



## “The Tech Trek: Grand Blanc’s Journey into the Future.”

*Volume II: Mason Elementary ROARs*

4<sup>th</sup> grader Riley Jakeway decided, as a 3<sup>rd</sup> grader, that she wanted to start up a school newspaper. In a persuasive letter written to Mrs. Sonya James, Mason Elementary Principal, Riley stated her case and in response, Mrs. James directed Riley to Technology Explorations teacher Jenna Houser. Together they created the Mason ROARer; a biweekly online newspaper written by students. For the first few months, Riley was the only writer and editor, but interest has since increased and a new student will be contributing to each issue with a “how to” column, as well as other students picking up assignments for the online blog.



**Hoping to join the school newspaper both in middle school and high school, Riley said she will never stop writing. Her advice for other students? “I would say always try new things. Because I love writing now and I used to not like it at all.”**

Riley said she wanted to start the newspaper because she loves writing: “At first I didn’t really like writing, but this last year in 3<sup>rd</sup> grade Mrs. Putnam started talking to me about the pros of writing, not the cons of writing. And from then, I’ve just loved writing.... she told me there are no rules in writing. That’s what I really like.” She also said she likes that the newspaper is online, because it can be accessed and worked on from home or wherever through the students’ Chromebooks, not just at school.

Riley’s sentiments are shared by Jenna Houser: “The great thing is if students are at home, and they have an idea, they can do it at home and then share it with me. They don’t have to be in this physical space to do it...sometimes it inspires more creativity that way. Some students have to absorb everything that they’re hearing that they need to do, but the production; they might not be able to do that right in that moment. They may need to think it over and mull it over, “how am I going to do it?”.”

Across the hall from Riley’s class is 5<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Tammie Snitko’s classroom. Mrs. Snitko had an interesting first day of class this year as student’s waved and shouted hello’s to Mckenna Schummer, who was all beaming smiles as she waved back to her class through Skype. Mckenna was diagnosed earlier this year with Osteosarcoma, a form of bone cancer. Due to treatments, she was unable to join her class as the year began in the typical fashion, so arrangements were made that would still allow her to be a part of the day.

Early in the morning, Mckenna’s teacher Mrs. Snitko worked with 4<sup>th</sup> grade teacher Christina Ostrander to establish a connection with Mckenna through Skype. Ostrander said when the connection finally went through and Mckenna’s face popped up on the screen, her smile was 1,000 watts bright. Throughout the day, Mckenna was able to participate in the welcome back icebreakers, go out to recess with her

friends, and eat lunch in the cafeteria. Since the first day, Mckenna has attended class both in person and through Skype, depending on how she is feeling. She is able to work on accelerated math online programs through her Chromebook, read, and take some of the accelerated reading quizzes online. Mrs. Snitko is so happy that Mckenna is able to still be a part of her classroom and is grateful that Mckenna has the opportunity to attend remotely when able: "It was completely because of technology that we were able to do that."

At Mason Elementary, amazing things are happening every day because of technology. New, innovative, and in most cases, student driven ideas and learning are forming in the classroom. One of the unique events that Mrs. Ostrander has done with her students is the Student Showcase, which takes place in our state's capital. An all day event, four of Mrs. Ostrander's students present to some of our state's most influential persons of interest: "They've met the governor, numerous lawmakers, business people, directors of technology, directors of programming; it's an awesome opportunity for the kids," states Mrs. Ostrander. Beyond the Student Showcase however, the same students have the opportunity to present at MACAL Student Showcase. Using the same material as at the Capital, the students present to teachers and administrators completely on their own, while Mrs. Ostrander provides emotional support and occasionally, trouble shooting.



**Tammie Snitko's class shows their support for classmate Mckenna Schummer during a daylong benefit for Mckenna. #MCKENASSQUAD**



**Principal Sonya James and Superintendent Clarence Garner paid a visit to Christina Ostrander's class. Superintendent Garner asked the students questions as they showed him the different programs they are using via their Chromebooks in class.**

The students are able to pick what they present on at both events and this year Mrs. Ostrander says that what they're presenting on was made possible by the technology bond and the 1:1. Google docs, slides, and Google classroom will be presented this year along with Accelerated Math, the Wonders (online reading) and the classroom drone. Besides the drone, all of the presented material is done through the 1:1 Chromebooks.



Principal Sonya James listens to music created by a student through the use of a program called Makey Makey.

Jenna Houser loves how the bond has affected students' learning: "I think our technology has become student driven. Students are saying we need this, this, and this. That's how this class came about; they were asking. The more students give us, not just from Mason, but every school, 'can you guys do this,' then we can see if there is any way we can do that. How cool is it that students are able to design their class?"

A special thank you goes to teachers Jenna Houser, Christina Ostrander, and Tammie Snitko for graciously sharing their time so that Grand Blanc Community Schools can share with you; their community.

*These are the volumes of Grand Blanc Community Schools. Its lifelong mission: to explore new concepts, to seek out new learning and new technology, to boldly go where no school has gone before.*

*Written by Caitlin Yancho*