

Education Update

October 2019

All MO schools are Future Ready

ALL six Mount Olive schools were recently recognized for their commitment to instructional technology and were certified as "Future Ready" by

Future Ready Schools-New Jersey. FRS-NJ is a partnership of the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey School Boards Association, and New Jersey Institute of Technology.

To receive certification, teams at each school composed of teachers and building administrators developed action plans to align their planning and teaching practices with the framework of the

national Future Ready Schools program. Over the course of five months, the teams defined the best ways to use technology and digital tools to engage students, improve learning, and personalize instruction to meet each student's unique learning needs.

"The thing I love about the certification process is that it is driven by teacher leaders," said Dr. Robert Zywicki, superintendent of schools. "We have amazing teachers here and they spent hours focusing on what would work best for their own classrooms and students. I commend the effort of everyone involved; I couldn't

be prouder. The certification of every school is an achievement."

Among Future Ready's key principles are the importance of:

- active learning that involves technology and "real-world" problem-solving
- school cultures dedicated to collaboration and innovation
- using assessment data to drive educational decisions

The schools received bronze certification which is awarded to schools at the earliest level of Future Ready implementation.

This school year, the teams will focus on working toward silver certification which requires schools to use their Future Ready experiences to further expand their use of digital learning tools (e.g., apps, media, video, websites, technology-powered collaboration and communication methods, etc.).

Dr. Zywicki sits on the national advisory team of Future Ready Schools. In 2018 he was named by the organization as a "district thought leader," an honor recognizing his expertise in using instructional technology to improve learning.

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Dr. Robert Zywicki
Superintendent



A WARM WELCOME ON DAY 1!

On the first day of school, fifth-grader Gianna Ferrugio is welcomed back by Melissa Kolenski, principal of Mountain View Elementary School. This is Mrs. Kolenski's first "first day of school" as official principal; last September, she opened Mountain View as acting principal. She was formally appointed principal by the board of education in November.

See us on Twitter!

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

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

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ART AT CMS

**Dolphin
experience
inspires projects**

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Students make their mark

MOUNTAIN View Elementary School students learned the power of the dot just as Vashti did in Peter Reynolds' inspirational bestseller, "The Dot." The multi-thematic children's book tells the story of a girl who, after lamenting her lack of artistic ability, makes a dot with a marker to appease her art teacher. She then goes on to explore her creativity by using dots in different and increasingly sophisticated ways.

Jen Olsyn, Mountain View's instructional supervisor, read the book to several classes in honor of International Dot Day. After discussions about the book's meaning, she then engaged them with companion activities.

Third-graders were each given a paper black dot and tasked with creatively using it in a drawing. Fourth-graders wrote stories about a girl named Dot and her quest to make a mark on the world, but here's the catch: The stories could not contain letters that have a dot in them (no "i" or "j" allowed). Fifth-graders created designs in a circle. Then, using the QuiverVision app on tablets, made the circles come to life in augmented reality, seemingly in 3-D.

"I hope students are inspired to make



With the QuiverVision app, a student's dot drawing turns into a 3-D augmented reality image

their mark," said Mrs. Olsyn, a huge fan of the book and Reynolds' other works. "It's also about having a growth mindset and not being afraid to try things and fail. It's an important message for kids."

This was the third year in which Mountain View has recognized International Dot Day.

Security and building improvements made

The district has made numerous security and building improvements in recent months:

- Security cameras were upgraded and additional cameras installed districtwide. A new electronic card access system was also put into place in every school, replacing keys for staff entry. In addition, a new lockdown system was installed with strobe lights for high noise areas and building exteriors.
- New windows were installed at Chester M. Stephens Elementary School.
- Water chillers and three energy-efficient boilers were installed at Mount Olive Middle School.
- Hallway and bathrooms were renovated at Sandshore Elementary School, with new lighting installed. Classrooms were also painted.
- At Mountain View Elementary School and Chester M. Stephens Elementary School, new furniture was added in areas dedicated to STEAM.
- A new finance lab at Mount Olive High School was established with an LED stock ticker and TVs for monitoring markets and business news.

Sharing how they learn

NEW teachers, new classmates, new rules, new expectations. Students spend the first few weeks of a school year adjusting to the "new." Finding your groove takes a little time, just as it does with adults in the first weeks of a new job.

To help kids learn about each other and teachers learn about them, Sandshore Elementary School co-teachers Tricia Mitchell and Donna Rocco engaged their students with several activities including one that required deep self-reflection. The fifth-graders were asked to complete learning profiles. Students listed how they learn best and each ranked eight learning methods (e.g., reading, teacher demonstrations, videos, etc.) in a column from most effective to least effective.

In another column, kids ranked how they prefer to work with information. (Working alone, working with a partner, and working in a group were some of the choices.)

In a third column, students listed the methods they prefer to show what they've learned, such as by writing, creating a poster, making a video, and by assembling a Google Slides presentation.

Armed with this information, the students spent time getting to know classmates with similar learning profiles who they might work



Etelka Moliner and Makenzie Lessing show off their learning profiles which list their favorite ways to learn

well with on future collaborative tasks.

"This could be the first time that students really considered their strengths and preferences as learners, which will help them as they make choices that guide their learning," said Mrs. Mitchell. "It also reinforced that we are all different, not only as people, but also as learners."

Students attend NJIT

Students from Mount Olive High School and Mount Olive Middle School learned advanced science and technology skills in a two-week program at New Jersey Institute of Technology.

In the Real World Connections program, the 30 students attended daily sessions on the NJIT Newark campus and each explored one of five different courses: Android app development, cybercrime solutions, website creation and maintenance, video game development, or virtual reality. The courses were designed around hands-on projects that allowed students to work collaboratively and learn by doing.

Students complete DNA research

A group of Mount Olive High School students recently extracted DNA from bee samples and duplicated a designated gene.

In the week-long program, part of the International Barcode of Life Project, the students worked in the high school's genetics lab preparing samples to send back for sequencing. The research completed by the students will be included in GenBank, the genetic sequence database of the National Institutes of Health.

Teachers Jen Brown, Chris Jensen, and Stephanie Makala coordinated the efforts of the young scientists.

A positive start to every day

FIRST GRADE teacher Kelli White stands at her classroom door at Tinc Road Elementary School. As her students trickle in for the day, she greets

each one personally. There are high-fives, handshakes, fist bumps, and hugs – each student choosing how he or she wants to be welcomed that morning. It’s a practice every classroom teacher in the building is now doing.

The warm welcome is a prelude to the daily morning meetup, a 15-minute sharing session that provides a positive kickoff to the school day. The meetings are part of a new district curriculum at the

elementary level that helps students work toward achieving the New Jersey Department of Education’s social emotional learning competencies. These include:

- Self-awareness
- Self-management
- Social awareness
- Responsible decision-making
- Relationship skills

After attendance and a morning song, a tradition of Tinc Road first grade classes, the students move to the carpet in the corner of the room and sit around Mrs. White.

The morning meetup is a community-building experience that helps to develop positive peer relationships. Under the direction of teachers, the students share experiences and discuss their likes and dislikes. They also engage in structured activities to promote positive attitudes that

are important to classroom climate such as empathy and respect.

Today Mrs. White’s students play a game of charades in which they act out favorite pastimes for their classmates to guess. It’s a fun way for kids to share their hobbies and help them find commonalities. They also talked about their favorite foods.

Clearly the socialization and casualness is warming up students for the school day. It’s the bullpen session before a pitcher takes the mound, a morning cup of coffee at the office before getting down to business.

Walk into Mrs. White’s classroom on other days and you might see students randomly picking the names of classmates from a hat and giving compliments to the people they selected. Or you could see everyone working together to build a single structure using blocks, books, or other items found in the room – an activity that strengthens collaboration and communication skills.

While game play and activities are morning meeting staples, Mrs. White more frequently uses this time to engage students with questions that compel them to reflect and self-disclose such things as thoughts, feelings, aspirations, goals, failures, successes, fears, dreams, likes, dislikes, and favorites. *If you could be a grown-up for a day, what would you do first and why? What is the most exciting thing you have ever done? What*

hurts your feelings? What did you do the last time your feelings were hurt?

“The morning meetup is a beautiful way to begin our day together as a family,” said Mrs. White. “It creates a space where the children feel comfortable sharing their feelings and can trust that we will all be there to support them.”

Each of Mrs. White’s morning meetings ends with an overview of the school day, preparing kids for what’s ahead.

The district uses the research-based Sanford Harmony curriculum for elementary students which is offered through National University. The Sanford Harmony online portal contains suggested activities that parents can do with their children to reinforce and augment what happens in the classroom. You can sign up for free at www.sanfordharmony.org.



First-graders Mia Laboy and DavyGail Macas join their classmates in a morning song and dance

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together as a
family.”

Kelli White
Teacher

Computers for all MOHS students

TEXTBOOKS and notebooks now have company in the backpacks of Mount Olive High School students: Chromebooks. Every student received a new Hewlett Packard

Chromebook to use at home and in class during the school year.

Providing MOHS students with their own computers accomplishes several important

goals. The initiative provides reliable devices to students who do not have computers or tablets of their own at home, or have inadequate, aging technology.

It also encourages more project-based learning and more individualized instruction. Since all students are now empowered to access the internet and internet-based applications outside of

school, it’s easier for them to research, communicate with their teachers, and collaborate with each other. Whenever and wherever they want, students can use instructional applications such as Google Classroom – an app that allows students to see classroom assignments and announcements, submit work, and exchange notes with their teachers and one another. They can even receive and respond to real-time personal feedback since teachers can use their own Chromebooks to check student work as it’s being done.

“This levels the playing field and ensures that all our high school students have the same access to resources,” said Dr. Robert Zywicki, superintendent of schools. “As a district we’re also focusing on tailoring instruction to meet the unique needs of each student and technology is essential to help teachers deliver those personalized learning experiences.”

In years prior to the Chromebook distribution, most high school classrooms were equipped with computers for student use in class.



Kaylee Rios picks up her Chromebook in the MOHS commons

A kiss inspires art projects

AT Chester M. Stephens Elementary School, a single kiss inspired art projects in every grade – a kiss from a dolphin.

During the summer, art teacher Denise Palmisano fulfilled a life-long dream and spent time with a dolphin. Mrs. Palmisano visited Dolphins Plus in Key Largo, Florida and interacted with Julie, a bottlenose dolphin. The highlight, besides the smooch, came when the two actually painted together. Mrs. Palmisano chose the colors and applied them to a paint brush that she put in Julie’s mouth. Julie did the rest, painting a small canvas for Mrs. Palmisano to take home.

So powerful was the experience that Mrs. Palmisano decided to incorporate ocean conservation and marine life awareness themes into her assignments this year. Planned are seahorse paintings (grade 1), sea turtle mixed media projects (grade 2), dolphin printmaking (grade 3), flamingo paintings and marine life sculptures (grade 4) and jellyfish paintings (grade 5). All projects were designed to teach the specific techniques and concepts in the elementary art curriculum.

“Through this focus on dolphins and ocean conservation, students will not just be making art,” Mrs. Palmisano said. “They’ll also be learning about science and forging a personal connection to the social issue of ocean



Gabriella Clark works on a drawing of flamingos

pollution.”

In September, Mrs. Palmisano presented a lesson to all her classes about dolphins, their love of socialization and human interaction, ocean conservation, and her experience at Dolphins Plus. After the lesson, students wrote letters to Julie’s trainers and sent them off with hand-drawn illustration of dolphins and marine animals.



MO educator named MOMS principal

Mount Olive Middle School has a new principal. James Kramer, a longtime Mount Olive School District educator, was appointed to the post by the board of education effective October 1. He replaces Matt Robinson who has become the director of elementary education.

Mr. Kramer has been with the district for 22 years. He taught social studies for two years at the middle school before transferring to the high school where he’s spent the last two decades. Since 2005 he has served as MOHS vice principal.

“I’m excited to bring my own educational vision to Mount Olive Middle School,” said Mr. Kramer. “I want to continue building a culture where kids and staff members love coming into the building. Every day we need to send the message to students that we as adults care and want them to excel.”

From 2000-2008, Mr. Kramer was the MOHS head football coach and led the team to its only state title in 2002 – a year in which he was honored as the Daily Record Coach of the Year and the Star Ledger State of New Jersey Coach of the Year. Prior to joining the district, he taught at Morris Knolls High School in Rockaway and at Ridge High School in Basking Ridge.

“Jim is a proven educational leader,” said Dr. Robert Zywicki, superintendent of schools. “His knowledge of the Mount Olive High School curriculum will be a huge benefit in preparing middle school students to take advantage of the academic opportunities at the high school.”

A Flanders resident, Mr. Kramer is both a MOHS graduate and a parent of two MOHS students. He holds two master’s degrees: one in educational leadership from New Jersey City University and one in teaching from Fairleigh Dickinson University.

Learning the power of one

RUBY Turner learned that one person can indeed make a difference.

After sharing the same classes for their early years at Mountain View Elementary School, Ruby and Leah Aquino became best friends. Now in fourth grade, the two found themselves with different teachers and without time to interact during the school day. Of course they couldn’t change the class assignments; however, Ruby saw an opportunity.

During lunch, each class’ students sit together in the cafeteria. Ruby wondered why this policy couldn’t be changed. She wrote a letter to Principal Melissa Kolenski.

“The school [teachers and staff] is always talking about how important it is to talk with new people,” said Ruby. “And I thought, What better way than to sit with different people instead of people in your class?”

Mrs. Kolenski brought Ruby’s letter to



school counselor Kate Devins. The policy of seating students in the cafeteria by class makes lunch arrival and dismissal fast and orderly. Mrs. Kolenski and Mrs. Devins, however, decided to try mixing things up for the fourth and fifth grades. Mix It Up Mondays, an initiative normally run once or twice year, would now happen every week. In Mix It Up Mondays, students are

randomly chosen to sit together at lunch as a way to encourage new friendships. (Cards with questions are provided to break the ice.)

Ruby was home sick on the day Mix It Up Mondays was officially announced. She found out after her mother received a text from her teachers, Anessa Goldkind and Melissa Ezro.

“When my mom told me, I jumped off the couch and started dancing, I was so happy,” said Ruby. “When you have an idea it’s good to share it and maybe you can make your dreams come true.”

Michael Cravotta – editor

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