

# FLAGSTAFF UNIFIED School District NEWSLETTER

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December 2024



## Knoles Elementary 4th and 5th Graders Shine at Winter Concert

December 6, 2024

On December 5, 2024, Knoles Elementary School's 4th and 5th graders showcased their talents at the annual Winter Concert and Art Walk under the direction of Mr. Dallin James, Knoles' first-year music teacher. Families were treated to festive holiday songs performed

beautifully by the students and enjoyed an impressive display of artwork created by Knoles' young artists.

The event was a wonderful celebration of creativity, music, and the holiday season. Congratulations to all the students and staff who made this evening so memorable! 🌲



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## A message from our SUPERINTENDENT

As the first half of the 2024-2025 school year comes to a close, I am filled with pride at the accomplishments of our students, the unwavering dedication of our staff, and the continued support we receive from our families and the Flagstaff community.

This first semester has been marked by several key highlights:

- **Student Success:** Our students have excelled in academics, athletics, and Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs, achieving impressive individual and team

accomplishments in various competitions.

- **Campus Improvements:** We celebrated groundbreaking ceremonies for new facilities at Marshall Elementary and Camp Colton while also enjoying the benefits of the recently remodeled Coconino High School auditorium and outdoor plaza.
- **Enhanced Learning:** Our educators have engaged in valuable professional development, focusing on essential learning standards and



## Thank You to Our Outgoing Governing Board Members

The Flagstaff Unified School District expresses heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Carole Gilmore, Christine Fredericks, and Dorothy Denetsosie Gishie for their years of dedicated service. Your leadership and commitment have made a lasting impact on our schools and community. Thank you for believing in the potential of every student.

innovative strategies to enhance student engagement.

- **Stronger Partnerships:** We have strengthened our partnerships with families through a variety of events, including school open houses, conferences, cultural activities, and topic-focused workshops.

- **Smooth Transition:** We have facilitated training and

onboarding for our newly elected Governing Board members, fostering a collaborative and effective leadership team.

I am excited to welcome our students back on January 6, 2025, and eager to embrace the many opportunities that await us in the second semester. Together, we will continue to strive for excellence and create a brighter future for every student in the Flagstaff Unified School District. 🌟

## ADMINISTRATION

MICHAEL PENCA  
Superintendent

LANCE HUFFMAN  
Assistant Superintendent of  
Curriculum & Instruction

## GOVERNING BOARD

CHRISTINE FREDERICKS  
President

ERIK SATHER  
Clerk

AARON CIRZAN  
Member

CAROLE GILMORE  
Member

DOROTHY  
DENETSOSIE GISHIE  
Member

## CONTACT

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Left to right: FUSD Superintendent Michael Penca, Aaron Cirzan, Melissa Kirk, Kortney Zesiger, County Superintendent Chery Mango-Paget, and Carolyn Kidd via Zoom.

## Congratulations to the Newly Sworn-In FUSD Governing Board Members

December 17, 2024

On Monday, December 16, 2024, the Flagstaff Unified School District proudly welcomed its newly elected governing board members during a formal swearing-in ceremony held at the FUSD Governing Board Room. Coconino County Superintendent Cheryl Mango-Paget administered the Oath of Office as these dedicated leaders began their terms. The new governing board members include

Aaron Cirzan, Carolyn Kidd, Melissa Kirk, and Kortney Zesiger.

Aaron Cirzan will serve a two-year term through December 2026, while Carolyn Kidd, Melissa Kirk, and

Kortney Zesiger will serve four-year terms through December 2028.

The district also extends sincere gratitude to outgoing board members Christine Fredericks, Carole Gilmore, and Dorothy Denetsosie Gishie for their years of dedicated service and commitment to the FUSD community. Their leadership and contributions have left a lasting impact on our students, staff, and families.

We look forward to the new governing board's leadership and vision as they help shape the future of education in Flagstaff Unified School District. Please join us in celebrating these new leaders as they embark on their roles! 🌲





## Flagstaff Teachers Awarded Palo Verde Fiesta Bowl Wishes for Teachers Grants

December 16, 2024

Twelve Flagstaff Unified School District teachers were among the 500 educators across Arizona selected to receive a \$2,500 grant through the Palo Verde Fiesta Bowl Charities Wishes for Teachers program. These grants, announced on November 21, 2024, were awarded to support classroom projects, supplies, and student-focused initiatives, totaling \$1.25 million in donations statewide.

The Wishes for Teachers program honors Arizona's dedicated educators by funding projects that enhance student learning opportunities.

Among the FUSD grant winners is Janeille Buckley, a culinary arts teacher at Coconino High School, who plans to use the funds to update the furniture in the Panther Café for students to enjoy during lunch. Steve Dunlap, a PE teacher at Sechrist Elementary School, plans to purchase sports equipment and games to expand PE options and offer students new ways to stay active. Wendy Hunter, a PE teacher at DeMiguel Elementary School, plans to purchase new equipment for PE classes and recess to encourage fun and fitness. Lisa Joe, a third-grade teacher at Marshall Elementary School, plans to update materials for her science unit on optics, including prisms, lenses, and flashlights, to enhance hands-on learning. Susan Burdick of Thomas Elementary School plans to purchase books, bookshelves, tables, and chairs for her classroom.

Other FUSD winners include Emma Costello of Sinagua Middle School, who plans to provide her students with flexible seating, fidget tools, and historical toolkits. Amy Dries of Sinagua Middle School plans to purchase materials for her woodworking class to create culturally inspired keepsake boxes. Jenny Jordan, a music teacher at Thomas Elementary School, plans to use the funds to purchase NUVO



instruments for her music program. Kenia Martineau of Puente de Hózhó plans to purchase learning materials and classroom supplies for her students. Sarah Montoya of Kinsey Elementary School plans to create an inclusive classroom environment with new furniture and decorations. Emily Musta, a biology teacher at Flagstaff High School, plans to enhance the school's courtyard gardens with tables and furniture for outdoor learning spaces. Aleta Zufelt of Cromer Elementary School plans to update the school library's Native American and Hispanic sections and purchase nonfiction books.

The grant recipients will be celebrated during the Rate Bowl halftime show on December 26, 2024, at Chase Field. Teachers will be honored on the field, recognizing their dedication and contributions to Arizona's students.

The Palo Verde Fiesta Bowl Wishes

for Teachers program has donated more than \$8.25 million to educators since its inception in 2016, benefitting over one million students.

Congratulations to all of our incredible educators for their well-deserved recognition! Learn more about the program at [fiestabowl.org](http://fiestabowl.org).



*Photos, top: Mrs. Hunter poses with students at DeMiguel Elementary School. Bottom: Mr. Dunlap in PE class with students at Sechrist Elementary School. (Mr. Dunlap's photo was taken by Jake Bacon/Arizona Daily Sun)*





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## Marshall Magnet Elementary Hosts Historic Beam Signing Ceremony

*December 1, 2024*

On November 26, 2024, Marshall Magnet Elementary School celebrated a milestone event with a Beam Signing Ceremony, allowing students and staff to leave a lasting mark on the new school building. Participants signed the largest glulam beam of the entire structure, which will be prominently and permanently featured in the new school.

The ceremony began with staff gathering for a photo and signing the beam, followed by students—who added their signatures after enjoying their Fall Harvest Feast. Families in attendance were invited to witness this special moment as students signed,

symbolizing their connection to Marshall's future.

The beam, once signed, will be transported by CORE to the jobsite and installed on December 6, 2024. A video of the beam's installation will be shared with the Flagstaff Unified School District and the Marshall community to commemorate this historic event.

Congratulations to the Marshall Mustangs for leaving their legacy on their new school! 🌲







## Killip Elementary Hosts Successful Page Turners, Problem Solvers STEM, Literacy Night

*December 1, 2024*

On November 14, 2024, Killip Elementary School welcomed students, families, and community members for an exciting evening of STEM exploration and literacy fun at the Page Turners & Problem Solvers event! Attendees participated in hands-on activities and connected with inspiring partners, including NAU Practicum students, GORE, NAU's Center for STEM Teaching and Learning, NAU's Women in

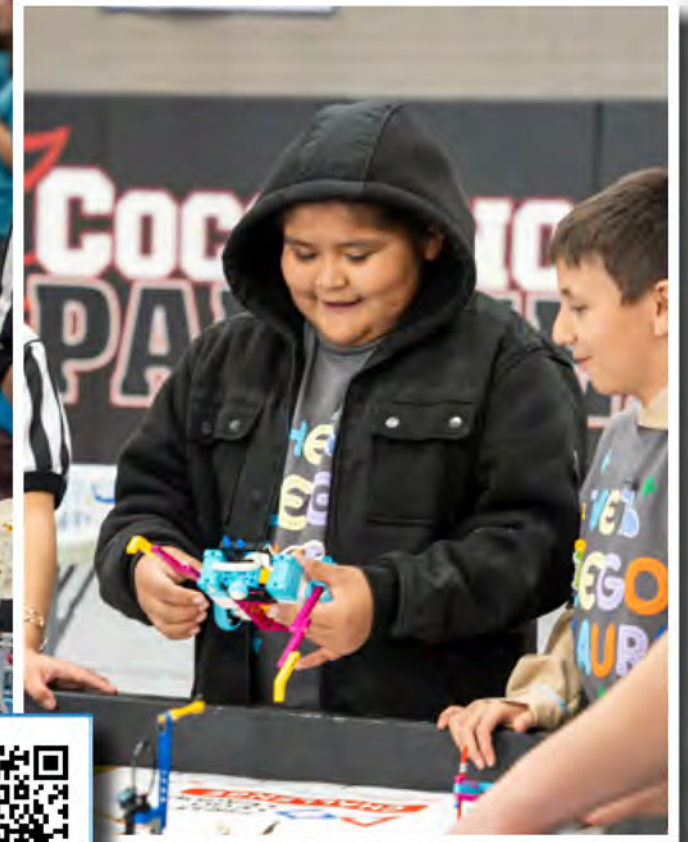
Construction, the CocoNuts, and local author Michael Erb.

A special highlight of the evening was a beautiful musical performance by Dr. C and Killip students, filling the event with joy and harmony. Families and students explored creative learning stations and engaged in interactive experiences that sparked curiosity and critical thinking.

Thank you to all the amazing staff, volunteers, and community partners who made this event a resounding success! 🌲







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## Coconino High School Hosts 17th Annual High Altitude Robotics Extravaganza

December 12, 2024

On Saturday, December 7, 2024, Coconino High School hosted the 17th Annual High Altitude Robotics Extravaganza, bringing together nearly 50 robotics teams from across Arizona. This year's event featured the FIRST DIVE games, celebrating ocean exploration and conservation while showcasing students' robotics skills, teamwork, and innovation.

The event began with staggered opening ceremonies: the FIRST Tech Challenge in the CHS theater and the FIRST Lego League in the CHS main gym. Robot matches followed,

running throughout the day as teams competed and demonstrated their engineering expertise.

The success of the event was made possible by the hard work of teams, mentors, volunteers, and organizers. Their dedication to promoting STEM education and fostering creativity was evident in every aspect of the competition.

Congratulations to all participants for their outstanding performances and for making this year's High Altitude Robotics Extravaganza a memorable celebration of innovation.







## Puente de Hózhó Celebrates Diné Spelling Bee Success

December 1, 2024

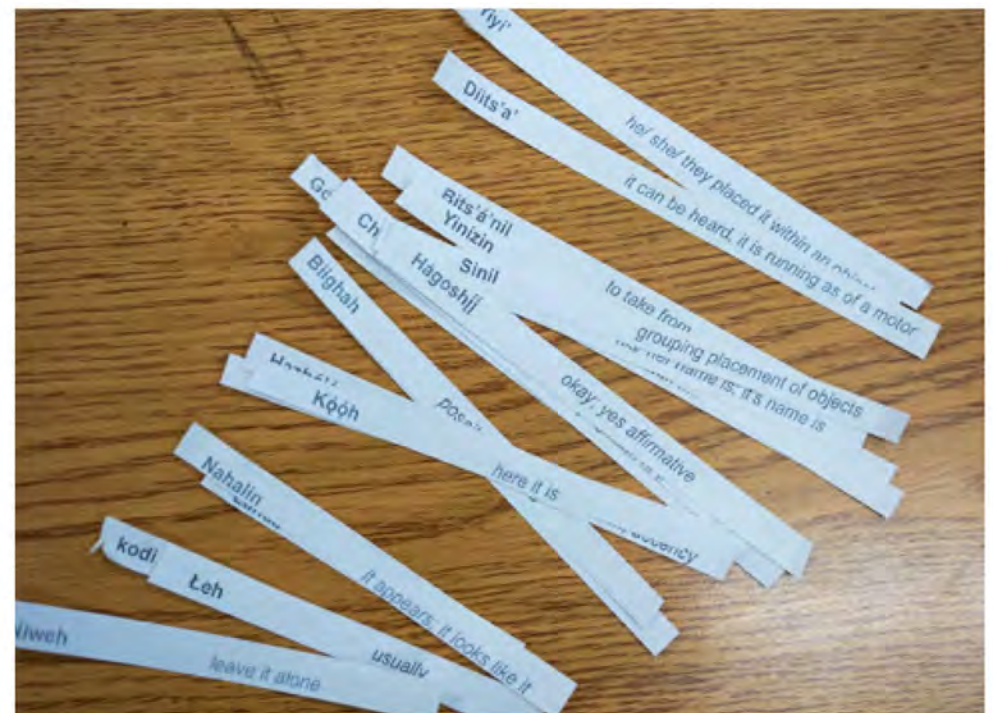
On November 26, 2024, Puente de Hózhó Elementary School students showcased their knowledge of the Diné (Navajo) language during an exciting school-wide spelling bee. Sponsored by the Diné Parent Organization, the event highlighted students' hard work, cultural pride, and language skills.

Students from grades 1 through 5 competed by spelling Diné sight words, impressing teachers, families, and their peers. Congratulations to the grade-level winners:

- 1st Grade: 1st Place - Alissandra Marquez, 2nd Place - Drew Sanchez

- 2nd Grade: 1st Place - Dodger Tuitasi, 2nd Place - Sophia Kescoli
- 3rd Grade: 1st Place - Taryn Williams, 2nd Place - Walter Fitch
- 4th Grade: 1st Place - Jayden Apachee, 2nd Place - Isaac Peshtony
- 5th Grade: 1st Place - Roselena Fitch, 2nd Place - Maddison Williams

Great job to all the students who participated and demonstrated their dedication to the Diné language! 🌲







## Coconino High School Senior Justine Sloan Wins Statewide Poster Contest

December 8, 2024

Congratulations to Justine Sloan, a Coconino High School senior selected as a \$500 prize winner in the Arizona Council on Economic Education (ACEE) Economic Concept Poster Contest. On December 6, 2024, Justine was surprised with a \$500 check and copies of the 2024 Economic Concepts calendar featuring her award-winning artwork.

Justine's illustration focused on identity protection—a theme inspired by real-life experiences.

"My illustration was based on me learning about getting a driver's license," she explained, adding that conversations with her family about important documents and their safety sparked her interest.

Reflecting further, Justine explained the importance of safeguarding your important documents.

"Identity protection is important to me because my family started talking about how I needed to get certain documents in hand before I go on a trip this summer," she said. "They said that some documents are better protected than others, and some have a higher chance of being identity-threatened."

Justine was thrilled by the outcome and was happy to win the contest.

Her creativity and thoughtful approach earned her well-deserved recognition, and her artwork now proudly appears in ACEE's statewide calendar. Explore the full calendar here: <https://bit.ly/2025ACEECalendar>.

Congratulations again to Justine Sloan for her outstanding achievement and for shining a light on the importance of identity protection. 🌲



## Summit High School Students Collaborate on Inspiring Mural Project

December 1, 2024

Summit High School hallways are getting a vibrant update thanks to a student-led mural project developed in collaboration with artist Elektra from Northern Arizona University (NAU). For her final project at NAU, Elektra reached out to Summit teacher RaeAnn Wanland to discuss educational murals in schools. After gathering student input through a survey, Elektra tailored the project to reflect Summit's unique culture and community.

The mural's design was created with significant input from students and includes meaningful

representations of the school. One notable feature is the "U", which highlights the school cafeteria and pays tribute to Summit's resident stray, Lunchcat.

In addition to completing the mural, students redesigned two other hallway art pieces and participated in interviews with Elektra to share their thoughts on the process.

This project marks a major achievement for Summit High School, showcasing student creativity and breathing new life into the school's hallways. A big thank you to Elektra, Ms. Wanland, and the talented students for bringing this vision to life. 🌲





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## Flagstaff High School Brings *Clue: On Stage to Life*

December 12, 2024

Flagstaff High School's theater students delivered an extraordinary performance of *Clue: On Stage* with three showings on December 5, 7, and 7, 2024 at the Flagstaff High School Cromer Auditorium. Under the direction of first-year theater teacher Emilio Noriego, the production brought the classic Hasbro board game and 1985 film to life, combining farce and mystery in a hilarious and suspenseful evening.

Set in a remote mansion, six eccentric guests found themselves at the center of a murder mystery, racing to discover who did it, where, and with what. Led by Wadsworth the butler, familiar characters like Miss Scarlet, Professor Plum, and Colonel Mustard kept the audience

guessing as the body count stacked up.

Mr. Noriego praised the students' dedication and talent.

"The students here at Flag High are extraordinary," he said. "This was my first time directing a play, and they pushed me past my limits further than I could have imagined."

The talented cast and crew worked tirelessly to deliver an unforgettable performance, earning well-deserved applause for their creativity and hard work. Looking ahead, Mr. Noriego shared that the drama program is preparing for a spring musical production of *Chicago*.

Bravo to the Flagstaff High School Drama Department for a fantastic show and a memorable night of entertainment. 🌲



## Coconino High School's Jai McCabe Wins Congressional App Challenge

December 18, 2024

Congratulations to Jai McCabe, a Coconino High School student, for winning the Congressional App Challenge for the second consecutive year! On Tuesday, December 17, 2024, Lori Mills, representing Congressman Eli Crane's office, presented Jai and his Engineering teacher, Mr. Woodruff, with certificates in recognition of this remarkable achievement.

The Congressional App Challenge is one of the most prestigious prizes

in student computer science and plays a transformative role in how Congress views STEM education. Jai's innovation, dedication, and passion for technology exemplify the values celebrated by this competition.

A big thank you to Mr. Woodruff for his mentorship and support, which have contributed to Jai's success. Congratulations again to Jai for this outstanding accomplishment. 🌲





## Coconino High School Music Department Winter Banquet Concert

December 18, 2024

On December 17, 2024, the Coconino High School Music Department hosted a magical Winter Banquet Concert at the CHS cafeteria. The event brought together students, families, and community members for a night filled with delicious dinner, beautiful music, and exciting raffles featuring baskets and gift cards.

Thanks to the incredible support from attendees and donors, all

proceeds from the event will go towards helping CHS music students travel to Disneyland in April 2025 to showcase their talents.

The Music Department extends its heartfelt gratitude to everyone who participated and contributed to making this evening such a success. It was a wonderful celebration of community spirit and student talent.

Stay tuned for more updates as the students prepare for their exciting Disneyland adventure. 🌲







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# JANUARY 2025

- 12/23-1/3: **Winter Break - No School**  
1/7: Bond Oversight  
Committee Meeting  
1/14 Governing Board Meeting  
1/20 Martin Luther King Jr. Day -  
No School  
1/28 Governing Board Meeting

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Early Release - All Schools  
All Fridays this month

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