OVERBROOK SCHOOL FOR THE BLIND

TOWERS NEWS

Vol.71, No.2, Spring 2018

**THINKING AND ACTING BOTH LOCALLY AND GLOBALLY**

The OSB International Program

Executive Director and CEO Todd Reeves and International Program Coordinator Wenru Niu recently met with OSB’s partners in Cambodia, Indonesia, Mongolia, and the Philippines, to improve our programs that bring change to underserved children with visual impairment.

Since 1985, OSB’s International Program has provided training, technical assistance and material support to increase educational access and expand employment opportunities worldwide for people with visual impairment.

*Cambodia:*

During their trip to Cambodia, Mr. Reeves and Ms. Niu continued the work of ON-NET, the Overbrook-Nippon Network on Educational Technology, to make access technology more widely available to people who are blind in Southeast Asia. Mr. Reeves and Ms. Niu were the guests at Krousar Thmey, the first foundation in Cambodia to help disadvantaged children by establishing schools for the blind and hearing impaired. The focus of this visit was to monitor project work on developing ICT (Information and Communication Technology), providing audiobooks to students, and training teachers in preparation for the upcoming takeover of schools for the blind and hearing impaired by the government in 2020. They visited schools in Siem Reap and Battambang, as well as met with the President of the University of Battambang.

*Mongolia:*

ON-NET co-sponsored a workshop with ICEVI (International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment) while meeting with the Mongolia National Federation of the Blind (MNFB). The workshop was entitled, “How to Achieve What You Want & Build Your Desired Lifestyle,” and featured a presentation from the workshop trainer, Karolis Verbliugevicius, a Lithuanian entrepreneur who is blind who shared his personal life experiences with students, factory workers, and MNFB members and staff.

*Indonesia:*

In Indonesia, Mr. Reeves and Ms. Niu met with representatives from the Mitra Netra Foundation, ON-NET, ICEVI, RBI and local school and university representatives, to discuss math instruction for blind students in Indonesia. The Mitra Netra Foundation also provided digital talking books to 44 special libraries in the country.

*Myanmar:*

Ms. Niu met with staff from the Myanmar National Association of the Blind to complete the Speech Application Programming Interface (SAPI) compliant Burmese Text-to-Speech (TTS) engine and discussed project options that can be supported by ON-NET. The final work will be done between the Sao   
Mai Vocational and Assistive Technology Center for the   
Blind in Vietnam.

*Vietnam:*

At the Sao Mai Vocational and Assistive Technology Center for the Blind in Vietnam, where the work has been focused on finding employment for adults with visual impairment, the team conducted meetings between potential employers and job seekers.

*Philippines:*

In the Philippines, Mr. Reeves had a chance to see firsthand the impact of the ON-NET Project. He met a few of the program’s beneficiaries; observed STEM training for teachers and Computer-Eyes Camp; visited Davao School for the Blind, and met and toured the Resources for the Blind, Inc.

*As a leader in the education of children with visual impairment and multiple disabilities, OSB is doing its part to foster and share high-quality blindness education around the world.*

Back at home, the OSB International Program also welcomed visitors from ICEVI, the International Council for Education of People with Visual Impairment. Joined by representatives from the Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired (TSBVI), and Perkins School for the Blind, the group met to determine the next steps for the ICEVI Nippon Foundation Mathematics Project and to conduct ICEVI’s Publications Committee meeting.

The goal of the Mathematics Project is to contribute to the worldwide improvement of mathematics education by developing a set of accessible multimedia instructional materials designed to assist teachers of children with visual impairments. Mathematics instruction is often neglected or nonexistent for children who are blind in developing countries throughout the world. This situation is not because children with visual impairment cannot learn mathematics; rather, mathematics instructors often present abstract concepts in visual form, preventing students with visual impairment   
from learning.

[Eight photos with this article.

In Photo #1: Five people are standing outside in front of the School for the Visually and Hearing Impaired in Siem Reap, Cambodia. Mr. Reeves is in the center with one staff member on his right and three more on his left. In Photo #2: Mr. Reeves is in a classroom with five staff members, They are all surrounding a computer and looking at the screen. In Photo #3: Mr. Reeves and Ms. Niu are posing for a large group photo in a classroom with staff members. In Photo #4: a group of 8 people are standing outside the front of OSB. Mr. Reeves is standing with Cyral Millers, Texas School for the Blind and Visually Impaired Outreach Director; Larry Campbell, President Emeritus of ICEVI and retired OSB International Program Administrator; Frances Gentle, President of ICEVI; Marianne Riggio, Director of Educational Leadership Program & International Campus Related Training at Perkins School for the Blind; Kay Ferrell, ICEVI North America/Caribbean Regional Chairperson; Wenru Niu; and M.N.G. Mani, CEO of ICEVI. In Photo #5: Mr. Reeves is standing with Mr. Karolis Verbliugevicius, at a school in Ulaanbaatar, the capital of Mongolia. In Photo #6: Mr. Reeves is standing with three male staffers at the Carl Balita Review Center in Manila. In Photo #7: Mr. Reeves stands outside with students and staff from the Davao School for the Blind. In Photo #8: Mr. Reeves ‘high-fives’ one of the youngest male students in a classroom in Mongolia.

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Executive Directors Message

[One photo: While sitting at a desk in a classroom at OSB, Mr. Reeves shows Cambodian money to High School student, Jessica B.]

Dear Friends:

Promoting accessibility and providing a barrier free environment in a campus that is over 150 years old that includes a Spanish Renaissance-style building with two interior cloisters is easier said than done.

Over the years, we’ve renovated buildings, added ramps and elevators,   
and modernized classrooms and dormitories to provide our students with opportunities for activity and independence. In the future, we will work with an architectural firm to guide us through a redesign of our buildings to provide appropriate accessibility throughout the campus.

But first, we wanted to engage a school safety and security firm to   
identify any capital considerations that we could pass along to our   
architects to integrate with their accessibility design work. During March, we scheduled a Safety and Security Audit in collaboration with National School Safety and Security Services (NSSSS), a firm based in Cleveland. Though we don’t consider the school to be an unsafe environment, inviting some fresh sets of eyes to examine our procedures, survey our grounds and talk with several members of our community was a proactive way to ensure we’re doing all we can to enhance student and staff safety.

How we approach safety and security in our schools is ever changing.   
We look forward to receiving a complete report with recommendations   
to update the safety, use and flow of most areas while preserving the   
building’s beloved architectural details.

The path ahead will no doubt be challenging, but necessary to match the trust parents place in our School, each day. Each day parents entrust us with the education and care of their children, our commitment to provide an educational environment that maximizes achievement, accessibility and safety is redoubled.

Sincerely,

Todd Reeves

*Executive Director and CEO*

WELCOME NEW STAFF

We have a lot of new faces at OSB this year. Take a minute to visit our website for the complete list of new staff members at [**http://bit.ly/2GuMvGT**](http://bit.ly/2GuMvGT).

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Spirit Week!

The OSB community showed its husky pride during Spirit Week in February.

This annual OSB tradition encourages students to wear a fun and funky array of clothes with a different theme for each day of the week.

On Monday, it was **Philadelphia Sports Team Day** which was easy to do since the Philadelphia Eagles had just won the Superbowl! [Photo: a young male student clutches his Eagles hat on his head.]

We rolled right out of bed on Tuesday for **Pajama Day**. [Photo: A young female student in her blue pajamas stands next to a seated female teacher who is wearing red and black checkered pajamas.]

Later in the week we celebrated **Crazy Hat Day**. [Photo: Three male adult students wear colorful hats they they made in class.]

Our students weren’t the only ones dressed up for Spirit Week. Here’s the lunchroom staff decked out in their finest for **Crazy Hat Day**. [Photo: A group of ten staffers each wearing different colorful hats, pose in a large group shot.]

On Friday we donned OSB gear for **Red and White Day** which included a Pep Rally full of cheers, contests and games. [Photo #1: An OSB teacher holds out a ruler that has two donuts hanging from a string. A student and another teacher try to eat the donut without using their hands. Photo #2: A young male student wearing red and white smiles at the camera. Photo #3: The Overbrook Husky stands in line with cheerleaders in the OSB gym.]]

**Thanks to students and staff for making Spirit Week a true celebration of our school community.**

**What is YOUR Defining Moment?** **When did you discover that YOU are ENOUGH?** Join the OSB Music Department on Thursday, May 17th, for a musical journey that uncovers our students’ unique strengths and individual beauty — our own Defining Moments. [Photo: an adult male student stands with both of his arms stretched up and out to the sky. He is looking up.]

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OUTBOUND WITH OSB

Thanks to a partnership with Art-Reach and support from Comcast, OSB students used typography and paint on a giant plaster bust of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. that was displayed on the steps of the Philadelphia Museum of Art during Black History Month (and seen by millions during the Eagles Superbowl Parade). [Photo: Three male students with canes stand outside next to the yellow painted bust of MLK.]

OSB was the proud recipient of the 2018 Member Agency Award presented during the Cultural Access Awards Ceremony hosted by Art-Reach. Thanks to a collaboration with the Pennsylvania Ballet’s Second Company and Art-Reach, six OSB students performed the world premiere of an original tap dance piece during the awards ceremony. It took ten dance rehearsals to get the steps just right, but we brought the house down during the performance! [Photo: A group shot of students in a final pose on stage. They are wearing black and red OSB t-shirts.]

While in Harrisburg to take in Executive Director and CEO Todd Reeves’ testimony before the Senate Appropriations Committee, OSB students, staff and alumni enjoyed a chance encounter with Governor Tom Wolf. From left, Tyeisha G. (red sweater), OSB School to Work Coordinator, Susan Vaughan (rear), OSB student Tyler J., OSB Alumni Class of 1977 Lyle Sine, Governor Tom Wolf, OSB Alumni Class of 1967 Bill Newmann and Betty Passanante-Rodriguez, Vice President, OSB Board of Trustees. After enjoying a tour provided by State Representative Morgan Cephas, the OSB staff, students and alums met Governor Wolf, where the Commonwealth’s 47th Governor took time to welcome our group and shake hands. [Photo: This is a group shot taken outside on steps of Capitol building.]

OSB athletes took part in the EAAB Winter Tournament in New York. The OSB cheerleaders placed 1st in the cheerleading competition and won the Spirit Award for outstanding sportsmanship. The OSB wrestlers placed 4th in the Wrestling competition. Special mentions to Tyler J. and Gilbert P. for winning their individual wrestling matches. Way to go, Huskies! [Photo #1: Five cheerleaders with pom-poms stand in a V-formation in the gym. Photo #2: Two wrestlers compete on blue mat while a referee stands nearby with a whistle.]

Transition Coordinator Bob Ashbridge and School to Work Coordinator Susan Vaughan presented at the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s Annual Conference on transition and the National Agenda’s Expanded Core Curriculum. OSB Teacher of the Visually impaired Rose Yanders discussed low and no cost technology for students with visual impairment. [Photo #1: Two OSB teachers stand next to a big OSB poster display. Photo #2: A female OSB teacher stands next to a poster display.]

Occupational Therapist Melissa Brown and Speech Language Pathologist Laura Stephan were selected to present at The Assistive Technology Industry Association’s (ATIA) Annual Conference. Melissa and Laura presented two different topics about how OSB is implementing assistive technology in the classroom. Topics covered were “Pairing Eye Gaze and Vibroacoustics for Students with Complex Needs” and “Tactile Talking 2: A Case Study.” [Photo: Two OSB female staffers stand next to a poster display.]

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ARTISTIC OFFERINGS

Artwork by three OSB students will be on display at the Pennsylvania Art Education Association’s Youth Art Exhibit in the Pennsylvania Department of Education’s building in Harrisburg through April 20th. [Photos 1-3: A photo of each piece of artwork is displayed.]

1. After listening to a story about poppy fields in honor of Remembrance Day (Veterans Day), Sydney A. from the Elementary program painted a field of poppies using 3D finger paint and a sponge brush.

2. After learning about Vincent van Gogh, Early Childhood student   
Noelle S. created a sunflower using   
3D bubble paint.

3. After a STEAM — Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts and Math — classroom lesson, Hezekiah R. from the Middle School sprinkled snow on colored tissue paper which bled and left a colorful abstract image.

**CREATIVE COLLABORATION**

Occupational Therapists Kelli Page and Abby Underkoffler collaborated with Overbrook’s Carpenter Extraordinaire, Vinny D’Angelico, to make functional and fun Busy Walls in the classroom. The Busy Wall encourages students to use their hands to explore and operate functional items in a safe, motivating way. It’s a great way to keep fidgety hands occupied as well as working on bilateral hand use, fine motor skills, cause and effect, and problem-solving skills. [Photo #1: A photo of the busy wall which includes bells, switches, and noise makers.]

Early Childhood student, Noelle S., loves to draw. When she heard that Ms. Worsley’s high school class produces the student newspaper, Noelle asked if her class would partner with her to write and illustrate a children’s story based on her favorite animal, a fox. The high school students agreed, and with guidance, they researched fables, fairy tales, and children’s books, to develop a story for Noelle to illustrate. The result is “Fiona The Fox” and the first reading of it was presented in Noelle’s classroom with her Early Childhood and High School friends. Everyone loved the story, and the High School students were impressed with how Noelle’s artwork brought the story to life. [Photo: Five High School students stand behind three Early Childhood students. One of the Early Childhood students is holding up a piece of paper with a drawing of a fox on it.]

**Insight ...information about eye conditions and diseases that can affect a child’s vision**

Albinism is a hereditary condition characterized by a variable lack of pigment in the eyes, skin or hair. People with albinism may have pale pink skin and blond to white hair, but there are different types of albinism, and the amount of pigment varies. The irises of their eyes may be white or pinkish. They are sensitive to bright light and glare and commonly have other vision problems. While some people with albinism can see well enough to drive, many have impaired vision and may even be legally blind. Albanism is often accompanied by nystagmus or strabismus. Since they are sensitive to bright light, people with albinism often wear tinted eyeglasses.

For more information about Albinism, visit [www.albinism.org](http://www.albinism.org)

LATEST RELEASES

**Check out** *Good Morning, Overbrook*, a news broadcast created by OSB High School students to keep our community up to date on events, activities and very cool things that happen at our school. Use this link to watch the latest broadcast on OSB’s Ustream channel.

http://www.ustream.tv/channel/92VYKkeCjq8

**Keep up with** the latest issue of *The Red and White* newspaper produced by OSB high school students.There are a variety of formats available on our website blog. Visit www.obs.org/blog.

**“Overbrook School for the Blind, 185 Years,” the 2016-2017 OSB Annual Report**, is available on our website at www.obs.org.   
If you would like to request a copy, please contact Maryann Flack in the Development Office at (215) 877-0313, ext. 256.

**DESIGNER BAG**

**BINGO**

Join Overbrook School for   
the Blind and Parents and   
Educators Responding to   
Children (P.E.R.C.) for Designer Bag Bingo on Saturday, April 21 in OSB’s Nevil Field House!

Guests will enjoy ten rounds of Bingo for a chance to win a designer handbag from Kate Spade, Michael Kors, Tory Burch, Coach and more. There will also be a 50/50, bonus Bingo rounds and chances to win additional prizes throughout the evening!

Register today for your chance to win one of these beautiful designer bags!

[Photo: An assortment of six handbags are displayed on a table.]

**DATE:** Saturday April 21, 2018

**LOCATION:**Overbrook School for the Blind Nevil Field House  
6333 Malvern Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19151

**TIME:** Doors Open at 6:00 PM, Event Begins at 7:00 PM

**TICKETS:**   
$30 in Advance/ $35 at the Door   
Reserve a Table of Eight – $230

**For additional information and to register,   
visit www.obs.org/specialevents**.

*Proceeds benefit OSB and P.E.R.C.**This is a BYO event: Guests are encouraged to bring their own beverages and snacks. Daubers and extra cards will be available for purchase.*

**TOWERS NEWSLETTER**

Vol. 71, No. 2, Spring 2018

Overbrook School for the Blind

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA

Established 1832

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