



WINTER 2025 NEWSLETTER

A Letter From the Superintendent



Dear C-M Students, Staff, and Community,

While I have only been here a short time, I want to recognize the dedication of our staff and parents in their quest to draw out the limitless potential in each of our students. I have worked in districts large and small and growing up in a small district gives our children the opportunity to be seen as individuals while creating the sense of community and belonging that the world needs.

As we finish the rest of the school year, let us re-dedicate ourselves to meeting the challenges associated with public education. We are looking at a tough budget year in that increased costs in energy, health care, contractual increases, and unfunded mandates strain our resources. State aid will never rise at the same rate, leaving a gap that can only be filled by increasing revenue, using our reserves, or cutting expenses. We will continue to keep you informed as we move through the process of building the 2025-26 budget.

As you know, the Board of Education is searching for your new Superintendent. I am happy to report that you will have a good pool of candidates for this critical position. Please visit our website for updates and to see how you can participate in the process.

On a positive note, the State Education Department is finally recognizing that our graduates need a “pathway” to graduation and beyond that will allow them to enter a career or college with the skills necessary to survive and thrive in an ever-changing world. There is a new emphasis on Career and Technical Education (CTE) and the application of knowledge. The ability to reason and adapt are skills that transfer into any career. The emphasis must be on how to think, not what to think. I am confident in the ability of our teachers and administrators to provide a meaningful education to our students.

I am honored to be your interim Superintendent and look forward to working with all of you to provide our children with a relevant and meaningful educational experience at Cato-Meridian CSD.

Sincerely,

Mr. Michael J. Hoose

Interim Superintendent of Schools

UPCOMING EVENTS

February 10 Board of Education Meeting, 6 PM, District Office

February 17-21 Winter Recess - No School

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SMALL COMMUNITY, BIG IMPACT

EXCITEMENT IN THE *Elementary*

What an incredible start to the year it has been! As we settle into the second half of our school year, I want to take a moment to reflect on all the exciting events and accomplishments we've shared so far.

Hands-on learning has been a highlight with events like the Hovercraft STEM experience and engaging field trips that brought classroom lessons to life. We also welcomed our local heroes from the Cato Fire Department, who taught students about fire safety in an interactive and unforgettable way. Our students enjoyed a Walk-a-thon as they raised money for Family Engagement activities. We also honored our veterans in a memorable ceremony which was attended by many who made sacrifices for each and every one of us. A beautiful tribute was also made for those who have passed on or could not be with us in person.

Several of our students were part of the Junior Drama production of *Twice Upon a Time* and we enjoyed the high school musical production of *Mean Girls*. These performances were the last to be held in our auditorium before renovations began. We are excited to enjoy our new auditorium in the fall when we return! In the meantime, we have made good use of our gymnasium as an assembly area. We had nice feedback about our winter concert that was held there as all of the groups performed magnificently!

The Junior-Senior HS Student Council sponsored Kids Night Out was a hit, giving parents a chance to recharge while their children enjoyed an evening of fun activities. Parent engagement continued during our parent-teacher conferences, fostering strong partnerships to support student growth.

The PTO sponsored Penguin Patch Holiday Shoppe was a festive success, giving students the chance to select thoughtful gifts for loved ones. Coupled with the PTO Book Fair, these events encouraged independence and nurtured family engagement.

We kicked off the new year with a buzz of excitement during our recent Spelling Bee, where students showcased their impressive vocabulary and poise under pressure. Congratulations to our top four spellers: Chance Peterson, Sarah Harmon, Anya Regester, and Emmitt Hilton. Shortly after, families came together for our Flurries of Fun Literacy Night, a memorable evening filled with storytelling, crafts, games, free books and a shared love of reading.

Looking ahead, we're thrilled about the opportunities spring holds. Highlights include our recent Lego League competition, upcoming Odyssey of the Mind competition, PARP, concerts, annual Spring Showcase, a science fair, and the much-anticipated field days. And let's not forget our State testing which will showcase what our students have learned! Our calendar is filling up with exciting events, and we're eager to continue building on the momentum of academic growth and community spirit.

I want to express my heartfelt gratitude to our students, staff, and families for their resilience and flexibility as we navigate changes brought on by the ongoing capital project, such as classroom relocations, the loss of one of our cafeterias and gymnasiums, and updated arrival/dismissal procedures during construction. Your support has been invaluable in ensuring a positive experience for everyone. Together, we're creating a school environment that is safe, welcoming, and conducive to learning.



Thank you for your continued partnership. Let's make this spring one to remember!

Warm regards,

Mrs. Danielle Mahoney
CMES Principal



JR.-SR. HIGH SCHOOL *Happenings*

This winter is certainly showing us more snow and colder temperatures than we have been used to. I hope you are enjoying this wintry season. This school year is moving so quickly; I can't believe we are already starting our second semester. I am proud of the hard work, excellent academics, club activities, and athletics, as well as seeing so many smiling faces every day.

We appreciate your patience and flexibility with all of the construction happening around our campus. It's an exciting time of year as we work to enhance our facilities for the future. As part of these updates, we would like to inform you that the entrance to the technology wing as well as classrooms will be closed beginning February 24th. Morning drop off and pick up will be through the office main entrance. Ms. Bornt, Mr. Ostroski and Mr. McGowan will be relocating to new classrooms for the rest of the year.

With the start of a new semester, we encourage all students to set academic goals and approach their studies with focus and determination. Our dedicated faculty and staff are here to support every student in achieving their best. Please take a moment to review your child's progress and discuss their goals for the coming months. Together, we can ensure their academic success.

Our counselors, Mrs. Sawyer and Miss Patchin, are currently working with students on course selections and academic planning for the 2025-2026 school year. This is a crucial time for students to explore their interests and consider courses that align with their passions and future aspirations. Whether preparing for college, exploring vocational opportunities, or developing new skills, thoughtful course selection is an essential step toward success.

We are also excited to offer distance learning opportunities in partnership with Cayuga Community College. These courses allow students to earn college credit while still in high school, providing a head start on their post-secondary education. These courses are offered to juniors and seniors only. We have a medical, education, criminal justice and engineering pathway. Please encourage your child to discuss these opportunities with their counselor to determine the best fit for their goals.

Our Blue Devils have been busy these last couple of months:

Student Council:

Hosted our annual kids night out for elementary students. The students, both big and small, had a fantastic time.

FFA:

Our FFA students are busy preparing for their upcoming leadership development events and the Ignite Leadership Conference.

Music Department:

Put on a fabulous holiday concert- so proud of our musicians!

Art Department:

Over 20 of our students have their artwork published in the Three Lakes Sampler and on display in the Both Ends of the Rainbow show at Schweinfurth Art Museum.

Thank you for your continued support and dedication to our students and school.



Together, let's make this semester one of growth, achievement, and school spirit.

Warm regards,

Ms. Jennifer Kelly

Junior-Senior High School Principal

ATHLETICS UPDATE

Dear Blue Devils community:

Our student-athletes have been working hard, representing Cato-Meridian with pride, determination, and sportsmanship. Here's an update on our winter sports teams:

JV & Varsity Girls Basketball:

Our teams are off to an impressive start this season. The athletes have shown tremendous growth, with a strong focus on teamwork and defense. Varsity players are giving their all, while the JV team builds a solid foundation for the future. We're proud of their commitment and can't wait to see them continue to develop.

JV & Varsity Boys Basketball:

These boys have been showcasing their talent and grit on the court. The Varsity team is working hard in league play, fed by strong senior leadership and a drive to make every game count, while our JV team members are sharpening their skills.

Varsity Indoor Track:

Our athletes have been competing in high-energy meets and achieving personal bests across various events and we have even had a few school records broken. From sprinters to distance runners and field event athletes, every member of the team is pushing their limits and making strides. Their dedication to practice and performance is inspiring, and we're eager to see how they finish the season.

Varsity Cheerleading:

The squad has grown all the way to 11 Cheerleaders this winter. Their performances are energetic and engaging as they're cheering on our basketball teams. Their hard work and enthusiasm bring fire to every event they attend!

Girls 7th & 8th Grade Basketball:

Our younger Blue Devils in the 7th and 8th grade girls basketball program are developing their skills and love for the game. They've been improving with every practice and game, setting a foundation for our future high school teams. Watching them grow is a highlight of this winter season!

Varsity Wrestling:

Team Alphabet is having a strong season, with several athletes achieving success on the mat and representing Cato-Meridian with pride. They've faced tough competition but continue to rise to the challenge, showing resilience and dedication. We're proud of their achievements and the hard work they put in every day.

We are looking forward to an exciting season of spring sports! Varsity and JV spring sports practices will begin on Monday, March 17th, and registration will open on Monday, February 17th. All spring modified sports will start practices on Monday, April 7th, with registration opening on Monday, March 10th. Varsity Sports Awards Night will be Tuesday, June 10th at 6:00 PM (location TBD).

**SPRING SPORTS
REGISTRATION**



Click to view Spring
Sports Registration

I'd like to extend my gratitude to our coaches, families, and fans for their unwavering support this season. Your encouragement means the world to our student-athletes and helps create an atmosphere of pride and community at every event.

As we continue through the winter season, let's keep showing up for our teams and celebrating their hard work and accomplishments.



Go Blue Devils! Warm regards,

Mr. Rob Wren

Athletic Director & Student Services Coordinator

Let's Go BLUE DEVILS!



BUSINESS OFFICE News

New loader purchased with \$50k grant



Greetings from the Business Office. Our Transportation and Facilities Department have been doing a tremendous job responding to the snowy weather we have been experiencing. Please see below for some areas of interest.

Facilities: The CMCS D received a \$50,000 NYS Legislative Grant through Representative John Lemondes Jr. to purchase a new loader for snow removal. We are excited to add this item into our fleet as it is a multipurpose piece of equipment that will also allow us to reduce rental costs.

Emergency Project: We are currently in the process of replacing the expansion tanks that support the Elementary School boiler. This has been approved as an emergency project and expenses for this repair will receive aid from New York State over 15 years.

Capital Project 2023: Construction is underway throughout the campus. The District continues to work with the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) toward approval for our septic system. We are hopeful that construction will begin in the summer for this portion of the project.

Construction has begun in the Elementary and Jr.-Sr. High School and is currently focused on the library media center and auditorium, as well as the main office in the Jr.-Sr. High School. As the school year progresses additional construction will begin. Please refer to the capital project web-page for more specifics regarding the project.

Smart Schools Bond Act/Camera System Replacement: We have received approval for a camera system replacement project that will be fully funded by the Smart Schools Bond Act. We will be replacing and upgrading our camera system to provide a higher level of safety and security to our staff and students.

Budget Development: The Governor's Executive Budget was released and reflected minimal increases in funding. We are analyzing this information and projecting significant cost increases due to energy prices, expected health insurance costs, and contractual constraints. We will be working with the Board of Education to present a fiscally responsible budget that maintains programming for students.



Ms. Elizabeth Kupiec
Assistant Superintendent



CURRICULUM Update

Dear Cato-Meridian Community,

As we continue to enhance our educational practices, we are excited to provide an update on key district initiatives and share important data about our students' performance.

Curriculum Enhancements

In alignment with the New York State Education Department's (NYSED) 2025 Literacy Initiative, our district remains steadfast in prioritizing the development of foundational literacy skills across all grade levels. For years, we have been committed to providing high-quality literacy instruction, focusing on key areas such as phonemic awareness, phonics, decoding, vocabulary, and comprehension. These essential skills are fully integrated into our curriculum, ensuring that every student is equipped with the tools for success in reading and beyond.

Professional Development

Our district is committed to continuous professional growth for educators. "Coffee Talk" PD sessions, held Friday mornings before the school day begins, are designed around teachers' needs. Teachers are surveyed to create a list of topics they can choose from, promoting personalized learning opportunities. At the high school, we've also reimagined faculty meetings by transforming them into embedded PD sessions, offering relevant, actionable strategies.

Follow-up support from instructional coaches in behavior, literacy, and math ensures that the strategies shared during PD are effectively integrated into daily classroom practices, fostering collaboration and sustained growth.



Elementary teachers recently attended a Coffee Talk session presented by Tyler Baker, Director of Pupil Personnel Services and Taylor Weese, Elementary School Psychologist.

Professional Learning Teams (PLTs)

Our Professional Learning Teams (PLTs) have been focused on identifying the essential learning standards for each content area at every grade level, ensuring a clear and targeted approach to instruction. These teams analyze assessment data to identify opportunities for students to demonstrate their learning. By leveraging both formative and summative assessments, we continue to refine instructional practices to address students' strengths and areas for growth. Our goal is to provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate their understanding while enhancing instructional strategies to support all learners.

Student Achievement and Performance Data

We regularly monitor and analyze student achievement data to guide our instruction and support services. The most recent data from the NYS Report Card highlights our students' performance in English Language Arts (ELA), Mathematics, and Science. While we are proud of the progress made, we remain committed to addressing areas where growth is needed, ensuring that all students reach their full potential.

We encourage families to explore the NYS Report Card for detailed insights into student performance, including proficiency levels and participation rates by grade. Transparency is a key part of our commitment to working together as a community to support student success. Visit <https://data.nysed.gov/> to view the full report and compare the district's performance across various grades and subjects.

We are proud of the strides our district continues to make and deeply value your partnership in helping our students succeed. Together, we can foster an environment that supports every learner in achieving their goals.



Sincerely,

Mrs. Jennifer Dorschel

Director of Curriculum, Instruction, & Assessment



A Letter FROM THE DIRECTOR OF PUPIL PERSONNEL SERVICES

Dear Families,

As we enter the new year, we want to keep you informed about an important upcoming event in the educational journey of your child. We are now approaching our Annual Review Season, a key time for us to review and update the Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) for our students with disabilities. These reviews ensure that we are providing the most effective, tailored support to help each student succeed.

Here are some important details as we move forward:

What is an Annual Review?

An annual review is a meeting where we discuss your child's progress, evaluate the current IEP, and determine any updates or changes that may be necessary for the coming year. This is an important time for families, educators, and service providers to collaborate and ensure that your child's needs are being met.

Pre-Meeting Phone Calls:

To ensure that everyone is fully prepared for these meetings, we will be reaching out to families prior to the scheduled Annual Review. Our team will be making phone calls to discuss any preliminary thoughts and answer any questions you may have before the meeting. This is an opportunity for us to gather input from you, share information, and make sure the meeting runs as smoothly and efficiently as possible.

Meeting Scheduling:

You will receive notifications about your child's scheduled Annual Review in the coming weeks. We ask that you please make every effort to attend these important meetings so that we can continue to work together in the best interest of your child.

Communication and Collaboration:

We understand that these meetings are a critical part of your child's education and we are committed to open and transparent communication. If you have any specific concerns or questions in advance of the meeting, please do not hesitate to reach out. We want to ensure that this process is as collaborative and supportive as possible.

Who is Typically Invited to the Meeting?

The following individuals are typically invited to attend the Annual Review meeting to ensure a comprehensive discussion about your child's educational plan:

The Special Education Teacher - The teacher provides insights into your child's academic progress and performance in the classroom.

The General Education Teacher(s) - If your child participates in general education classes, a teacher from those classes will share information about their academic and social progress.

A School Administrator or Case Manager - An administrator or designated case manager will attend to help facilitate the meeting and ensure that all necessary supports are being provided.

Related Service Providers (if applicable) - Depending on your child's needs, specialists such as a speech therapist, occupational therapist, or counselor may be invited to discuss their role and contributions to your child's IEP.

You - As the parent or guardian, you are always an essential participant in the meeting, and we encourage your active involvement.

If there are any other individuals you believe should be included in the meeting, please let us know, and we will make the appropriate arrangements. Thank you for your continued partnership. We look forward to working together to help your child reach their full potential in the year ahead.



Warm regards,
Mr. Tyler Baker
Director of Pupil Personnel Services

Local Postal Customer

TECHNOLOGY *Update*

Nearing the midway point of the 2024-2025 school year, the word that sticks out to me is security. The CM Technology Department has concentrated on protecting the physical and digital environments of our staff and students throughout the year, and will continue to be a focus as we seek to proactively address any threats that may arise. We have strengthened our building security by adopting Raptor technologies at our single points of entry, preventing any sexual predators from entering the schools. While the mere presence of the Raptor banner is an effective deterrent, in practice the platform allows us to run background checks on every visitor who enters our premises. The approval of our Smart Schools plan promises an upgrade of our camera system. Once again, the knowledge that we have “eyes and ears” on our buildings gives us peace of mind, and we are committed to continuously upgrading our means of monitoring Cato-Meridian facilities. Our partnership with Day Automation has allowed us to adopt an alert and lockdown system to swiftly respond to any security threats. We have also strengthened our virtual security by adopting ClassLink, a single sign-on platform for staff and students that works to protect data while also adhering to our list of Ed Law 2d compliant applications.

As much as we’ve emphasized security, the Technology Department has also embraced its role as a vital component of good instructional

practice. Educational technology allows teachers to spend more 1:1 time with their students, an evidence-based approach to the positive learning outcomes. By providing students with new chromebooks, staff with new LG boards and chromeboxes, and maintaining a secure and reliable network, meaningful technology integration allows us to engage in learning in new ways. Our virtual pathways program at the Jr.-Sr. High School is an example of how technology provides new and diverse opportunities for students, as does the virtual field trips given to Elementary students through Cayuga-Onondaga BOCES. New applications like MagicSchool AI are challenging us to redefine what learning can look like, while also confirming that instructional best practices can be enhanced, not replaced, with technology.

Throughout all of the changes to what education can look like, we are able to hold firm to the mission of our district: We prepare all students for success through a variety of opportunities that help them learn and grow toward their potential. A successful technology department clears obstacles for student learning, helping all students reach their goals.



Sincerely,
Mr. Lucas Smith
Director of Technology

