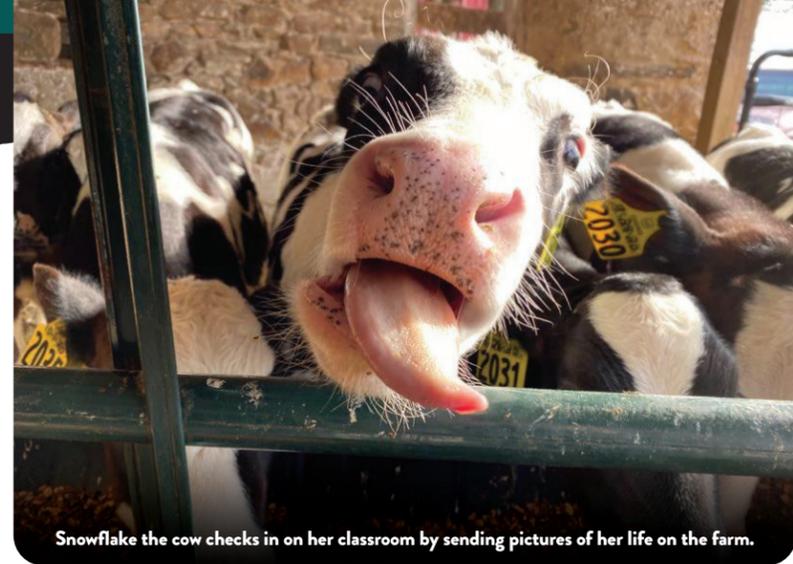
She recently celebrated her fourth birthday with her classmates. "Illy was absolutely joyful on her birthday," said Dena Petrella, Primary Program Teacher. "She and her classmates celebrated with music, a rainbow story and so much more. They truly enjoyed being together."

Meet Classroom 314

Middle Program

Ben, Mary, Kaylyb, Logan, Brianna and Kymoni are a class of rockstars! This group has shown extraordinary work throughout this year. Each of the students was present for remote instruction, ready to learn and grow, and they have continued with that same motivation on campus together with their peers. The class made strides in vision, communication, fine motor, gross motor, behavior management and orientation and mobility skills through classroom activities, tasks, playtime and mealtime.

"This learning would not have been possible without the support and dedication of our students' wonderful families who went above and beyond to assist their young learners during remote instruction," said Mary Gaudish, Middle Program Teacher. "They were our partners, working collaboratively throughout the year to ensure each student's success."



Snowflake the cow checks in on her classroom by sending pictures of her life on the farm.

HAVE YOU HERD THE GOOD MOOS?

WPSBC Classrooms have adopted cows!



We think she's "udderly" adorable!

Several classrooms at WPSBC have adopted cows through the Discover Dairy Program, which works to educate students across Pennsylvania about dairy farming by giving them a first-hand look inside a dairy farm.

Kate Barnes, Secondary Program Teacher, discovered the program and shared it with fellow WPSBC staff members who also participated. Barnes' class adopted Snowflake the cow at the start of the 2020-2021 school year. "We thought this would be fun for our students to share responsibility and learn about dairy during remote

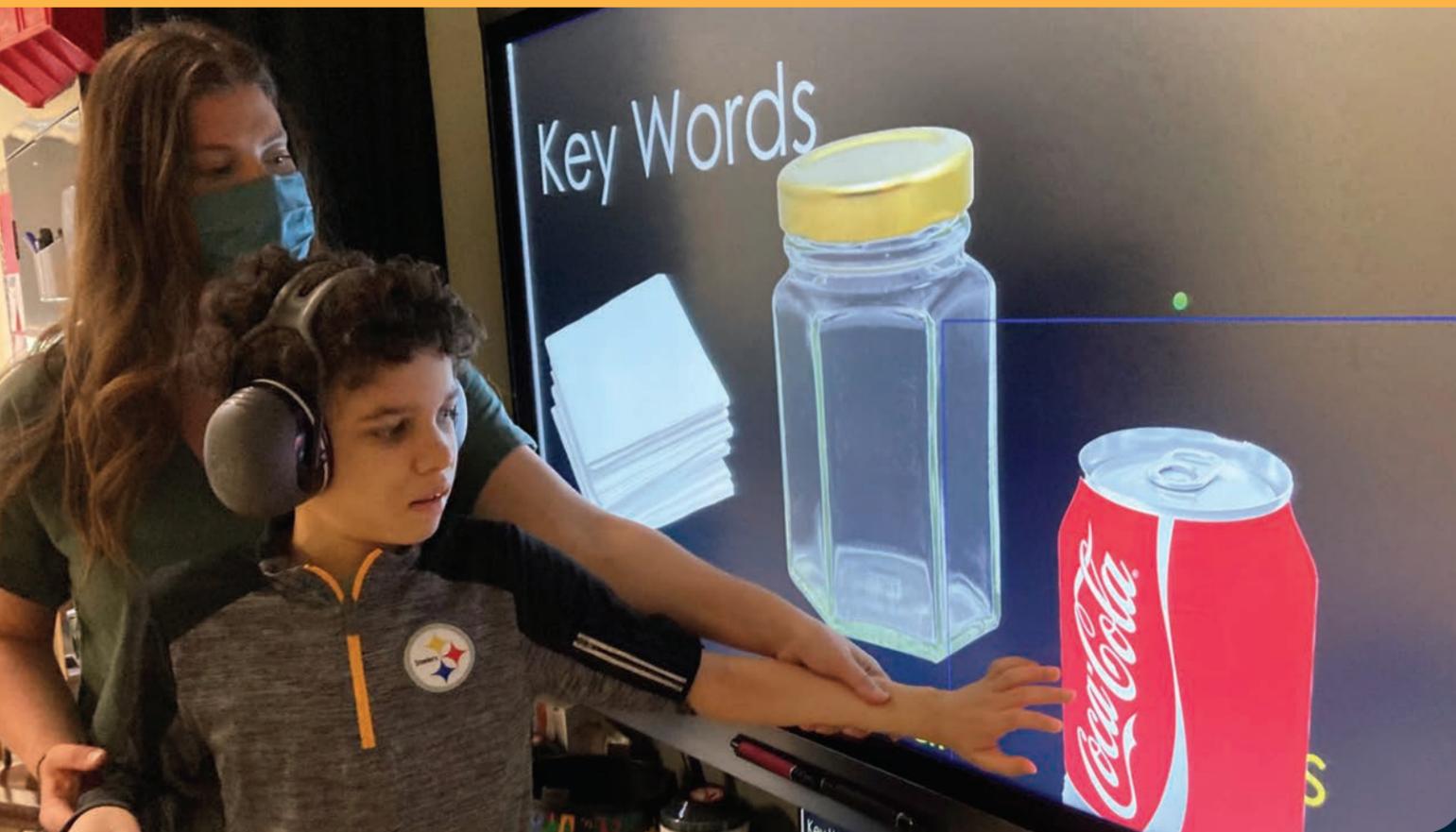
learning," said Barnes. "Snowflake was assigned to my classroom. She was born in October at a farm in Pennsylvania."

Students throughout Pennsylvania, Illinois and Minnesota participate in the program to gain a deeper understanding of the dairy industry. WPSBC classrooms organized lessons about farming, how much cows eat, how much milk they produce, foods that are dairy and recipes using dairy.

All participants in the program received a certificate stating, "By adopting this cow, your class agrees to watch as she grows and

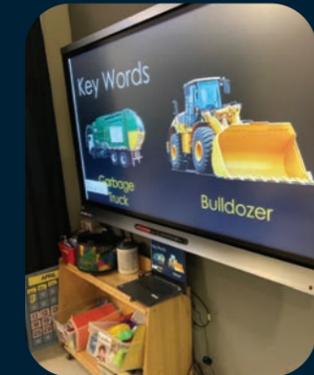
develops on the dairy farm. It is important to keep track of her health and well being just like her farmer does every day. It is encouraged to continue learning more about her role on the farm and how one day, she will be producing wholesome milk for you."

"Snowflake's farm sends us videos and photos of her with her cow friends," said Barnes. "The students love receiving updates on Snowflake and learning about her life on the farm."



Julia Vorobiev, Middle Program Teacher, celebrated CVI Literacy Awareness Month by reading the book “Recycle: A Handbook for Kids,” by Gail Gibbons with the weekly reading group.

“We used 3D objects and pictures on the SMART Board presented on a black background to support visual needs and concept development,” said Vorobiev. “We also did some hands-on activities to demonstrate some of the concepts discussed in the book.”



Celebrating CVI Literacy Awareness Month

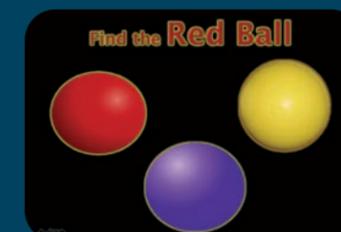
WPSBC celebrated Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) Literacy Awareness Month in April by highlighting several activities and lessons. CVI is a neurological-based vision impairment caused by damage to the visual pathways or visual processing areas of the brain.

This month-long campaign promoted by Paths to Literacy is aimed at raising awareness of the needs of students in each phase of CVI, and sharing information and strategies to support these students. Paths to Literacy is an online resource for educators and families providing literacy experiences and information for children who are blind or visually impaired.

WPSBC Occupational Therapist Debbie Fenton and Assistive Technology Specialist Patrice Bucheli published, “So Many Things Are Red: Animated PowerPoint Activities for Students with CVI,” as a PowerPoint resource for educators and families in the Paths to Literacy newsletter.



“We put together this PowerPoint for our students with CVI, and it was used based on a student’s CVI Range Score,” said Fenton and Bucheli. “The goal was to provide 2-D images and concepts that allowed us to work on a variety of lessons to discuss salient features and comparative language.”



The PowerPoint used animation, movement and color to focus on counting, numbers, and identifying shapes and images. Students participating in the activity used switch devices to independently navigate through the PowerPoint.

WHAT IS CVI?

Cortical Visual Impairment (CVI) is a term used to describe visual impairment caused by brain injury or damage to the brain. CVI differs from ocular forms of impairment in that the interference in visual function exists not in the eye or optic nerve, but in the visual pathways of the brain. This can be confusing, especially when children present with a healthy eye, but they do not appear to see. They may even appear to be blind, though we now know this to be untrue.

For resources related to CVI Literacy, visit the Cortical Visual Impairment Resources Page at www.wpsbc.org.

MAINTAINING A CLEAN AND SAFE ENVIRONMENT



WPSBC's Buildings and Grounds team, led by Dennis Kwiatkowski, Manager of Buildings and Grounds, and Sue McAleer, Director of Finance and Facilities, continues to maintain thorough cleaning and disinfection protocols in all areas of our campus to keep our school community safe. Cleaning takes place during the school day, in the evenings and on weekends. The team also has made several modifications to the layout of the buildings to allow for social distancing in classrooms by renovating, adding new bathrooms and replacing flooring. The following are some of the cleaning protocols at WPSBC:

- Buildings and Grounds staff come in on Saturdays to use electrostatic sprayers in all student areas and common areas
- Daily disinfecting of all areas
- High-touch surfaces are being wiped on a continuous basis
- Additional spray applications are applied as needs arise
- Inventory on all supplies is stocked regularly

Thank you for keeping our school safe!

Health Services Department Organizes Staff Vaccine Clinic

Dr. Elena Flores-Noel, Health Services Director, and the nursing team coordinated and helped to facilitate a vaccine clinic on-campus with Integrated Health 21, a health management company located on the South Side of Pittsburgh.

"Thank you to our nurses," said Rachelle Rectenwald, Assistant Superintendent. "The team has worked diligently to navigate the pandemic and keep our community safe."



Thank You!
Thank You!
Thank You!
Thank You!
Thank You!

As we finish the 2020-2021 school year at WPSBC, we want to thank you: our students, our families, our staff and our donors. We have learned, we have grown, we have responded and adapted.

Many of the changes we've made over the past year are lasting and have positively impacted the education of our students. Thank you sincerely for your support and efforts made.



At the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children,

We Respect one another and ourselves.

Reject any form of racism, prejudice or discrimination.

Believe racial equity is essential to excellence in education.

Engage in courageous and compassionate conversations and actions.

Collaborate to foster acceptance and strengthen human relationships.

Celebrate diversity as we learn with and from others.

Embrace peace, action, love, forgiveness and grace.

We are WPSBC.



www.wpsbc.org



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For information about the School, to arrange a tour or for a speaker, call 412-621-0100.

 Like us on Facebook to follow all the latest School updates at www.facebook.com/WPASchoolforBlindChildren

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YOU CAN MAKE AN IMPACT.



By giving to the WPSBC Foundation, you are directly supporting our students, and together we can empower them to excel in their own individual way.

Join us today to support the Western Pennsylvania School for Blind Children.

Visit www.wpsbcfoundation.org to learn about the many ways to give.

The Mission of the Foundation is to financially support the School's Mission to nurture the unique abilities of individuals with blindness and visual impairment through educational excellence and a lifetime of learning.



Mark Your Calendars!

 **12** ESY Program Begins

 **30** ESY Program Ends

 **26** Open House at WPSBC

 **29** Residential Students Return to Campus

 **30** First Day of School!

 **6** Labor Day, No School