

EducationUpdate

May 2022

MOHS named a model school

One of only 16 in nation to receive prestigious honor this year

MOUNT Olive High School has been named a 2022 Model School by the International Center for Leadership in Education, an organization that supports effective instructional practices that lead to accelerated learning for all students.



This honor is a recognition of not only the efforts over the past several years, but the decades-long commitment of the board of education and entire community to innovation and student-centered learning.

Dr. Robert Zywicki
Superintendent

“This honor is a recognition of not only the efforts over the past several years, but the decades-long commitment of the board of education and entire community to innovation and student-centered learning,” said Superintendent Robert Zywicki, Ed.D. “MOHS is the crown jewel of our district, with so many opportunities for students to explore whatever interests them. I am so proud of our teachers, administrators, and support staff for their dedication to our kids.”

In recent years, MOHS has also made a concerted effort to encourage all students to enroll in higher-level coursework. More AP classes were added, bringing the total to nearly 30, and the school adopted an AP financial incentive program. For students who pay the College Board fee for one AP exam, the school pays the registration fees for all additional exams. The incentive program helps overcome any cost barriers that were dissuading students from pursuing AP courses. For three consecutive years, 2017-2019, Mount Olive was named to the AP Honor Roll by the College Board – a

distinction that recognizes the district’s efforts in increasing the number of students from underrepresented demographics who take AP courses.

Additional partnerships were formed with several universities, too. This allowed students to receive college credit by taking

NEW CLUBS



Aaron Bravinjeyaraj, a third-grader at Sandshore Elementary School, looks for his next move

Chess clubs begin at elem schools

All four elementary schools have begun chess clubs taught by Mount Olive High School chess club members. At every meeting, the elementary students learn various strategies before putting their newfound knowledge to use by competing against each other.

college courses at MOHS, taught by MOHS teachers.

A team from the school district will present details of the high school’s unique programming at the 30th annual Model Schools Conference in Orlando, Florida from June 26–29.



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Flag football team started at MOHS

Page 3





AWARDS

Bottles of biographies

AT Chester M. Stephens Elementary School, fifth-graders taught by Dina Carmelengo, Katlyn Houtz and Maryellen Nyce culminated their study of biographies by writing profiles about notable figures of their own choosing. They then created likenesses of their subjects using plastic bottles as a base.

The students first read several biographies to learn the language, format, and structure of the genre; among them were “All About Betsy” and “Celia Cruz, Queen of Salsa.”

“All About Betsy” chronicles the life of Betsy Coleman, the first African-American woman and first Native American to hold a pilot license. “Celia Cruz, Queen of Salsa” tells the story of, you guessed it, the Cuban-born Cruz, a singer who revolutionized the Latin music industry and found international fame.

Each fifth-grader then selected a famous figure to write about. Using credible sources provided by the teachers, the young biographers conducted their research and compiled key facts before putting pen to paper. The completed biographical essays described the childhoods, adulthoods, and accomplishments of their subjects.

One- and two-liter bottles were given to students to take home and craft into sculptures of their famed personalities



Above, Ashley Wettlaufer holds her sculpture of Alexander the Great; **left,** Alia Tetrault with Clara Barton



using whatever materials they would like. It was a project inspired by one Houtz recalls doing in her own elementary school when she was a child.

Among the luminaries chosen to be profiled were: Helen Keller, Jane Goodall, Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., chocolatier Milton Hershey, John F. Kennedy, Marie Curie, and Stephen Hawking

Hands-on science lesson

LEARNING about living things and the habitats they call home is an important part of the kindergarten science curriculum. At Tinc Road Elementary School, kindergartners in Laura Smith and Shannon Sweeney’s class culminated their study of animals that alter their environments by constructing their own dams, simulating the work done by beavers.

For their dam projects, the students worked in small groups and used sticks they collected the day before as well as clay and rocks provided in the class science kits. They built their structures in metal baking pans. When the dams were completed, the eager beavers tested the integrity of their structures by pouring water into one side of the pans and checking for seepage.

“This was a great way to wrap up our



science unit,” said Sweeney. “The students loved working with their classmates. The project allowed them to use science, social and emotional, and problem-solving skills all at once.”

Other animals studied as part of the unit included ants, bees, and birds. The students also learned some of the ways in which people and plants change their environments.



Sandy Andrews with Sandshore Principal Jen Curry

They rock!

Sandy Andrews and Laura Markowski rock! The Mount Olive educators were recently honored in the Teachers Who Rock program sponsored by the New Jersey Education Association and radio station WDHA-FM. Their nomination letters were read on the air on the station’s morning show and posted on the channel’s website.

Andrews serves as the aide to Sandshore Elementary School’s reading specialist. Her nomination letter was penned by first grade teacher Tracy Church who wrote that Andrews “takes students one on one and in small groups to support their specific needs and build their confidence in the classroom. She is friendly and kind to all...She truly rocks.”

Markowski, a kindergarten teacher at Mountain View Elementary School, was nominated by fellow kindergarten teacher Jennifer Leone who called her “the glue that holds the kindergarten team together.”

“Ms. Markowski has a great relationship with her students because she never forgets what it is like to be a child,” Leone wrote. “She works hard to find activities that students will enjoy and find fun and engaging. She sees all the positive qualities in her students and celebrates their growth. She takes time out to make sure that every child feels special and loved.”

New club wins award for invention

In its inaugural year, Mount Olive High School’s Project Invent club, which focuses on entrepreneurship and invention, won the Discover Award and \$500 in the virtual Project Invent regional competition. The MOHS team developed a wearable alarm system for people with hearing impairments.

During the development phase, the Leary Firefighters Foundation and the fire departments from Erie, Pennsylvania and Millburn, New Jersey provided guidance and feedback.

Representatives from IBM served as competition judges.



High school begins girls flag football team



Jess Jobbins rears back to pass

Girls flag football has touched down at Mount Olive High School. About two dozen girls in grades 9–12 made the cut for the new team's inaugural season.

Practices began in early March, with team members spending time both out on the field and inside learning defensive and offensive plays. Although it's officially run as a club since flag football isn't recognized as a varsity sport by the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association, the team plays against other school teams from the area. The team's first game on April 13 was a tough loss against the Passaic County Technical Institute, defending state champs.

"It's all about creating opportunities for kids," said Superintendent Robert Zywicki, Ed.D. about starting the team. "From my own personal experience, I know how important

team sports are in helping young adults develop life skills such as leadership, teamwork, and confidence."

Many of the players participate in other sports during the fall and winter seasons. The flag football team provides students with another way to compete during the spring.



Above, Ashlee Beck catches a pass as Hibah Durrani, Amira Batekh, and Donae Beckford look on; **below left,** Isabella Kolbusz reaches out to catch a pass as Olivia Brown gives chase

MOHS junior Julia Klatt, an athlete who plays varsity soccer and basketball, didn't have much experience playing football. That didn't stop her from trying out. She found a team spirit different than on other teams.

"I enjoy it," she said. "Some teams can be stressful. This team, you can just have fun."

Teachers Brian O'Connor and Kristina Danella coach the team. O'Connor teaches physical education at MOHS and serves as the head coach of the boys varsity football team; Kristina Danella is a Mount Olive Middle School special education teacher.

"The coaches are great, very helpful with the plays and telling us where we should be," said sophomore Gabrielle Drucks. "We do similar plays to the boys teams."

A grant from the NFL helped pay for some of the team's startup expenses.

District's music program honored

FOR the sixth consecutive year, the school district has been honored with the Best Communities for Music Education designation from the National Association of Music Merchants Foundation in association with the University of Kansas. The honor is awarded to districts that demonstrate outstanding achievement in efforts to provide music access and education to all students.

"Mount Olive is a community that values and invests in music education as an essential component of our PK-12 program," said



Superintendent Robert Zywicki, Ed.D. "We are very proud of the work of our educators and even prouder of our student musicians and performers who are the real stars of our show."

The award from the foundation acknowledges that Mount Olive is leading the way with music opportunities as outlined in the new federal education legislation, the Every Student Succeeds Act. The legislation, signed into law and awaiting state implementation, designates music and the arts as important elements of a

well-rounded education for all children.

To qualify for the Best Communities designation, the district answered detailed questions about funding, graduation requirements, music class participation, instruction time, facilities, support for the music program, and community music-making programs.

Research into music education continues to demonstrate educational/cognitive and social skill benefits for children who make music. In a series of landmark studies by scientists and researchers at Northwestern University, a link was found between students in music programs and lifelong academic success, including higher high school graduation rates and college attendance.



Music and hijinks take center stage in 'Something Rotten'

Mount Olive High School's drama club recently performed "Something Rotten." The musical comedy, set in the 1590s, tells the tale of two brothers who run a theater troupe and are desperate for a hit. After a soothsayer foretells that the future of theater includes actors bursting out into song, the brothers set out to write the world's

very first musical.

Approximately 50 students in cast and crew brought the show to life. The production starred Jacob McCreery, Brendan Blazier, Sabrina Costa, Tyler Hamlett, Molly Gecek, Hyron Gonzalez, Olivier Kacprowicz, and Justice Vera.

MOHS English teacher Jodi Bosch directed the show.





When disaster strikes, find a MOMS sixth-grader



The look of shock on people's faces when I tell them I teach a class called Surviving Natural Disasters never gets old."

Rob O'Callaghan
Teacher



SIXTH-GRADERS enrolled in Mount Olive Middle School's Surviving Natural Disasters wrapped up the popular trimester course with a lesson on fire.

Teacher Rob O'Callaghan, after receiving permission from administrators, built a fire pit on gravel near the bus parking lot. Students were not permitted to light or tend to the fire; however, O'Callaghan demonstrated methods to get a fire going, including using magnesium shavings and flint and steel. The toasting of marshmallows followed, before the teacher demonstrated how to properly extinguish a campfire.

"The look of shock on people's faces when I tell them I teach a class called Surviving Natural Disasters never gets old," O'Callaghan said. "I don't know of any other class of its kind anywhere."

The course discusses various types of natural phenomena around the world such as hurricanes, blizzards, and earthquakes, and compares how nations in different stages of development respond to them. The scope later narrows to focus on the disasters frequently

experienced in New Jersey. But this course isn't just sitting in a classroom and learning about what-ifs.

The fire safety and fire-starting exercise culminates the course's survival unit. Students learn and practice the survival skills they might need in a life-threatening crisis. This includes simple first aid (e.g. tying a tourniquet, making a leg splint, and properly wrapping a bandage), navigation using a compass, and tying knots. The sixth-graders also venture into the woods near MOMS to construct simple shelters using fallen branches and other forest debris.

For a generation raised inside on video games, social media, texting, and television, venturing into the great outdoors to learn hands-on skills is fun, fresh, and informative.



Above, sixth-graders gather around the campfire to toast marshmallows; **below left,** Noah Pizzirusso awaits his turn

"Students walk out of the class with an exceptional amount of knowledge of the importance of assisting others after a devastating natural disaster, and how they can better assist in preparing their family for a local disaster," O'Callaghan said. "They also leave with a heightened degree of confidence in simple first aid as well as other lifelong skills that can help in many other aspects of life."

The Surviving Natural Disasters course was first offered in 2017-18.



Sebastian Ostrove, Shayna Shawl, and Alexis Thorward with bags of clothing and supplies destined for Ukraine

CMS raises money for Down syndrome

Chester M. Stephens Elementary School students donated more than \$1,900 to benefit Ruby's Rainbow. The foundation awards scholarships to students in the U.S. who have Down syndrome and are seeking post-secondary education, including enrichment and vocational classes.

The money was raised in honor of Anthony Vizzone, the 4 year-old son of the school's reading interventionist (gr. 3-5), Kathryn Vizzone. The grades competed against each other to raise the most money. First grade took the top honor, contributing \$416, and won a pajama dance party.

To explain Down syndrome and raise awareness of the drive, Vizzone spoke with students and created two read-aloud videos which the teachers shared with their classes. The books read were "47 Strings: Tessa's Special Code" by Becky Carey and "Different is a Great Thing to Be" by Heather Avis. Both authors have children with Down syndrome.

Drive benefits Ukraine

Three Mount Olive Middle School students recently organized a collection drive to benefit Ukraine. Touched by the tales of hardship and images of destruction in the media, Alexis Thorward, Shayna Shawl, and Sebastian Ostrove rallied their schoolmates in the collection of clothes, blankets, bedding, canned food, and

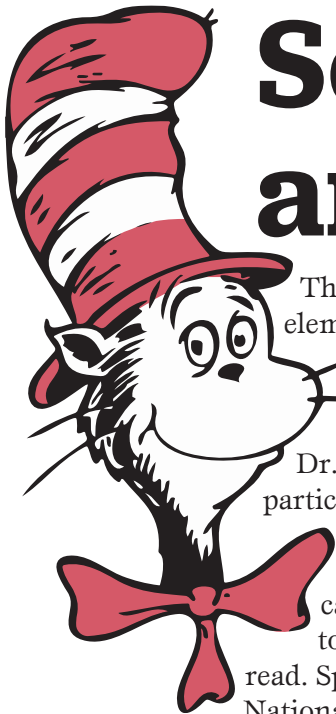
medical supplies.

To spread the word about the drive, the students created posters, posted on social media, and made a school announcement.

A MOMS substitute teacher with family in Ukraine brought the donations to a church in Parsippany which arranged a large shipment overseas.



“You’re never too old,
too wacky, too wild,
to pick up a book
and read to a child.”
– Dr. Seuss



The district’s elementary schools celebrated reading and everything Dr. Seuss as they participated in Read Across America Day – a nationwide campaign designed to motivate kids to read. Sponsored by the National Education

Association, Read Across America is held annually on the birthday of the legendary children’s author.

On the special day, parents, grandparents, board of education members, and administrators visited to read to classes, and students and staff donned their best Seussian attire.

The schools put their own unique twists on the festivities. Sandshore Elementary School had different projects for each grade level including a “Horton Hears a Who” STEAM activity for third-graders.

At Mountain View Elementary School, Paul Czekaj, a singer and songwriter, kicked off the day’s festivities by singing his original song, “Reading’s Lots of Fun.” His visit has become an annual RAA Day tradition.

Chester M. Stephens Elementary School

celebrated reading for the entire week. Each day, teachers read to their classes a book set in a different region of the county. Among the selections were “Catching The Moon,” which tells the story of a girl who grew up to become the first woman to play for an all-male pro baseball team, and “Hidden Figures,” a true story of four Black women instrumental in the space race.

Tinc Road Elementary School also made reading a focus of the entire week, with two author/illustrator events anchoring the fun. More than 260 students and parents turned out for a pizza and paint night inspired by “Giraffes Can’t Dance,” a picture book by Giles Andreae with illustrations by Guy Parker-Rees.

Two days later, the school hosted author and illustrator John Steven Gurney. Gurney delivered grade level presentations describing his path to becoming an author and illustrator. He also led students in a drawing project.

The two events were made possible by a grant from the Education Association of Mount Olive.





Gifted and talented program provides fun learning experiences

STUDENTS in Aspire, the district's afterschool gifted and talented program for grades 2–5, combine new learning and creativity to complete innovative hands-on projects.



Every day I am shocked with what they come up with. They do things totally out of the box. And it's interesting to see how differently they work from each other."

Maryellen Nyce
CMS teacher

fashions, creating a signature perfume and accompanying marketing plan, and building a sports franchise are just some of the projects that the kids have worked or are working on.

During the holiday season, students in grades 4 and 5 constructed gingerbread houses using real gingerbread and a variety of confections; however, with every ingredient having an assigned cost, their real estate mogul

dreams were constrained by the very tight budgets they had to work with. (Welcome to real life, kids.)

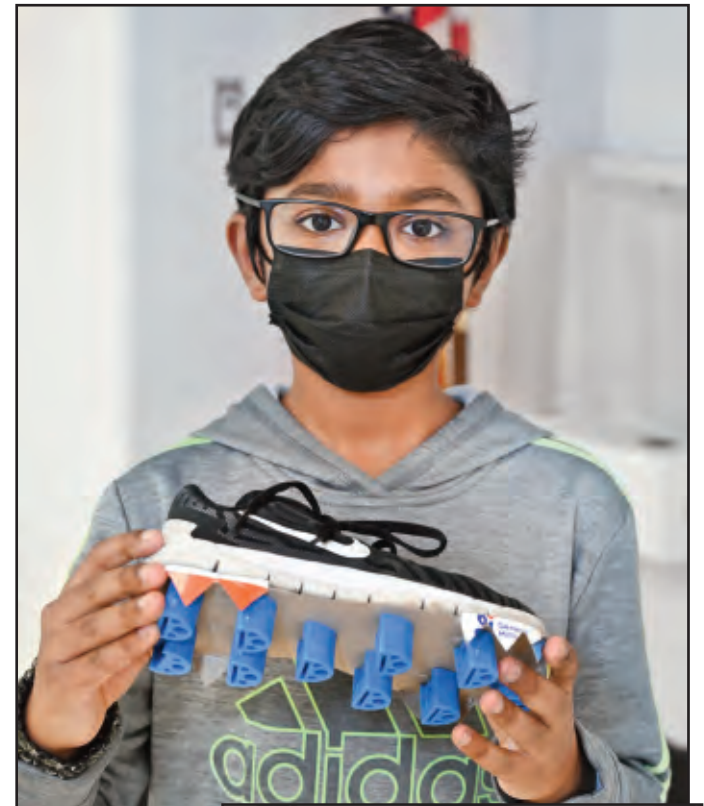
"I love project-based learning," said Kessler, a teacher new to Tinc Road who piloted an enrichment program in her former district. "In Aspire, the kids are actually creating their own curriculum as they go. It's exciting."

At Chester M. Stephens Elementary School, students recently tackled two notable projects. After studying the forces of nature and friction, the students were tasked with formulating ways to slow the travel of a ping-pong ball down a ramp. The young engineers modified both the ramps and balls with a variety of materials such as masking tape, bubble wrap, and rubber to combat the force of gravity.

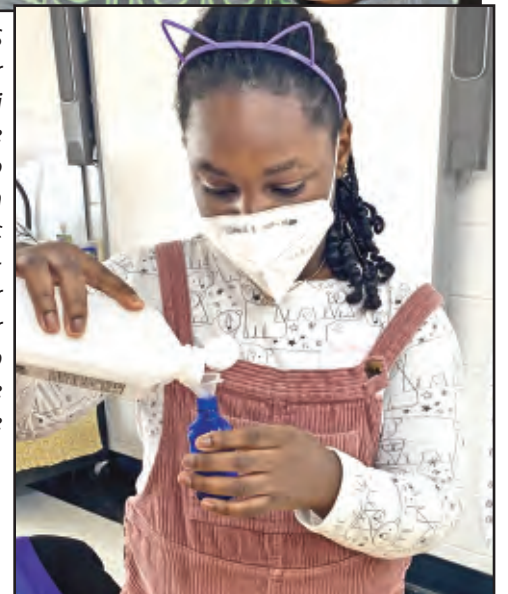
The students also used their understanding of friction to design shoes and vehicles that could safely and effectively traverse ice. To increase traction, anti-slip rug underlay and plastic toy construction blocks were among the products used.

"Every day I am shocked with what they come up with," said teacher Maryellen Nyce who works with the kids. "They do things totally out of the box. And it's interesting to see how differently they work from each other."

The students have also created their own games, both board games and video games. Aspire students meet once per week after school.



Above, CMS fifth-grader Surya Mani holds the shoe he developed to safely walk on ice; **right,** Tinc Road fourth-grader Arreymanyor Tataw mixes up her signature fragrance



Abdul Ghani shows off his sunflower painting

Flowers are in bloom at Tinc Road

It's officially spring and flowers are blooming – inside Tinc Road Elementary School. Students in all grades recently completed sunflower projects after learning about the work of the most famous sunflower artist of all time: Vincent Van Gogh.

The young artists worked on a variety of sunflower projects in different mediums, from pastels to acrylics.

The students in grades 3–5 also learned that the sunflower is the national flower of Ukraine and has become a symbol of peace and protest in the conflict with Russia.

Making a difference in the world

The rewards of volunteerism and the impact that people can have on others were messages that Alainie Costas, a Massachusetts nurse, recently brought to Mount Olive Middle School students.

Ms. Costas spent an entire school day remotely speaking to eighth-graders about her experiences volunteering on Mercy Ships – hospital ships that provide free medical care to developing countries. On three separate tours lasting several months each, she treated patients in the West African countries of Benin, Togo, and Sierra Leone. Ms. Costas described in detail what life is like in these poverty-stricken nations and her service on teams that provided orthopedic, reconstructive, and general surgeries.

MOMS library media specialist David Eisenberg, a friend of Costas', arranged the special day.



Making new community links

IN the pre-COVID days, Mount Olive Middle School's Community Links club would reach out in various ways to the Mount Olive community and Morris County region. Members served as school ambassadors, visiting seniors at the St. Francis Elderly Residential Center, for example, and working with children at the Mount Olive Child Learning Center.

The lingering pandemic has changed the club, but its community service mission remains. With field trips a thing of the past, the members have found ways to contribute to the school community in ways that are less personal, but still impactful.

The two dozen students work in small groups to tackle different projects. One team recently took on the mission of transforming the bulletin board outside the cafeteria into an information resource. Members post flyers with info such as details on a babysitter training course, club contact information, and school drama production updates. Anything that the team feels would be

of interest and of help to their peers is considered. It's decidedly low-tech, but effective and current.

Another team prepared a fundraiser and support drive for a local animal shelter, another worked on a plan to make sweet treats that were sold and the profits used to buy gifts of appreciation for the school's bus drivers, and another prepared a penny war fundraiser to support various local charities.

A group of girls also developed a slide show to present to Principal Jim Kramer, advocating for the creation of a co-ed volleyball team.

The pandemic has necessitated flexibility and resiliency in so many areas of school and work; some changes have worked so well, they've been continued.

"The kids are wonderful and I am so impressed with the level of teamwork I'm seeing," said teacher Karen LaValley, club adviser. "They really think everything through. Working on some small projects like this is something we may keep in the club even when we can get back out in the world."



Chloe Winters works on graphics for her team's info board

The great outdoors comes inside

THE fourth and fifth grade wing at Mountain View Elementary School was recently transformed into an outdoor wonderland called Camp Read-a-lot. During the special three days, teachers infused the nature/camping theme into daily instruction

to heighten student engagement and the enjoyment of learning.

With tents, sleeping bags, and faux campfires in classrooms, students engaged in a variety of activities that spanned all curriculum areas.

In math, for example, fourth-graders designed campgrounds and calculated the areas and perimeters of them. In addition, they practiced their multiplication and division using cards with camp-themed pictures. In English language arts, the students used homemade fishing rods to fish for text passage cards from an inflatable pool. They then applied various comprehension strategies to the texts they caught. They also practiced their inferencing skills and went on a scavenger hunt to find vocabulary words related to camp.

Some classes also participated in a STEAM challenge to build a tent using toothpicks, aluminum foil, and marshmallows.

Of course, Camp-Read-a-lot featured a lot of reading. Students read a variety of books

that were brought from home and borrowed from the library.

Fifth grade teacher Katie Goss made Camp-Read-a-lot tee shirts for all the camp counselors (i.e. teachers).



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