

GIFTED STUDENTS SPEAK TO COMMUNITY AT EIGHTH-ANNUAL AMERICAN EDUCATION WEEK CELEBRATION

NORTH HUNTINGDON, PA. – Norwin School District celebrated American Education Week by hosting the eighth-annual Business-Education-Community Program, an event that shines a spotlight on student achievement and brings representatives of the greater Norwin community into the school setting.

This year’s program theme was “Public Education: A Treasured Gift,” and it featured students who have benefitted from the Norwin Gifted Program. The program was held Wednesday, November 21, 2018 at Norwin High School. This year, approximately 120 people attended, representing leaders in the local business, education, and government sectors.

Norwin has 308 students in the Gifted program. These students participate in a variety of activities, led by Gifted teachers, that are geared towards providing students with a selection of activities that meet their individual needs.

Master of Ceremonies Charles Blenko, a Grade 12 Gifted Student, recalled how he entered the gifted program in the second grade. He shared that the Gifted Program provided him and his fellow students with many hands-on activities and opportunities to learn and grow in unique ways. “At each gathering of gifted students, we brought together our unique minds and abilities to perform, design experiments, memorize digits of pi, and learn about history in an incredible tapestry of talent,” Charles said.

Charles plans to attend Penn State for civil engineering next fall.



Students in the Gifted Program who spoke at this event included:

Seated, L-R: Connor Baverso (Guest of Honor), Emily Jumba, Isha Vyas, Ciara Giran, Elizabeth Zapanta.

Standing, L-R: Charlie Blenko, Dan Coughenour, Anthony Anselmino, Quinn Kubistek, Luke Snyder.

Additional students spoke about the enriching educational experiences in the Gifted program. They included:

- **Dan Coughenour and Anthony Anselmino, both Grade 12:** These students, together with student Eimile McKinnon, created a custom interface that helped a student with fine motor functioning, vision, and speech impairments be able to activate the Siri app on his iPad. Their solution enabled student **Connor Baverso, Grade 12**, to text and call his mom, listen to music, ask about the weather, and ask questions through a Google search.

- **Emily Jumba, Grade 11:** Emily spoke about how the Gifted Program has helped her improve her communication abilities through opportunities such as the Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Conference; serving as an officer in the Model United Nations club; competing on the Norwin High School team for Hometown High Q; and teaching Spanish to elementary school students.
- **Quinn Kubistek, Grade 10:** Quinn spoke about how the Gifted Program has given him the flexibility and encouragement to compete in the demanding National History Day competition. For his most recent National History Day project, he interviewed the writers of the Disney film *Newsies*, which Quinn described as “one of the coolest experiences of my life.”
- **Isha Vyas, Grade 10:** Isha spoke about how she has designed experiments for several science competitions. She designed a project where she evaluated different brands of glucose testing kits (known as glucometers) while comparing their cost and accuracy. In 8th grade, Isha completed this project, performing experiments using synthetic blood with added glucose. In 9th grade, she continued this project using the most accurate glucometer from the first study as a benchmark.
- **Luke Snyder, Grade 9:** Luke spoke highly of the extra opportunities for advanced math he has been given through the Gifted program. In seventh grade, he was able to take Algebra I and Geometry. As a current freshman, he now takes Honors Pre-Calculus, usually a class for only sophomores and juniors. “This is a great example of how the gifted program allowed myself and others to excel at various subjects, and find and explore our interests, no matter what they may have been,” Luke said.
- **Ciara Giran, Grade 9:** Ciara talked about how the Gifted program helped to expand her theatrical strengths, as she has completed 18 shows. Ciara used her creative skills as an actor when she helped write, direct and act in numerous science videos to share with her fellow students. She always ended these videos with an interactive game. In the Model United Nations program, she uses her flair for acting by serving as a delegate for a country to solve real-world problems. “The gifted program has taught me to always strive to exceed my goals. I am excited to see where this next chapter takes me and am so lucky to be a part of this great district,” Ciara said.
- **Elizabeth Zapanta, Grade 10:** Also highly creative and a Show Choir member, Elizabeth has participated in the Gifted program for about eight years. Projects like the Honors English 9 Ted Talk helped her to indulge her creative side. For the project, she was required to read *Romeo and Juliet*, relate it to common cultural ideas of the time and find a modern-day example. She submitted a video, in TED talk style, as her final product. “The open ended-ness of the project really helped me take it in my own direction,” Elizabeth said.

As an added treat, the Norwin Gifted teachers shared a video of recent Norwin graduates who reflected upon their experiences in the Gifted program. The alumni speakers included Jacob Baxter, Lucy Race, Rachel Bartuska, Sophia Melocchi, Brandon Bodnar and Andrew Horton.

The extra efforts of several Norwin Gifted teachers made this year’s program possible. They included:

- Ms. Ciminy St. Clair, Coordinator of High School Gifted Education
- Dr. Constance DeMore Savine, Coordinator of Middle School Gifted Education
- Mrs. Trisha Brunazzi, Coordinator of Intermediate School Gifted Education
- Mrs. Laura Swick, Coordinator of Elementary School Gifted Education
- Ms. Angela Mazur, High School Gifted Case Manager and ELA Teacher
- Mrs. Larissa Sturm, High School Gifted Case Mgr. and Social Studies Teacher
- Mrs. Gretchen Sweeney, High School Gifted Case Manager and ELA Teacher

“The gifted program at Norwin is dedicated to our students to offer them acceleration as well as enrichment not only in the classroom environment but also through a wide range of community resources,” said Ms. Ciminy St. Clair, Gifted Coordinator.

Dr. William Kerr, Superintendent of Schools, provided the student speakers with Certificates of Appreciation, assisted by Mr. Mike Choby, Norwin High School Principal.

The Norwin String Ensemble, under the direction of Mr. Mike Szymanski, provided gathering music for the guests. The Norwin Show Choir, under the direction of Mrs. Bridget Faulk, provided a medley of holiday entertainment. Air Force Junior ROTC Cadets John Cerra, Christopher Hinson, Zack Naponic, and Logan Wade posted the colors. Rachel Sullivan, a Grade 10 Gifted student, sang the National Anthem. Immediate Past School Board President Mr. Robert Perkins and School Board Member Mr. Dennis Rittenhouse attended the event, along with numerous community leaders. Pastor Nick Poole of Calvary Church, Irwin, offered both the Invocation and Benediction.

American Education Week presents all Americans with an opportunity to celebrate public education and honor individuals who are making a difference in ensuring that every child receives a quality education.

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