

Education Update

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District eyes \$600K in tuition

Tuition from Chinese students in transfer program would provide significant revenue

Mount Olive School District is in the homestretch of establishing a program that would welcome approximately 30 high-achieving students from China for their senior year of high school. The move could net the district as much as \$600,000 in revenue next year from tuition payments.

“Not only will this program provide extra money, it would provide our kids with insight into another culture and allow the best and brightest Chinese students to spend a year studying in America.”

Dr. Larrie Reynolds
Superintendent

Dr. Larrie Reynolds, superintendent of schools. "State aid has essentially been flat for years so the district is continually seeking other revenue sources. Not only will this program provide extra money, it would provide our kids with insight into another culture and allow the best and brightest Chinese students to spend a year studying in America. It's really a win-win."

No added teachers or any other significant expenses are anticipated, and Mount Olive High School can easily accommodate the extra students.

The district has partnered with Edu-Link, a Paramus-based consulting firm that builds alliances between international schools and those in the U.S., to establish its transfer program. Edu-Link will serve as the liaison between Mount Olive and the schools in China, as well as place students with carefully-screened host families for the duration of their stays.

In February, approximately 90 Chinese students are slated to visit Mount Olive High School as part of their Edu-Link guided tour of

U.S. schools.

School officials visit China

Before moving forward with the plan, four board of education members and three administrators visited China in early November to learn more about the Chinese educational system and the needs and customs of its students. While in China, the school officials spent most of their time touring public and private schools in the cities of Changchun and Beijing, including several that had already established international educational partnerships.

"It was important for us to be sure that the students would be a good fit for us and us with them," said Dr. Reynolds, who was part of the contingent. "What we found were hardworking students, many of whom are now in school for 10-14 hours per day, that are fascinated with America and the American way of life. They believe we have the best schools and universities in the world and they all would love to come here to learn."

Edu-Link paid for the entire cost of one administrator's trip. A grant from the Confucius Institute of Rutgers University paid



The Hour of Code... Students of all grades in the district recently participated in the Hour of Code, an annual event sponsored by Code.org which teaches the fundamentals of computer programming. Above, Leah Welsch, a second-grader at Mountain View Elementary School, plays a game that teaches the logic required for effective coding.

for all of the lodging, food, ground transportation, and most of the airfare for the other two administrators and all four board of education members. The total expense to the district is estimated to be less than \$5,000.

To accept foreign students, a school must be approved by the federal government and be certified as a Student and Exchange Visitor Program (SEVP) institution. The district has already filed the necessary paperwork. An inspector recently visited Mount Olive High School and submitted a recommendation; approval is expected by early spring.

The district will select the participants for the program based on applications, academic transcripts, and interviews.

Mt. Olive Township School District

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**New facilities
highlight of
open house**
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Another banner year

At a recent meeting, the board of education honored Tinc Road for being ranked in the top 5% of highest-achieving elementary schools in all of New Jersey and in the top 10% in Morris County. Staff members and students joined Dr. Richard Fair, school principal, and Melissa Kolenski, instructional supervisor, in accepting a banner recognizing the achievement.

"I am so very proud of my students and teachers," said Dr. Fair. "They're wonderful.

Reaching the top 5% in the state has never been done before by any school in Mount Olive and I am honored that Tinc Road was the first to ever do so."

Tinc Road's ranking is based on PARCC scores from the 2015-2016 school year as reported on Schooldigger.com, a website that compiles test score data from more than 120,000 schools nationwide. Particularly notable were Tinc Road's strides in fourth and fifth grade language arts and math. Compared



Samuel Papafio-Kesee, Tessa Zentko, Lillie Lijewski, and Connor Smyth hold up the banner recently presented to Tinc Road Elementary School

to 2014-2015, the percentage of fourth-graders rated as proficient (considered as passing) increased by 9% percent in language arts and 40% in math; the percentage of fifth-graders rated as proficient increased by 16% percent in language arts and 26% in math.

This is the fourth year in the past six years that Tinc Road has been honored as a top Morris County school. Overall, the district was ranked in the top 13% of the best New Jersey school systems.

Withstanding quakes

STUDENTS at Mount Olive Middle School have a new-found appreciation for the skill it takes to build earthquake-resistant buildings and bridges. Gabrielle Czernik, a structural engineer, recently guided all students in the school in an experiment to create their own structures able to withstand the shaking and rolling of a quake.

The hands-on STEM lessons were conducted in the cafeteria for six periods throughout the day. Working in teams of three to six, students devised and built structures from marshmallows, paper, and coffee stirrers. Using "shake tables" that simulate an earthquake, the kids then tested the stability and strength of their creations. If they survived the first temblor, the structures were tested using sandbags as weights.

The structural challenge helped students apply their knowledge of science to a project that simulates a real-life problem and helped develop critical thinking skills. Good communication and teamwork were also important for success.

Before the hands-on science, Ms. Czernik discussed civil engineering careers and the most common specializations (transportation, geotechnical, environmental,



Gabrielle Czernik looks on as Daniel Pera and John Conway test the stability of the structure they helped create

coastal, water resources, and construction). This is the third year in which Ms. Czernik has brought hands-on engineering challenges to MOMS students.



Mikhayla Casey and Eric O'Hern help count the money raised for UNICEF

Helping children around the world

Fourth-graders at Mountain View Elementary School recently raised more than \$1,200 for UNICEF, the humanitarian organization dedicated to helping children in need around the world. The students participated in UNICEF's annual Halloween fundraiser which has raised more than \$175 million since the project's inception more than 60 years ago.

In addition to asking for donations instead of candy while trick-or-treating, the kids worked in small groups to raise money in different ways. Some went door to door soliciting donations, some placed collection jars in local retailers, others had info stands, and one group organized a bake sale outside Valentino's Pizza.

This year, the fourth-grade teachers are creating grade-level projects that expand upon each unit in Journeys – the program at the heart of the district's language arts curriculum. The UNICEF fundraiser related to the "Reaching Out" unit which included an article about the different ways children around the world get books and a short play called "The Power of W.O.W." about students fund-raising for a local charity.

Continuing to bend

Bend The Cycle, an informational website that made national headlines last spring when it was launched by Mount Olive High School student Mike Tanious, continues to grow and evolve. The site has officially formed a non-profit organization and boasts a new look and easy-to-follow navigation.

The heart of bendthecycle.com is still the same: inspiration, advice, and helpful resources for kids aged 13-24, particularly ones who are growing up in lower-income communities. The site includes straight-up, practical information on such topics as standardized testing, jobs, taxes, financial aid, college costs and majors, health, and typical salaries of various occupations.

Full STEAM ahead

Open house at MOHS focuses on science, technology, engineering, art, and math

Full STEAM Ahead, Mount Olive High School's recent open house, showcased the school's expansive course offerings and clubs involving science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM). Approximately 200 residents and guests, including New Jersey commissioner of education Kimberley Harrington, toured the building.

The highlights of the open house were the new instructional spaces created from a summer renovation of the school's former auditorium: a high-tech design lab and a state-of-the-art audio production studio.

Teachers and students were on hand to demonstrate the capabilities of the design lab, which enables engineering students to plan, prototype, and produce products using more than 30 MakerBot 3-D printers. In the MakerBot center, the first of its kind in any high school, several 3-D printers churned away and brought to life student-designed objects.

Directly below the lab on the first

floor, the audio studio and adjacent performance area were also a hubbub of activity. Musicians in MOHS' new Rock 'n' Roll Academy, which includes courses and clubs, performed classic rock favorites while audio engineering students recorded and mixed the tunes. The heart of the audio studio is an API mixing board typically found in high-end recording companies (see photo on front page).

The open house also featured overviews of the video production department and walk-throughs of the t.v. studio and control room; demonstrations by the drone racing club; performances by musical ensembles; tours of the robotics labs; and presentations by the robotics teams and students in computer-aided design and architecture courses.

The Full STEAM Ahead open house was coordinated by Dr. Gretel Perez, supervisor of STEAM, and Christine Nelson, administrative assistant to the principal, Kevin Stansberry.



Dr. Tracey Severns, director of student performance, and Kimberley Harrington, NJ commissioner of education, chat with Gavin Weeber

At right, part of the design lab used for prototyping; far right, Alyssa Algeri solders in a robotics lab; bottom right and bottom center, students in the Rock 'n' Roll Academy perform in the space adjacent to the audio studio; below, Bella Ferrara shows off the capabilities of a NAO robot



Game teaches geography and logic

Where in the world is that classroom on the computer screen? That's the question Britt Henricksen and Dani Marangon's fifth-graders at Chester M. Stephens Elementary

energy in the air as the young detectives work to solve the geographic mystery.

"The kids love it," said Ms. Henricksen. "The game engages them in a critical thinking challenge that requires teamwork and good communication. It encourages thinking outside the box."

In Mystery Skype, every student is assigned a job. There are students who research the questions to ask the other class and

students who research questions that need to be answered, for example, as well as those assigned to represent the class on camera. There are also typists responsible for chronicling the questions and answers.

At the end of each game, which takes approximately 45 minutes to complete, the classes usually share information about their schools and communities.

There are several ways that teachers



Veronica Pandowski and teacher Britt Henricksen research Pennsylvania geography during a recent game of Mystery Skype

“The kids love it. The game engages them in a critical thinking challenge that requires teamwork and good communication.”

Britt Henricksen
Fifth grade teacher

answered with a "yes" or "no." Think of it as a type of video "Battleship" game that reinforces not only geography but also logic, cooperation, and deductive reasoning skills.

Ms. Henricksen and Ms. Marangon's fifth-graders have played the game several times this year, most recently with a fifth-grade class just 90 miles away in Philadelphia. Walk into the classroom during a Mystery Skype session and you'll feel the excitement and

interested in participating in Mystery Skype contact each other. The most frequently used method is through Twitter by using #mysteryskype in the tweet. (Twitter has become a powerful resource for educators, allowing them to share information and engage in cooperative learning activities.)

Ms. Henricksen and Ms. Marangon's class has previously faced-off against Mystery Skype classes in Illinois and North Carolina.

The reasons for an historic accord

BEFORE landing, the Pilgrims aboard the Mayflower agreed in writing to create "just and equal Laws" in their settlement that

would work "for the general good of the Colony." Right before the school district's Thanksgiving recess, fifth-graders at

Sandshore Elementary School learned about the importance of this document, known as the Mayflower Compact, through an exercise that showed them the impact of unjust laws.

Students representing citizens in a colony were given disproportionate quantities and qualities of candy

based on a set of "laws" that were created by the colony's leader. Some students had various bars of chocolate while the vast majority had only small bags of Skittles. After distribution, the kids were arbitrarily assigned an odd or even number correlating to their status in the community and given five minutes to barter with each other based on their new positions.

The result was a chaotic and often frustrating social struggle that left those citizens who were "poor" and "powerless" feeling victimized by the laws that formed the very foundation of their colony.

"The kids came to understand just how important the Mayflower Compact was," said fifth grade teacher Tricia Mitchell. "The activity brought to light the need for an agreement that would promote the betterment of the colony while addressing the problems at hand with immediacy. There were many hardships faced by the Pilgrims, and weathering them underscored the importance of cooperation, adaptation, perseverance, and resolution."



Saaket Kulkarni and Marcello D'Amico try to work out an agreement

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