

# Education Update

December 2019

## College Board honors school district

*Mount Olive named to the prestigious AP Honor Roll for third consecutive year*

**T**HE Mount Olive School District was named again to the AP Honor Roll by the College Board. The district is one of only three districts in Morris County, 20 in

New Jersey, and 250 in the U.S. to be so honored. The AP Honor Roll distinction recognizes the district's efforts in increasing the number of students from underrepresented demographics who take AP courses, while also increasing or maintaining the percentage of students passing the exams. This is the third consecutive year in which the district has earned a place on the honor roll.

A look at the data reveals just how far Mount Olive High School

The Mount Olive Board of Education has made concerted efforts to encourage students to challenge themselves with high-level courses. Last year, for example, an AP incentive program was implemented so that the cost of the AP exams would not dissuade students from enrolling in AP courses. For students who register and pay the College Board fee for one exam, the district pays the registration fees for all additional AP exams. (The College Board charge for most exams is about \$95 but some can cost as much as \$142.)

"The AP Honor Roll distinction is a direct result of the AP incentive program that was approved by the board last January, the dedication of our amazing AP teachers, and most importantly the hard work of our AP students," said Dr. Robert Zywicki, superintendent of schools. "This year, fewer school districts were recognized because the criteria were much more stringent, making it incredibly difficult for districts to make the list in consecutive years. Everyone in the school community should celebrate this achievement."

has evolved. AP course offerings over the years were expanded and students responded by not only sitting for the courses but also taking the year-end exams. From 2004 to 2018, the number of AP exams administered grew from just 85 to 553 – an increase of 551%. The passing rate has increased as well. The addition of three AP courses for the 2019-2020 school year, (Human Geography, Computer Science Principles, and Psychology), brings the total number of AP offerings at Mount Olive High School to 28.

**“The AP Honor Roll distinction is a direct result of the AP incentive program that was approved by the board last January, the dedication of our amazing AP teachers, and most importantly the hard work of our students.”**

**Dr. Robert Zywicki**  
Superintendent



**SHE ROCKS!**  
Leah Coward, a fourth-grader at Chester M. Stephens Elementary School, pulls out the crystal she made in class. The hands-on activity reinforced the information the students had learned about different types of rocks.

### See us on Twitter!

Stay up to date with current district and school news by following us on Twitter:

- District – @MountOliveTSD,
- Superintendent Rob Zywicki – @ZywickiR
- MOHS – @KevinRStansber1
- MOMS – @mtolivemiddle
- CMS – @CMS4Learning
- Mountain View – @MtView07836
- Sandshore – @MOSandshore
- Tinc Road – @tincroadschool

Also regularly check our newly designed website: [www.motsd.org](http://www.motsd.org)



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## MAKERSPACE

**High-tech  
carnival held at  
middle school**

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## Beyond the classroom walls

ONE of the powers of instructional technology is its ability to virtually transport students out of the classroom. This allows them to experience the sights and sounds of the world and to communicate with people they ordinarily wouldn't have a chance to meet in real life.

Megan Manley's second-graders at Tinc Road Elementary School recently took a virtual trip to the Pinola Aviary in Louisiana by videoconferencing with Jessica Cockrell, a veterinary technician. She showed the students some of the exhibits and birds in the private preserve, which is a home to more than 300 species of birds from all over the world.

The discussion and virtual tour of Pinola augmented what the second-graders had recently learned in a non-fiction text about animal homes and habitats.

Ms. Cockrell and Mrs. Manley found each other through Skype A Scientist, an organization that runs a website which matches science professionals with classrooms around the world.

While this was a one-time interaction, a



Second grade teacher Megan Manley discusses with her class an internet post from a traveler visiting Antarctica

month-long project allowed students to see the world through the eyes of a traveler experiencing new sights, countries, and customs for the first time. The second-graders followed and communicated with Colin Heinrich during his recent trek to and throughout Antarctica. Through Reach The World, an organization that pairs volunteer travelers with classes, the students participated in Mr. Heinrich's chilly adventure. They read his online logbooks and field notes, saw his photographs, and spoke to him several times through live video chats.

## Helping the environment

IN just eight weeks, Sandshore Elementary School students and staff prevented nearly 1,200 pounds of plastic from entering area landfills and possibly even ocean waters. The school is collecting plastic bags for recycling – an effort that puts the focus on protecting the environment and reducing the consumption of single-use plastic products.

The collection will continue throughout the school year. However, between November 15 (America Recycles Day) and April 15, the school is competing in the 13th annual Trex Annual Recycling Challenge. Sponsored by

Trex, a manufacturer of wood-alternative decking and other outdoor materials, the program challenges schools to collect the most plastic bags. Schools of equal size in the same geographic area are grouped together and the school in each group with the highest collection total will receive a buddy bench made from Trex composite material. Winning schools will be announced on Earth Day, April 22.

"Although the competition is very exciting for students, they are really focused on making a difference," said Elena Melekos, school counselor. "They love seeing how much plastic is being brought in."

Sandshore's Kindness Ambassadors are actively involved in the recycling effort. The ambassadors, fourth- and fifth-graders who assist with schoolwide service projects, help with weighing the plastic. During the weekly PA announcement of the collection total, ambassadors also share facts about plastic and how it impacts animal and marine life.

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Grace Hubbard and Riley Kazan stand in the Sandshore lobby among one week's plastic bag collection

## Junior ROTC takes home trophy

Mount Olive High School's Junior ROTC won second place in a physical fitness and endurance competition. At the Piscataway High School Raider Challenge, MOHS cadets competed against 10 other teams from across New Jersey and Pennsylvania in events that included an obstacle course, tug-of-war, callisthenics, and a 3K run.

Lt. Col. Brian Dickenson and Chief Master Sgt. Robert Bedell lead the program, which is now in its third year.

## MOMS students win awards in contests

Mount Olive Middle School students recently won awards in several competitions.

Seventh-grader Thomaz Honda won first place in the advanced category at a chess tournament sponsored by the New Jersey Consortium for Gifted and Talented Programs. About 60 G&T students from area middle schools competed in the tournament, which was held at Randolph Middle School.

In an area spelling bee, also sponsored by the NJCGTP, eighth-grader Siyona Satpathy took home an award for finishing in the top 10. The bee began as a MOMS tournament in which 102 students competed. The best 10 MOMS spellers advanced to the finals and competed in Morristown against their peers from other area districts. Siyona was eliminated from the bee with the word "hinderance."

In October, a pair of students worked together on a poster that won first place at the Renaissance Faire in Manheim, Pennsylvania. Seventh-graders Charlie Atkinson and Robbie Cahili shared the honor.

## Reading initiative involves whole school

Chester M. Stephens Elementary School just completed a reading initiative in which all students in the school read the same book at home with their parents.

Every family received a copy of "A Boy Called Bat," courtesy of the Education Association of Mount Olive. Parents also were provided with a reading schedule and were asked to read the scheduled chapters every night to their children. Online video-recorded chapters read by CMS teachers, administrators, and other members of the school community were made available as well – intended for use on those busy nights when schedules conflict.

In school, students studied common vocabulary words and engaged in cross curricular activities which focused on the book's plot and themes.

According to research, reading aloud to children sharpens their imagination and engenders in them a love of reading.



# MOMS runs high-tech carnival

**W**ITH balloons, streamers, and galloping music, the Mount Olive Middle School makerspace was transformed into a STEAM-powered carnival. The makerspace hosted first- and fifth-graders from Sandshore Elementary School who came to play games that were developed from projects created in MOMS' Innovation & Design classes.

“My class couldn't stop talking about hydraulics when they got back. The experience was one of a kind. The students learned so much.”

**Devon Marques**  
Teacher

“My class couldn't stop talking about hydraulics when they got back,” said Devon Marques, first grade teacher. “The experience was one of a kind. The students learned so much.”

## Benefits for all students involved

While the grade-schoolers explored the science behind fun and games, the carnival provided the middle school students with the ultimate evaluation for their projects: customer feedback. In addition, it tested the ability of the young engineers to troubleshoot, a skill that comes from knowing the science be-

hind the designs inside and out.

“I was so impressed by the way my students innovated quickly when something broke or stopped working,” said I&D teacher Dr. Rebecca Kreider who organized the event.

The carnival also gave Sandshore students, particularly the fifth-graders who will be attending MOMS next year, an opportunity to check out their future school and the technology in the makerspace. Students went “hands-on” with gear trains, hydraulics, and 3D printed objects, and see the makerspace's 3D printers, media room with green screen, and prototyping workshop.

## Genesis of the carnival

The carnival games began their lives about eight weeks before the carnival. Sixth-graders worked in pairs and used their knowledge of projectile motion to create catapults; eighth-graders, also working in pairs, made hydraulic arms. Both projects took the teams



**Above,** Tito Ghanem tests a crane game as Kailash Annamali provides some suggestions; **right,** Ruby Hernandez watches as her fifth grade buddy, Vega Prasanna, works a hydraulic arm



through the entire engineering process, from concept and design to fine-tuning and completion.

To show students the real-world relevance of what they had learned and built, Dr. Kreider challenged them to turn their projects into games for a younger audience.

# CMS opens unique learning space

**T**HE Cube, Chester M. Stephens Elementary School's new multifunctional learning area, officially opened in October. Created by combining a resource room with a classroom, the Cube provides the space for a variety of purposes such as STEAM projects, for example, and even whole-grade instruction. With furnishings that divide the space into separate learning sections, the Cube is also the perfect spot for small groups of students to simultaneously work on different projects; here, kids have the elbow room they need to spread out and be active learners.

Instructional technology in the Cube includes a bank of four computers, a printer, and an interactive computer whiteboard. The tables are made from the same outer material as erasable marker boards, letting students easily brainstorm, plan, and collaborate. A swipe with a dry eraser is all it takes to make a

change or clean the slate and ready the table for the next class.

Teachers have just begun to explore ways of using the space. Kindergarten classes have worked in the Cube on a hands-on STEAM project with LEGOs, second grade classes completed a virtual escape room, and the entire fifth grade videoconferenced with a scientist over Skype, to name just some of the activities.

The Cube is located at the end of the fourth and fifth grade wing.



Kindergartner Leah Taylor works on a project in the Cube



# Helping students communicate

*Strategically placed picture boards benefit students who have speech problems*

**A**LYX Direnzo, speech therapist at Mountain View Elementary School, has made it easier for students with special needs to communicate.

Throughout the building, Ms. Direnzo has posted augmentative alternative communication boards – posters with illustrations depicting common wants, needs, and feelings. The boards are analog versions of digital devices and apps that Ms. Direnzo uses when working one on one with kids. (Some students even have their own.)

Communication is as simple as pointing. Mountain View currently houses three districtwide programs that include students with special needs; many of these students have speech difficulties and some are completely nonverbal. The AAC boards have helped bridge an important gap, allowing students to express themselves without frustration.

“I wanted to give every child a voice,” said Ms. Direnzo. “I wanted to enable children who are not functional verbal communicators to independently and easily get their messages across. The boards are simple and very pragmatic ways of doing that.”

Now, Ms. Direnzo has brought easy communication outdoors to the school’s playgrounds. She had large, all-weather AAC boards made at Staples with her own money. While similar in design to the indoor boards, the outdoor ones have metal stakes and focus on recreational activities. Each board is divided into two sections. The first contains core words applicable in all settings such as I, me, he/she, they, want, like, feel, yes, and no. The second section has specific playground pictures, e.g., a slide, swings, monkey bars. Working left to right, a student can string together a full thought.

“I knew the boards would be beneficial in these very social settings,” Ms. Direnzo said. “They’re very intuitive. Immediately after

they were set up, I saw preschoolers using them.”

One board is on each playground.



On a Mountain View playground, speech therapist Alyx Direnzo shows a student a board that can help with communication

**“I wanted to give every child a voice. I wanted to enable children who are not functional verbal communicators to independently and easily get their messages across.”**

**Alyx Direnzo**  
Speech therapist

# MOHS drama club performs ‘Hairspray’

**M**OUNT Olive High School’s drama club recently produced “Hairspray,” the musical based on the 1988 film. More than 100 students in cast, crew, and orchestra rehearsed for eight weeks to bring the show to life.

Set in 1962, “Hairspray” tells the tale of teenage girl who becomes popular on a local TV show and uses her newfound celebrity to fight for racial integration.

“I’ve loved this show since the first time I saw it,” said MOHS teacher Christopher Bosch, the production’s director. “‘Hairspray’ celebrates the importance of diversity with a story that’s family-friendly, energetic, and poignant.”

The production featured Katie O’Shea, Jon Wade, Chris Carlstrom, Joseph Richards, Wangare Njuguna, Justin Gayles, Meghan Bodmer, Jared Case, Leslie Sinosa, and Amanda Berrios.



Wangare Njuguna brings down the house as Katie O’Shea looks on

**Below, Jon Wade has fun in the role made famous by Harvey Fierstein in the musical’s original Broadway run**



Michael Cravotta – editor

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