



# HCMS Cougar News

Harper's Choice Middle School  
5450 Beaverkill Road, Columbia, MD 21044

Mr. Stephen Wallis, Principal Ms. Debra Scrandis, PTA President

Website: <http://www2.hcpss.org/hcms>

PTA Email: [hcmsptanews@comcast.net](mailto:hcmsptanews@comcast.net)

Office: 410-313-6929

Fax: 410-313-5612

Guidance: 410-313-6931

March 3, 2008

"The News that Roars"

Volume 6 Number 7

## Principal's Corner March 3, 2008

**HCMS-Zapata's Night:** We held a wonderfully successful community dinner last evening, selling over 160 tickets. We enjoyed a "Taste of Mexico" in our Cougar café..... chips and salsa, an entrée, salad, and beverage. The owner, Cesar Flores, was again this year most welcoming, and everyone enjoyed a great meal, along with good conversation and Mexican music in the background..... and some splendid salsa dancing by Señor Sorkin, Señorita Miranda-Valladares, and our Spanish students. Much appreciation to our PTA; those parents and students who assisted in the set-up, serving, and clean-up; and Sally Moscatiello, who coordinated this year's activity.

### Kudos to Staff, Students, and Parents:

- \* Congratulations to parent *Beth Johnson* and Reading Specialist *Regina Hall*, who conducted a successful annual county-wide book drive, with Harper's Choice Middle collecting a number of books for other schools and students who need them throughout the county. We, too, benefited from the annual drive, as HCMS also received a number of books to replenish our inventory in classrooms and the media center.
- \* Kudos to eighth-grader *Mark Reyes*, who recently attended the National Young Leaders State Conference (NYLSC), in Chevy Chase. The organization states that NYLSC is a four-day "leadership conference for high achieving 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> graders." The seminars are designed to provide students experience in setting personal goals, studying group dynamics, appreciating diversity, and understanding presentation and public speaking skills.
- \* Art Kudos: On February 9, I had the opportunity to attend the Columbia Association's "Images of Freedom" Poster contest, in honor of Black History Month. Eighth-grader *Thomas Klotz* won for his creation, which netted him a \$25 gift certificate to the Columbia Arts Center, a CD of the show, and his work proudly displayed on the green Columbia Buses that you see about town. The following six students also received recognition and a certificate of participation: *Deniz Ertenu*, *Manrique Garay*, *Rachel Rabinowitz*, *Michael Reed*, *Greg Kim*, and *Matt Shin*. This poster contest is done annually, in collaboration with Corridor Transportation and the Columbia Association. Congratulations to art teacher *Ms. Maxquesar Jones* for her good work and guidance, as well as science teacher and 6<sup>th</sup> grade team leader *Mrs. Friend*, for her support in attending this event each year.
- \* Eighth-graders *Thomas Klotz* and *Caylan Perry* were selected as HCMS representatives to serve on the Voices for Change Youth Summit, a diverse group of youths and adults that empowers youth to take action and create positive change in Howard County. The Columbia Association, Howard County Connections, Howard County Department of Recreation & Parks, and Leadership Howard County are among the sponsoring organizations that seek student representatives from the school system.

**2<sup>nd</sup> Marking Period Academic Performance:** Be sure to peruse the grade-level area walls for the names of our academic stars from the second marking period. You will note our 6<sup>th</sup>-, 7<sup>th</sup>-, and 8<sup>th</sup>- Grade Distinguished Students, those students with combinations A's and B's, as well as those considered Most Improved. Congratulations to all of our academic stars!!

**Destination Imagination:** You may know that we've a number of students who participate in this activity, which is about creativity and problem-solving. Teams of up to 7 members compete in various challenges stressing complex thinking, problem solving, and teamwork. The program teaches critical life skills, brainstorming, critical thinking, presentation skills, project management, knowledge application confidence, team work, time management, and research skills.....whooaaaaa! HCMS has two teams, and we are thankful that parent *Sally Moscatiello* generously finds the time to lend so much guidance and support. The HCMS team won 1<sup>st</sup> place on Saturday, 2/23, at the Maryland North Central Regional Tournament. The team consists of *Jeremy Kass*, *Cristiana Little*, *Lauren Marshall*, *Babette Newman*, *Emily Pfannenstein*, *Gabe Smith*, and *Nataliya Taylor*. They solved the Destination Imagination Improvisational problem, and had only 30 minutes to create a 6-minute performance which combined several randomly drawn story elements, develop a solution to a randomly chosen problem, and use "garbage items" such as cardboard and coat hangers to build a

soundtrack to enhance their performance.....plus, they also had to solve an "instant challenge," with only a few minutes to build a solution to perform a specific task. The team of 7th graders moves on to the Maryland State Tournament on April 12. Additionally, two Harper's Choice alumni, *Zak Little* and *Jonah Scheinerman*, placed first in the Destination Imagination Technical Challenge, representing the joint team from Altholton and Wilde Lake High Schools. Congratulation, once again, to these fine academic plodders, creative/critical thinkers, and competitors!

**Interims:** These progress reports were distributed to students this past Friday, February 29. Students should have already returned the parent-signed envelope to their appropriate homeroom/advisory teacher.

**February HCPSS Parent-Teacher Conferences:** Many thanks to those parents who were able to schedule conference appointments with their youngsters' teachers last month. It takes a great deal of love, energy, time, and effort raising and educating youngsters, and we appreciate the support and guidance that you put forth as the home and school continue to forge partnerships.

**Read Across America:** This annual event takes place during the month of March. HCMS reading staff, students, and parents have produced a wonderfully creative "reading quilt" that is displayed on the outer walls circling the grade-level areas. We will also conduct a "Book Exchange," allowing students to donate a book and, in exchange, select a book of their choice. Additionally, I will participate, along with other selected staff, to read selections from "The Cat in the Hat," by Dr. Seuss. Finally, as you may know, those students having met their Accelerated reader 2<sup>nd</sup> marking period goals are attending Atholton High School's performance of "Seussical the Musical" on March 5. Much appreciation to a fine staff, terrific students, and wonderfully supportive parents.

**Howard County Library Spelling Bee:** This county-wide spelling bee takes place on Friday, March 14, 7:00 p.m., at the Howard High School Auditorium. Winners from various schools and home-schooling associations compete that evening for the county championship. As you may recall, student Rebecca Fritz was our school champion, with Becca Newkirk taking 2<sup>nd</sup> place runner-up, and Yasmin Shemali placing 3<sup>rd</sup>. Rebecca will represent HCMS in this month's contest, and Becca will be our alternate. We are proud of these students' accomplishments and the hard work that goes into such an achievement. The winner of this bee will represent Howard County in the National Spelling Bee held in Washington, DC. How cool is that! We wish our students well, and I hope many are able to come out and support the program!

**HCMS Drama Production: Drama Club:** This year's drama production of *Alice in Wonderland*, directed by English teacher Mr. Mitton, will be presented March 6 and 7, at 7:30 p.m. and two performances on Saturday, March 8, a matinee at 1:30 and again in the evening, at 7:30. We've a good number of our cherubs involved, and students/staff have been working weekdays and Saturdays building stage props in the Cougar cafe. Much appreciation to Mr. Mitton, Ms. Marshall, and Ms. Brenner for their generous time and effort in guiding these student drama performances, and a special thanks to those parents and staff members, who gave a good portion of their Saturday in January to help frame out the sets! Sincere appreciation to all of you wonderfully supportive parents for your assistance and support, without which we could not provide such a wonderful experience for our youngsters.

**Music in Our Schools Month:** The National Association for Music Education cites the month of March for its focus on this fine art. HCMS is again this year conducting a poster contest around the theme "Music Touches Lives," and how students may relate it to our school-wide emphasis on Respect, Responsibility, and Relationships. Students are asked to be creative, turning in their poster entries to Mr. Gaylord no later than March 12. Grade-level winners will receive an iTunes gift card.

**Accelerated Reader (AR) Program:** Accelerated Reader (AR) Program: This fine program continues to be strong, providing students opportunities to read on their own, to take comprehension tests, and to earn points that allow them to receive prizes and improve their reading grades. Many thanks to parent Setareh Shemali, Reading Specialist Regina Hall, and Reading Team Leader Kathy Biscardi, without whom the program would not be a success.

**HCPSS MIDDLE SCHOOL PROMOTION STANDARDS:** In order to be promoted from Grade 6 to Grade 7, from Grade 7 to Grade 8, or from Grade 8 to high school, middle school students must accomplish the following: 1.) Pass all

courses; 2.) Receive a final grade of “C” or better in English, mathematics, reading, science, and social studies. *Students who do not meet this requirement will automatically be considered for retention and be recommended to attend summer school.* Academic eligibility standards will apply to ninth-graders beginning with the first marking period of their freshman year, at which time they will be expected to maintain a 2.0 grade point average and have no failing grades in order to participate in extracurricular activities. These rules govern academic eligibility for student participation in all extracurricular activities, including but not limited to: athletic teams, cheerleading, school plays and musicals, school clubs, running for or serving in an elected school office, and non-required trips by performing groups (i.e. bands, choirs, etc.). Feel free to pick up a copy from any school’s administrative office.

**HCPSS Local Assessments:** As you know, we administer to all students end-of-quarter “local assessments” in mathematics, English, science, and social studies. Additionally, assessments are given to students in health education classes, as well as in 7th and 8th Spanish and French classes in marking periods 2 & 4. Teachers work hard to ensure that appropriate material is completed for each marking period’s assessments. While reading skills/tasks are embedded in these assessments, there is considerable writing involved. Individual and group assessment data are used to provide feedback for teachers to target student areas of weakness and strength, allowing intervention strategies to improve student learning. The relevant feedback on instruction and learning is also used to inform future instruction and modifications to curricula. FYI.....these county-wide school system assessments are given each grading quarter throughout the school year.

**HCMS Professional Development School (PDS):** FYI.....Our PDS program continues to do well, serving as a student teaching training ground for students attending Towson University. As you may recall, this is a collaboratively planned partnership for the academic and clinical preparation of teaching interns and the continuous professional development of HCMS and university faculty. Social Studies teacher Ms. Leighanne Vader serves as our PDS site liaison, working with HCMS and Towson University administration and staff to provide a meaningful worthwhile experience for future teachers, as well as for our HCMS students and staff. Among the benefits is a host of professional development courses that are made available to HCMS teaching staff.

**Maryland State Assessments:** FYI..... these state assessments (for all grade levels) will be administered during April and May. The mathematics MSA’s will take place on April 1 and 2; reading MSA’s will take place April 8 and 9; science MSA will occur for only our eighth-graders between April 23 and May 13; and the algebra High School Assessment (HSA) will be administered on May 22. Please contact assistant principal Ms. Patricia Murray, if you think you may have time to volunteer, serving as a monitor. You may also feel free to contact guidance staff with any questions regarding these assessments.

**Sweet Serenades:** Wednesday, March 26, from 7:00-9:00 p.m., in the Cougar Café. This is our wonderful annual occasion to host our many students’ fine arts talents---vocal, dance, instrumental---in a kind of cabaret-like atmosphere, featuring parent-sponsored desserts. I hope you will be fortunate to join us, as everyone finds the evening to be very entertaining.

As always, thank you for recognizing the importance of a shared partnership in the education of (y)our youngsters!

Sincerely,

Stephen Wallis  
Principal

## GUIDANCE NEWS

### **OPPORTUNITIES FOR FAMILIES WITH SPECIAL NEEDS**

Autism Awareness Nights at The Rockfish Restaurant in Annapolis! The Rockfish Restaurant is hosting Autism Awareness nights on the third Tuesday of each month. Families with children who have Autism are encouraged to come and enjoy a family meal without any stigma. The chef will offer several items that are either gluten or asein-free and background music will be turned down to reduce sensory overload. A quiet room will be available if needed. The evening is all about acceptance and understanding and helping loved ones enjoy all the experiences that everyone else enjoys. 10% of the proceeds from each of the Autistic Awareness evenings will be donated to Pathfinders for Autism. Please call 410-267-1800 for more information.

The Howard County Autism Society and AMC Theatres at Columbia Mall will be offering movie showings for families with special needs. There will be no trailers, the volume will be kept down and the lights will be kept up. Children are encouraged to take sensory breaks. All families and friends with special needs are welcome. Showings will start at 9:30am and doors open at 8:45 am. Cost is \$6.00 per person. The upcoming schedule is:  
**3/29/08:** Horton Hears a Who  
**4/12/08:** Nim's Island

Parents of children with AD/HD. A new support group has formed! CHADD Parent Support Group meets the 2nd Tuesday of each month 7-8:30 pm, at the Norbel School, 6135 Old Washington Rd, Elkridge, MD, 21075. For more info, please call: Nancy Rhodes, 410-796-6700.



**STRESSLESS TESTS** a non-profit organization recognized as an educational partner with the Howard County Public School System presents Study Skills:

### **Spring, Summer, and Parent Courses**

**The Testing, A Workshop for Parents** of students who don't test well will meet March 11 from 7:00 - 8:30 p.m. at Centennial High School. Parents will learn the most effective strategies to help, resulting in more independence and higher performance for students on both classroom and standardized tests. The fee is \$85 and the second parent is free.

**Spring Middle School Study Skills** classes meet Monday evenings April 7 - 28, 6:30 - 8:30 p.m., or Tuesday afternoons April 22 - May 13 from 3:45 - 5:45 p.m.. The fee is \$175 and includes the *Study for Success* DVD. Classes meet at Burleigh Manor Middle School.

**Summer Study Skills** is now a 5-day course, with new games and activities for a lighter touch for summer. Middle School classes start the weeks of July 28, August 4 and August 11, and meet from 12 noon to 2 pm. The fee is \$185 and includes the *Study for Success* DVD. All classes meet at Centennial High School.

### FROM THE HEALTH ROOM

Please make sure you fill out the extended day field trip forms. We will use the needed information for all field trips! If your child takes medication regularly or needs to take medication on an extended day field trip, please have the doctor fill out their portion of the form.

Please remember to update new phone numbers ASAP. If an emergency arises the emergency contact information you provide to us is our only lifeline to you.

If your child's medical condition or medications change, please notify the Health Room (remember the first thing the paramedics ask is what medications is this child taking, are there any allergies to medication, or do they have asthma). This updated information could save your child's life!

### **Spring is coming. Be prepared!**

Does your child have Asthma? Asthma is a chronic condition that affects about 10% of children at some time during childhood. Some of the common triggers are: Viral infections, exercise, allergens, environmental irritants, and emotions. If your child has asthma please be sure that the Health Room has an inhaler for your child should an episode arise.

Also, does your child have an allergic reaction to bee-stings or food? If any Epi-pen is needed for such cases, make sure the Health Room has one available for your child.

Not sure if you should send your child to school? If your child has a temperature of 100 degrees or higher, the student needs to stay home. They need to be fever free for 24 hours before returning to school. The isolation of ill students at home can prevent the spread of illness in the school.

If you are in need of health insurance for your child.....you may be Eligible for the Maryland Children's Health Program. Call 1-800-456-8900 for more information. Remember, a physical exam is needed for every child who attends a Howard County Public School.

### **HEALTH AWARENESS DURING FLU SEASON**

Symptoms of influenza include fever, headache, chills, body aches, tiredness, dry cough, sore throat, and nasal congestion. Flu is spread from person to person through the air by coughing and sneezing. It is also spread by direct contact with infected people. Symptoms usually start 1-3 days after exposure. If you get the flu: rest; drink plenty of fluids such as juice, water or hot tea. Most persons

feel better after several days but cough and tiredness may last two weeks or more. Stomach cramps and diarrhea are not typical symptoms of influenza. Do not give over the counter medications to a child without first consulting your pediatrician. If a fever lasts more than 3 or 4 days, consult a physician. Do NOT come to school with a fever or when taking medication to reduce a fever. A physician may also prescribe certain antiviral medications. These medications may make symptoms milder if taken within 1 to 2 days of when symptoms begin.

### **Always remind children to:**

**Cover their mouth with a tissue when they cough or sneeze** – have them throw the tissue away after they use it. If they do not have a tissue, they should cough or sneeze into their upper sleeve, not their hands.

**Wash their hands often with soap and water**, especially after they cough or sneeze, before eating lunch and after using the bathroom. If water is not near, use an alcohol-based hand cleaner.

**Not to touch their eyes, nose or mouth.** Germs spread this way.

### **CELL PHONES**

Please remind your children that Harper's Choice Middle School is a cell phone free building. Cell phones may be brought into the building but have to remain off and in their locker during the school day. We also request that parents not use cell phones in the building. Your cooperation is appreciated.

### **MEDIA CENTER NEWS**

**READ ACROSS AMERICA** will be celebrated at HCMS March 3 – 7, 2008. During morning and afternoon announcements a staff member will read part of Dr. Seuss's Cat in the Hat. Also, students are invited to participate in a **BOOK EXCHANGE** called *BRING A BOOK --- GET A BOOK*. Here is how it works. Students that wish to participate will bring a book that they are willing to donate and give it to their Reading teacher by March 5<sup>th</sup>. In return,

they will have the opportunity to select a book of their choice from the donated books. On March 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> each reading teacher will bring their class to the Media Center to select their book from the exchange. All books should be of interest to Middle School readers. If you have any questions please contact either Ms. Oatts or Ms. Biscardi at 410.313.6929.

### GT NEWS

#### Black Saga Competition

Congratulations to the following 7th grade students who competed in the county-wide Black Saga competition and did a fantastic job representing Harper's Choice:

Dominic Halstead  
Sean Salley  
Emma Hughes  
Maya Glover  
Juan Sandoval  
Aaron Robertson

Black Saga is a trivia competition of the African American experience from the 1600s to present day. Students have more than 800 facts to learn about experiences, people, events, dates, and places that were an integral part in shaping African American history.

Members of the Black Saga team will go to the state competition on March 15th at Towson University. We look forward to hearing how well they did!

Memory books are on sale for \$22.00 now through March 14th. Student created, professionally bound...all of your best 2007-08 school year memories captured in one book! Order forms can be picked up from and turned into Ms. Gorkiewicz.

Good luck to the Debate Team who will face off in the countywide debate on March 13th against Oakland Mills Middle School on the topic of "Should school uniforms be mandated in public schools?" HCMS will have the negative side of the debate, arguing against a mandate on school uniforms in public schools.

Mark your calendars:

- March 5- Middle School Book Club Meeting.  
7-8pm. Barnes and Noble, Ellicott City.
- March 14 - Memory Book Orders and Money due to Ms. Gorkiewicz
- April 2 - Middle School Book Club Meeting.  
7-8pm. Barnes and Noble, Ellicott City
- April 9 - Incoming 6th Graders G/T Orientation.  
7-8pm. Cougar Cafe
- April 29 - G/T Parent Meeting. 7-8:30pm. Meeting House at Oakland Mills
- May 7 - Middle School Book Club Meeting.  
7-8pm. Barnes and Noble, Ellicott City.
- May 14 - HCMS Enrichment Fair. 6:30-8:00.

If you have any questions regarding the G/T program at HCMS, please contact Ms. Gorkiewicz at [Megan\\_Gorkiewicz@hcpss.org](mailto:Megan_Gorkiewicz@hcpss.org)

### HOWARD COUNTY PUBLIC LIBRARY

The Library is offering FREE live on-line homework help. Check it out at [www.howa.lib.md.us/](http://www.howa.lib.md.us/). The service is available seven days a week from 2 p.m. through 1:00 a.m. Eastern time. Students in 4<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grades, as well as college freshmen, can use the service as often as they wish and receive help in math, science, social studies and English. A Howard County Public Library card is necessary to access this free service.



What if...? That's the theme for Google's Doodle 4 Google contest. If you love to doodle, put your imagination and creativity to work and start designing your own Google logo. You can start by downloading a logo template from <http://www.google.com/doodle4google/forms.html>

Any HCMS student may submit an entry, and the top six designs chosen by a panel of judges will be entered in the national contest. Entries are to be turned in, along with a completed Entry Form and Consent Form, to the Administrative Front Office at HCMS no later than April 4.

The National Winner will have his/her logo displayed on the Google homepage for 24 hours on May 22, 2008. He/she will also win a \$10,000 college scholarship, a laptop computer, t-shirt, and a trip to the Googleplex in California. Plus, the winner's school will win a \$25,000 grant toward the establishment/improvement of a computer lab.

For the official rules check out <http://www.google.com/doodle4google/index.html>  
For additional questions, please contact Deanna Newkirk at [mdnewkirk@verizon.net](mailto:mdnewkirk@verizon.net) or (410) 992-9367

### **MUSIC IN OUR SCHOOLS MONTH CONTEST**

The month of March is designated Music in our Schools Month, by the National Association for Music Education. HCMS will have a student poster contest again this year. Please see the contest rules below.

How would you like to win an iTunes gift card? How you ask?

We know music touches your life in many ways, so create a poster that shows how one of the 3 Rs; respect, responsibility, or relationships, relate to music.

Here are the 4 simple rules:

- 1) Create a colorful poster relating one of the 3 R's to music.
- 2) Make it no larger than 16x20 inches.
- 3) The contest will run from Monday, March 3rd through Wednesday, March 12th.
- 4) All poster entries must be turned into Mr. Gaylord, room 508, no later than March 12th.

Posters will be judged by staff and one winner in each grade level will be announced on Friday, March 28th!

### **IMPORTANT DATES**

- March 09 - Day Light Saving Time begins (Turn your clock forward 1 hour)
- March 17 - 24 Schools Closed for Spring Break
- April 04 - Schools Close 3 hours early  
End of marking period
- April 24 - Schools Closed  
Professional Development Day