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# MEETING THE BASIC NEEDS

## School provides resources for all students

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Having the bare essentials was the ordinary for junior Peter Howard.

"I was struggling in eighth grade. I always got made fun of for my shoes and the way I dressed," Howard said.

Due to the privacy of the subject, Howard chose to remain anonymous.

Howard, coming from a low-income family, had trouble getting basic items such as shoes or clothes, until he received help from Communities In Schools (CIS) site-coordinator Deanna Miller.

"[My freshman year] I met her [during school], but then I came to her and asked her for help with shoes because mine fell apart," Howard said.

Miller presented Howard with a free pair of brand new shoes.

"Honestly, it makes me overjoyed inside knowing that she's willing to take money out of her budget to do this for kids. It warms my heart," Howard said.

Miller has worked in the school for seven years. She started out as a coordinator of GEAR-UP, a program catered to helping students in foster care succeed. Now for the past three years, while being apart of the faculty, Miller is employed by CIS, a national program that focuses on keeping students in school and helping them succeed in life.

The basic needs closet, located in the Career Service offices, is a school-wide resource created and monitored by Miller. Items in the closet range from snacks to clothing items to school supplies, and even prom dresses.

According to Miller, it is one of the outreaches of the school to ensure students are being taken care of.

"[The needs closet allows students to be] better prepared to learn," Miller said. "When a student's needs are met, students can concentrate on learning."

Miller created this closet three years ago when CIS was first implemented at the school. At that time, the closet was shelves in her office.

"I started with] some sweats, shirts, shoes, socks, all school supplies and notebooks," Miller said. "The items continued to be used quite a bit."

As the need for more items rose, Miller decided it was time to expand the shelves to something with more space.

"When they remodeled the [career service] area, I asked if I could have a larger closet to put more items in,"

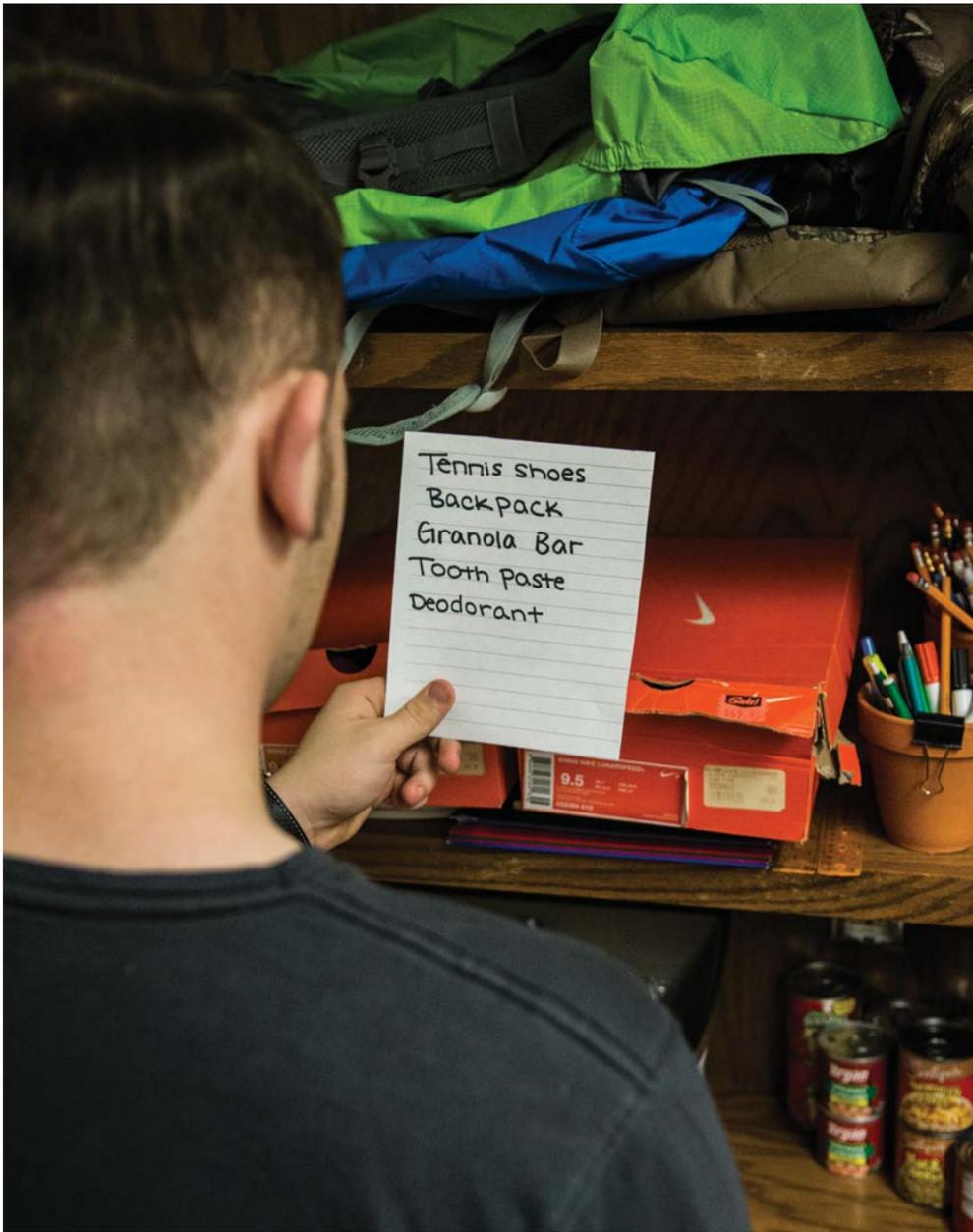


PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY DEREK BRUMBAUGH

Miller said.

The items stocked in the closet are readily available to students and have been utilized daily. In the past three months, the basic needs closet has served an average of 26 students per month.

Howard, a frequent visitor of the

closet, has felt an impact because of the help he has received from both Miller and the basic needs closet.

"It boosts [my self confidence] to know that someone actually cared about the way I looked," Howard said.

The items in the closet are not

funded by the school. Instead, they are made possible through outside donations or out of Miller's budget, which is funded by CIS. Miller spends half her budget on items for the closet.

"It is a combination of me buying and me trying to find other resources

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# DEBATING THEIR WAY TO THE TOP

## Johns, Uttley qualify for nationals debate in Utah

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Wanting to win is a typical feeling for competition. At the 2015 South Kansas National Qualifier Policy Debate tournament, however, senior Sebastian Johns and junior Zach Uttley were met with a difficult decision.

Johns and Uttley competed alongside fellow team members senior Josh Lee and junior Caleb Dial. Placing among the top two teams at the district competition would qualify debaters for the national competition.

"The tournament itself lasted for two days and, by the end of the first, all of our teams seemed to be doing well," Lee said. "By the end of the second

day, there were only four teams remaining, three of which were from Pittsburg."

The national qualifier tournament runs differently from typical invitational competition. Teams were matched using a computer software program.

"Basically, the [program] can match any team against any other team, irrespective of their record, school, or any other warrants," Johns said. "It's completely randomized."

At that point, it was understood two Pittsburg teams were bound to be matched against one another.

Unfortunately for Pittsburg, it was the two teams with seniors who would never have the chance to nationally qualify for debate again.

Debate and forensics coach Julie Laflen took this news harshly.

"When the computer told us who was to be debating, it was really hard for me as a coach because the teams they had debating against each other were Sebastian and Zach, and Josh and

Caleb," Laflen said. "[I'm] not going to lie, I cried. This was the one scenario I was dreading, and there it was in front of me."

Instead of three strikes, the tournament ran on a basis of 'two losses and you're out'. As both teams had already suffered a loss earlier in the day, the winners of the round would advance while the losing team would have to drop completely out of the tournament and lose eligibility for national qualification.

This circumstance is not an uncommon one to the debate squad. This isn't the first time Pittsburg teams have been matched against each other at the national qualifier tournament.

"This is the fourth year that this has happened," Laflen said. "[In past years], I've always been able to take age, experience, performance and dedication into consideration. I did not have that this year. Both [teams] had the same record, consisted of a

four-year senior and a three-year junior, were dedicated to the program, and were capable of competing at the national level."

Laflen usually makes the decision concerning who advances. This year, however, it was just too close to call.

"When she looked at our two teams, there was not a single deciding factor that she could base her decision on," Lee said. "So, she left it up to us, which she's never done before."

Due to her indecision, Laflen provided the teams with three options. They could decide to flip a coin, debate each other, or reach a unanimous decision regarding who would advance to become National Qualifiers.

"Mrs. Laflen has always stood by the fact that we don't debate each other," Johns said. "It's just something that we don't do. We work together and we're a



Preparing for a tournament, junior Zach Uttley participates in a practice debate round. PHOTO BY MADDY EMERSON.

team."

Leaving the qualification up to chance was also not a favorable choice, so the boys agreed to reach a verdict themselves.

"No matter what decision was made, it would be hard on all four of us," Lee said. "At the same time, we are all really close friends and we didn't want to ruin anything between us."

Deciding who would advance was not an easy feat for any of the debaters.

"At the beginning of the conversation, we didn't know what to talk about," Lee said. "It was just so tense. The decision itself came down to me and Sebastian because we're seniors and it was our last qualifier. Zach and Caleb would have next year, but Sebastian and I wouldn't."

After nearly two hours of alternating silence and discussion, a consensus was reached.

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THEY WORKED SO HARD AND WERE SO DESERVING OF THIS ACHIEVEMENT

- JULIE LAFLEN



During Senora Pallares' planning period, she helps senior Dante Menghini with his AP Spanish. PHOTO BY DEREK BRUMBAUGH.

## SENIORS UTILIZE FLEXIBLE SCHEDULING

### Work, college class opportunities prepare students

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When senior Kaylee Spangler got the call in the middle of December, she had one week to decide her future for the next four years.

"I am going to a college that has a seven percent acceptance rate. The fact I got in at semester was a huge deal I couldn't pass it up," Spangler said. "Also, considering my college is free and anyone who attends gets out debt free."

Spangler currently attends College of the Ozarks near Branson.

She is one of the 21 students who graduated after the first semester.

The amount of seniors with reduced schedules has declined by over 50 percent in the last two years. This year there

are a total of 183 seniors, 52 of those remaining have reduced schedules and 48 are working a part-time job or attending Pittsburg State University (PSU).

"We have a handful of kids who are actually working on their careers, working in the job they want to work in while they are still attending high school knowing there are some opportunities down the road for them to elevate their certificates," Principal Jon Bishop said.

These students are able to do this because they have already obtained the required credits for graduation.

"There's some kids that when they get to that second semester they only need maybe four or five classes. We can offer them a reduced schedule to either go to work earlier, or get more hours in, or to

take college classes," Bishop said. "If they need five classes they'll take the first two hours off and take a college class then come to school. Or, they'll work first through fourth hour, then go to work after their done."

While Spangler decided to graduate at semester, other students decided to only have a few classes. Two of these students are seniors Dante Menghini and Ailie Foresman.

Menghini had the opportunity to graduate at semester, but decided to enroll in one class at the high school this semester in order to play tennis this spring.

"I decided to take classes at PSU because I wanted to do something new, and I figured it would be nice to get some of my college classes out of the way

early," Menghini said. "I enjoy the change of pace my new schedule has given me, and I think it's going to help me in the long run to get used to college classes without a full schedule."

For Foresman, she balances work, classes at the high school and classes every other day at Labette Community College (LCC). Depending on the day, Foresman will either go home after her classes are over to work on other homework, or she will head straight to work.

"It's nice to experience class off high school campus," Foresman said. "Senior year is traditionally supposed to be pretty mellow, but my senior year is anything but. I am constantly busy."

## ADVOCATING FOR UNDERCLASSMEN

### Thomas, Montes mentor students for post-high school

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While she works at her desk, freshmen advocate Kristin Thomas contacts parents to schedule their family's next meeting. Thomas and sophomore advocate Gloria Montes meet twice a year with students and their parents to discuss the student's plans after high school. They also help inform the parents and students.

"I want to make sure they are aware of clubs and activities. The ultimate goal is for every student to be as successful as possible so that, when they leave PHS, they can go straight into the career they want or straight into college," Thomas said. "[That way] there is nothing holding them back. My ultimate goal is to prepare them and help eliminate some barriers that may come up along the way."

According to Assistant Principal Rhonda White, the advocate program was started to help establish a connection between the school and the students and their families.

"It was necessary to help make sure we have a good support base for our freshmen and to improve the communication we have with the families," White said. "I think it greatly improves the services that we have for our students. It connects them with another adult in the building and it helps them become more successful."

The advocates helped freshman Madison Nagel visualize her plans for life after high school.

"[Ms. Thomas] makes me think about colleges I want to go to, career paths I want to take and other aspirations that I may want to pursue," Nagel said. "I'm torn between two career paths, so she is helping me prepare for both. I am very thankful that she is here to point me in the right direction."

Both Thomas and Montes agree scheduling appointments is one of the biggest obstacles they face.

"Everyone is so busy with their jobs," Montes said. "It is difficult for some families to make it here."

Advocates have provided a link on the front



Freshman advocate, Kristin Thomas, meets with student during progress meeting. PHOTO BY KAITLYN KIDD.

page of the high school website, phs.usd250.org, to schedule appointments. Families can also email the advocates at any time to plan their meeting.

Despite challenges, Thomas and Montes enjoy their job.

"I love what I do because [of the] students and getting them to think about the future," Thomas said. "Just to see those connections between the parent and student makes it worthwhile."

Nagel believes Thomas has positively impacted the freshman class.

"Without [Ms. Thomas], the majority of the freshmen wouldn't be thinking about their futures and goals that they want to reach. Most of them would probably walk out of high school with a career in mind but, with the help of Ms. Thomas, we are preparing for our careers now," Nagel said. "With that head start, we can ultimately go into a field that we have a passion for and make a stronger impact."

## DEBATING TO THE TOP

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"It was a really hard decision to make for both teams," Johns said. "Eventually, we all wrote down on paper who we believed should go to nationals and all four of us said that Zach and I should [qualify]. Everyone had a different reason for deciding what they did, but I respect [Josh and Caleb] for that. They have much more character than I will ever have for making that kind of decision."

"It was a very difficult sacrifice to make," Lee said. "I've been a part of the debate program since my freshman year, but I have no regrets because I made the decision I felt was right and appropriate. In the end, that's more important to me than something I've wanted for my entire debate experience."

Once they made their choice, the debaters informed Laflen. "To make that decision as a high schooler isn't fair," Laflen said. "But they were very mature, responsible and just so selfless."

Ultimately, Johns and Uttley were deemed National Qualifiers and will travel to Salt Lake City for the 2016 National Speech and Debate Tournament on June 12-17.

Despite feeling guilty about another team's loss, Johns was proud of his own achievement.

"Personally, [qualifying] was something that I've wanted to do every year in debate," Johns said. "I made that my goal as a policy debater, so it feels really good to have accomplished something that I set out for my freshman year."

Just like his partner, Uttley is excited to attend the national competition, though this will be his second time competing.

"National qualification is the highest level of debate competition that you can achieve in high school," Uttley said. "Qualifying for nationals is definitely a really big honor for Sebastian and I as a team, as well as our debate squad."

Lee and Dial's chance to attend the national competition is not lost. They were named first alternates, meaning if Johns and Uttley are unable to attend or if they each qualify in a forensics event, Lee and Dial would be eligible to compete in policy debate.

"It's a wonderful feeling to watch your team qualify for nationals, especially when they've worked so hard for it," Laflen said. "But it's not nearly as simple as just being happy because, at the same time, I have another team that is equally as devastated that they didn't qualify."

Despite the mixed feelings, Laflen feels the program has flourished because of her experienced students.

"I think the dedication gets stronger every year," Laflen said. "It's the kids who make the program and I'm just so proud of all of them this year."

Pittsburg also claimed the title of first place in Sweepstakes, which ranks the schools' overall performances.

"From a coach's standpoint, it was a proud moment to hear that," Laflen said. "They worked so hard and were so deserving of this achievement."

## MEETING STUDENTS' BASIC NEEDS IN, OUT OF SCHOOL

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buying and me trying to find other resources [to supply items]," Miller said. "It is one of my responsibilities as site-coordinator [to find donations] in our community to provide [for students] because my budget could not continue to stock the closet by itself."

Miller, however, is not the only faculty member aiding students with their basic needs. School nurse Lisa Schwob has been providing, through donations, hygiene products for students for approximately 21 years.

"Honestly, hygiene has always been an issue with high school students. We have special situations where kids do not have access to running water or there is a good reason as to why hygiene is an

issue," Schwob said. "We treat each case individually, I try to talk to the kid and get to the bottom of what is going on, and we try to help them with it."

This year, for a philanthropic project, retired Family and Consumer Science teacher Susie Dalton and the Phi Kappa sorority put together and donated approximately 100 hygiene bags each filled with shampoo, soap, toothbrushes, toothpaste and combs. Schwob has given away 60 of those bags.

"It was a service project through her sorority," Schwob said. "We are thankful that they thought of us because we are putting them to use."

Schwob also collaborates with Miller in using the clothes portion of the needs closet.

Sophomore Henry Samuels, who also chose to remain anonymous due to the privacy of the matter, is another student who has benefitted from the aid of others.

"[Schwob] has offered me a few jackets. Last year [she noticed] that I did not bring my jacket to school and she gave me a new jacket," Samuels said.

Schwob has also offered Samuels hygiene items as well.

"At first it was kind of uncomfortable," Samuels said. "But I became more accepting [of her help] and not being judgemental of what she was trying to do to help me, especially when she was going out of her way to help me."

While aiding students is an aspect of their

careers, both Miller and Schwob take the time to build a relationship with the students they are working with.

"People can be very self-conscious about very personal things," Samuels said. "I was that way, but with getting help from Lisa and others [in the school], it has been easier to cope with."

Howard also believes receiving the help he did has benefitted him.

"My freshman year, I went from having nothing to having most stuff that other kids have," Howard said. "That is the way it is now [because of Miller] and if I need anything else I can ask her and she will get it for me."