

EducationUpdate

October 2021

All Mount Olive schools recognized in prestigious statewide program

ALL six Mount Olive schools were recently recognized for their effective use of digital learning tools and their commitment to sustainability. Each school was awarded a Digital School Star and earned bronze certification from Sustainable Jersey. The organization helps schools become environmentally friendly buildings, foster positive school environments, and prepare students for the challenges of the future.

Mount Olive School District is one of just a handful of districts in the state to have all of its schools earn a Digital School Star.

“Digital Star recognition for all six buildings is a testament to the hard work of our teachers and amazing IT staff to make digital learning a vital piece of the instructional and assessment process,” said Superintendent Robert Zywicki, Ed.D. “Mount Olive has been an instructional technology leader for some time; however, over the past three years, that commitment has strengthened and has truly been transformational.”

To earn a Digital School Star, each school submitted a comprehensive application detailing its efforts in a dozen action areas. These included:

- Application of digital learning tools
- Teaching of digital citizenship
- Data safety and security
- Infrastructure
- Equitable access to digital learning

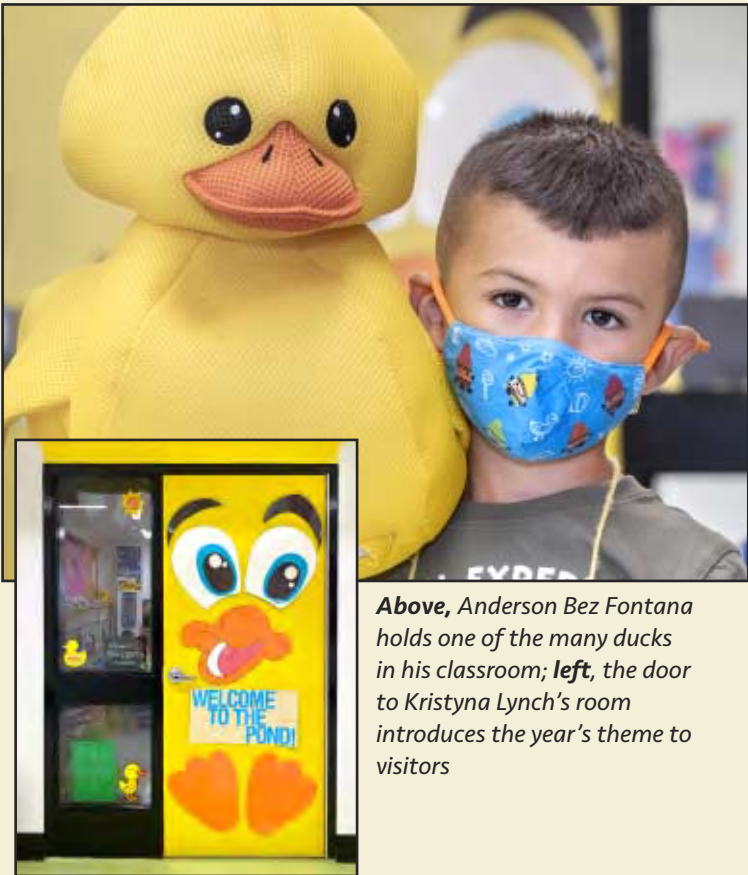
Among the highlights cited were the district’s advanced wireless network, 1:1 Chromebook deployment to students, extensive use of the Google educational suite of applications and resources, development of a personalized success plan for each student, hybrid learning practices, and various digital communications vehicles (e.g., school newsletters, regular use of social media, superintendent’s weekly blog and

THEME

Everything’s ducky at CMS

At Chester M. Stephens Elementary School, kindergarten teacher Kristyna Lynch adopted a duck theme for her class this year. It’s everywhere, inside and outside of the classroom, from signs to bulletin boards. The class begins each morning by reading the Pond Promise, a testament to kindness and helping each other which the class created together on the first day of school.

“Themes help build a sense of community,” said Lynch. “Every day I try to show my class that we’re in the pond together as a family, and that means being responsible, inclusive, and a source of kindness here and beyond the pond.”



Above, Anderson Bez Fontana holds one of the many ducks in his classroom; left, the door to Kristyna Lynch’s room introduces the year’s theme to visitors

frequent video messaging).

A more extensive application in 22 assessment categories was completed to earn sustainability certification. Among the categories:

- Energy efficiency for school facilities
- Energy tracking & management
- Healthy food choices
- Promotion of locally grown foods
- Green cleaning policy and plan
- Classroom cleanup practices
- Education about sustainability
- Programs to promote physical activity

- Indoor air quality review
- Green purchasing policy

The Digital Schools program is offered in partnership with the New Jersey Department of Education and the New Jersey School Boards Association. It builds on the foundation of Future Ready Schools – New Jersey, a discontinued organization that helped schools harness the power of instructional technology and student assessment data to improve learning. All Mount Olive schools received Future Ready certification in 2019.



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Mount Olive School District gets an ‘A’

Niche.com has again ranked MOTSD in the top 4% of all school districts in the U.S. and awarded it an “A.” MOTSD was also ranked in the top 50 best school districts in New Jersey.





CMS classes are on track

A SUMMERTIME railroad trip through the Rockies was the inspiration behind the theme adopted by two second grade classes at Chester M. Stephens Elementary School.

Teacher Ann Scotland's ride aboard a vintage steam train on the Durango & Silverton Railroad in Colorado took her through the San Juan National Forest on a historic stretch of track that's been continuously operated since 1882. The scenic gorges and sounds of the train whistle echoing through the canyons compelled her to bring the experience back to her students. She and teacher Dawn Walsh adopted the train theme for 2021-22, and together they developed the plan to make it all work and all make sense in the context of the classroom.

"Themes can be inviting and uniting for a class," said Scotland. "When you launch off a year with one it offers an immediate connection that you can all share in. We wanted the return to school to be extra special for the children after such an unsettling time with the pandemic."

Train lingo and imagery is used frequently in the classrooms. During the educational journey of each day, the train makes numerous stops, frequenting places such as the Math Station and the Reading



Bradley Quinn stands in the hallway in front of a train mural

Café. You'll hear talk of students "staying on track" with their learning and the "all aboard" call when an activity commences. When students rotate among learning centers in the classroom, they go from track to track.

"We use the train theme just enough to keep students connected and to give the day a fun, steady structure," Scotland said.

It was full steam ahead with the train theme from the very first day of school when the second-graders created their own personalized conductor hats. The students had real ones to use for reference. The classes were gifted two New Jersey Transit conductor hats from a friend of Scotland's, a retired NJT employee.

Class focuses on SEL skills

WITH much of the U.S. workforce gradually returning to the workplace, many adults are finding it difficult to adjust to the regular routine. The same holds true of children who are back to school full time and in person, away from the isolation that defined pandemic life.

Teachers of younger students in the district have eased students back into the academic demands of the regular day by building the social and emotional skills of their kids.

At Tinc Road Elementary School, third grade teachers Samantha Darnesto and Michele Schoch emphasized to their class the importance and benefits of togetherness and collaboration. They engaged students in various activities that set the tone for the school year and helped build a spirit of family and togetherness within the classroom. For example, students were posed with four questions:

- How can we make this class feel like a family?



Addison Wright places a note on a bulletin board with her suggestion on the best way to collaborate with her classmates

- How can we celebrate one another?
- How can we support each other?
- What does respect look like?

The third-graders then wrote their answers on Post-it notes and affixed them to a bulletin board in the front of the class. It's a literal roadmap of concrete steps that students can take to build bonds and nurture relationships.

IN THE NEWS



MOHS student attends cyber academy

Bryan Thomas, an eleventh-grader and Air Force Junior ROTC cadet at Mount Olive High School recently participated in the Air Force Junior ROTC Cyber Academy. He remotely attended the six-week, three-credit college course to build skills in state-of-the-art information technology and cybersecurity. Thomas was one of just 100 Air Force Junior ROTC cadets from around the world chosen to be a part of the program.

Taught by college professors and guest lecturers in the cybersecurity and information technology fields, the academy focused on essential IT fundamentals, coding, and common types of cyberattacks. After each day's morning lecture, the cadets worked in small work groups to apply the knowledge they had learned.

In late October, Thomas will put his new knowledge to the test when he takes the IT Fundamentals exam from the Computing Technology Industry Association. If he passes, he will receive his IT Fundamentals certification, a typical first step for professionals pursuing careers in the IT field.

Students are among nation's best

Three Mount Olive High School seniors were named as semifinalists in the 2022 National Merit Scholarship Program. Aveena Khanderia, Kyle Mears, and Bilal Syed earned the honor based on their scores on the Preliminary SAT, an exam that measures language and math skills and knowledge important for success in college and beyond.

The students' scores are in the top 1 % in the nation.

To advance, the students must complete comprehensive applications which include official school grades, school and community activities, awards, and examples of leadership ability.

The competition awards three types of scholarships to winners: one-time \$2500 National Merit Scholarships; college-sponsored Merit Scholarships with four-year renewable awards; and corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarships with four-year renewable awards or a single-payment award.

MOHS students pass AP exams in near record numbers

THE pandemic didn't slow down Mount Olive High School students. Data recently released by the College Board shows that the high school's students are continuing to enroll and pass Advanced Placement exams in near record numbers.



In a pandemic-disrupted school year with shortened school days and remote instruction, our students and staff hurdled challenges and kept their focus."

Dr. Robert Zywicki
Superintendent

Research, and four additional AP exams of their choosing.

"I am so proud of our students and AP teachers for their perseverance and dedication to achievement," said Superintendent Robert Zywicki, Ed.D. "In a

pandemic-disrupted school year with shortened school days and remote instruction, our students and staff hurdled challenges and kept their focus. It's inspirational, it really is."

The district's surging AP participation reflects a concerted effort by the Mount Olive Board of Education, central administration, and high school administration to encourage students to challenge themselves with more difficult coursework. More AP courses were added to meet student interest, bringing the total to nearly 30, and additional college-level courses are being offered through local universities.

In January 2020, the Mount Olive Board of Education also approved an AP incentive program to encourage students to enroll in AP courses and complete exams. For students who paid the College Board fee for one AP exam, the district paid the registration fees for all additional exams. The incentive program helped overcome any cost barriers that were dissuading students from pursuing higher-level courses. (The College

758 AP exams administered
80% higher than 2016

107 AP Scholars
Students passing more than one AP exam

8 Capstone Diplomas
For graduates passing AP Seminar, AP Research, and four additional AP exams of the students' choosing during high school

Board charge for most exams is about \$95, but some can cost as much as \$143.)

The data from 2021 also shows that students from diverse demographics are continuing to participate in AP courses. This has long been a district and school goal. 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 (while also increasing or maintaining the percentage of students passing the exams).

Taking on the paper table challenge

THE goal for seventh-graders in Innovation & Design classes was to systematically apply the steps of the engineering design process: ask, research, imagine, plan, create, test, improve. The task: build an 8-inch tall table capable of supporting the weight of a textbook, using just a cardboard top, eight sheets of newspaper, and tape.

Working in the makerspace in teams of four to six, the students constructed their prototypes in a wide variety of designs, all using rolled sheets of newspaper as support columns. The students documented their progress in their engineering design notebooks, carefully noting the process and details every step of the way.

"The kids did an amazing job," said teacher Tricia Mitchell. "At first it seemed a little daunting to them, but as they thought more about it and began designing, they quickly realized that they had the creativity and knowledge to succeed."

The challenge was also an exercise in collaboration and communication – two essential skills necessary for success with group projects in school and in the workplace.



Left, Nicholas Moschello peeks over the top of the table his team built; **below,** different table designs





Building a spirit of community

KINDERGARTEN isn't all about ABCs and 123s. Social and emotional learning is a foundational element. Collaboration techniques, respect for others, and positive relationship-building are life skills that take root in kindergarten and are nurtured throughout a student's entire educational career.

With the pandemic disrupting last school year, Sandshore Elementary School's first grade teachers made it a September priority to build a spirit of togetherness and develop students' interpersonal skills. For students who had spent their kindergarten year learning remotely throughout all of 2020-21, this would be their first introduction to Sandshore and possibly even to working in-person with a group of peers.

First grade teachers welcomed students before the year had even begun. They recorded themselves reading "The Night Before First Grade" and emailed the videos to their students. The storybook tells the tale of a girl who makes new friends on the first day of first grade and engages in "getting to know you" activities with her classmates

– a perfect depiction of what was to come.

"I think the video helped take some of the butterflies away," teacher Jennifer Day said. "And I wanted students to see me without a mask. That was important, for them to see a person. On the first day [during arrival], some students recognized me even with my mask on and said 'Look, there's my teacher.'"

To help students become acquainted with each other and develop a spirit of community, some first grade teachers asked students to bring in "all about me" bags with items that represented personality traits, likes, and hobbies. Students described to their classes the items in their bags and explained why the items represented them. Items included toy cars, sports medals and ribbons, and ballet shoes. Teachers also brought in bags of their own to share, many with family and pet photos.

Some teachers also asked students to complete "all about me" posters, cooperatively develop classroom rules of conduct, and write reasons explaining why their class is a family.



Kayla King holds a poster explaining why her class is a family



First-graders in Alexandra Eppinger's class build and explore in Mountain View's makerspace



Ruby Hannaway shows off the quote of the week

Open for business!

MOUNTAIN View Elementary School's makerspace is in full gear. Finally. Classes are now visiting once a week, exploring the different construction kits and materials. It's been a long time in the making.

The makerspace, formerly the library computer room, received new furniture

and materials in the winter and spring of 2020; however, only a few groups of students were able to use the room before the pandemic necessitated an end to in-person instruction. Because of pandemic safety protocols and an abbreviated school day, the makerspace was not used during the 2020-2021 school year.

Finding inspiration

Inspiration can easily be found in Devon Marques and Lauren Pedersen's class at Sandshore Elementary School. Every week, a different quote is posted which focuses on themes such as optimism, inclusivity, respect, hard work, and togetherness.

The third-graders seek out inspirational messages at home with their families, discuss them, then each student selects one to recommend to the class. Every Friday, the students present their quotes and speak about the meanings. The student whose quote was selected as the current week's inspiration chooses the quote for the following week.