

Education Update

an official publication of the Mount Olive Township School District

Nov 2016

District in top 13% in state

Test scores show Mount Olive students are achieving at highest levels in district history

Mount Olive School District is in the **top 13%** of the best New Jersey school systems, according to rankings recently released by SchoolDigger. The website, which annually evaluates U.S. schools based on standardized test scores, ranks Mount Olive in the 87th percentile in the state and in the **top 10 of Morris County districts.** The SchoolDigger ranking confirms

“Our students, faculty, and staff deserve hearty congratulations. The Board of Education also played a crucial leadership role in this achievement by establishing to all that we stand for excellence.”

Dr. Larrie Reynolds
Superintendent

district data that shows that student achievement levels in 2016 were the **highest in Mount Olive history.**

All our schools performed exceptionally well. Particularly notable were the test scores at Tinc Road Elementary School, which led to its ranking in the **top 4%** of all New Jersey elementary schools.

Mount Olive High School, the district's flagship school, scored among the **top 10% statewide** for the first time in its history. That performance is even more impressive considering that regional vocational/technical schools and charter schools were included in the rankings. (In August, MOHS was honored by Newsweek as one of America's top high schools; it was also recognized as a top high school by U.S. News & World Report in 2015.)

“Our kids, faculty, and staff deserve hearty congratulations,” said Dr. Larrie Reynolds, superintendent of schools. “The Board of Education also played a crucial leadership role in this achievement by establishing to all that

we stand for excellence. They worked together with district administrators to craft policies, programs, and procedures that ensure that our kids are getting the best education they can.”

About 99% of Mount Olive students took the PARCC exams – the standardized tests in language arts and math that are the foundation for the SchoolDigger rankings.

New high-tech HS spaces

MOHS open house set for Tuesday, November 29, from 6-7:30 p.m.

NEWLY renovated instructional spaces at Mount Olive High School are providing students with experiences not found in any other high school in the country.

The highlight is a new design lab that enables engineering students to plan, prototype, and produce products using more than 30 MakerBot 3-D printers. The MakerBot center is the first of its kind in any high school and demonstrates the district's commitment to teaching students hands-on skills in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

The design lab occupies space on the school's second floor that was reclaimed when the building's original auditorium was converted to instructional use over the summer. The first floor of the renovated space includes a state-of-the-art audio production studio featuring an API mixing board typically found in high-end recording companies. The studio and adjacent performance space are



Mohammed Hamed, an MOHS sophomore, watches one of the 3-D printers in action in the school's new design lab

used by students in the high school's new audio engineering courses, which teach the technical skills used in the recording industry. The audio facility was designed by renowned record producers/engineers Tony Bongiovi (cousin to rocker Jon Bon Jovi) and Ron Saint Germain.

Community members are invited to attend an **open house on Tuesday, November 29** to tour the new MOHS facilities and see them in action. The open house runs from **6-7:30 p.m.**

Mt. Olive Township School District

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**Students hear
actress discuss
new book**
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Kids visit Ellis Island to hear actress discuss book

MORE than 80 fourth-graders from Tinc Road Elementary School recently traveled to Ellis Island to hear actress Jamie Lee Curtis discuss her 11th children's book, "This Is Me: A Story of Who We Are and Where We Came From." The book depicts a lesson on immigration. In it, an elementary teacher tells her class about her great-grandmother who emigrated to America with nothing but a small suitcase. The teacher compels her students to ask themselves what possessions they would take along if moving to a new country and being separated from the world they knew.

Ms. Curtis asked the Tinc Road students to ponder the same question and she called on several of the fourth-graders to answer aloud to the group.

"I picked family photos because I would be sad to leave them behind," said Gabriel Alonzo, a student in Rebecca Hopley's class. "They



On Ellis Island, Tinc Road students and staff members listen to Jamie Lee Curtis discuss her new book

would remind me of the good times I had with my family."

After the presentation, which was sponsored by the "Save Ellis Island" foundation, the students toured the island to see first-hand the landmark they had read about last year as third-graders. The students, who will touch on the topic of immigration again this year as they explore key periods of U.S. history in the 20th Century, each received a signed copy of Ms. Curtis' book.

Building good character

SANDSHORE Elementary School recognized New Jersey's Week of Respect – an annual week of awareness centered around the prevention of harassment, intimidation, and bullying.

The highlight of the week was a visit by Omegaman (Marc Wilkes) who delivered superhero-themed messages about positive behavior. Weaving dramatic feats of strength and personal stories into his presentations, Omegaman kept the students entertained while underscoring the key messages including "Be a dream-maker, not a dream-breaker" and "Be a H.E.R.O (Helping Everyone Respect Others)." In addition to anti-bullying and character building, other topics were discussed such as peer pressure, making healthy lifestyle choices, self-esteem, academic excellence, and violence prevention.

"Teaching respect for yourself and others, as well as taking responsibility for your words and actions, is an important part of character education," said Julie Kester, school guidance counselor. "Just like we teach toddlers manners, we need to teach and encourage



Sandshore second-grader Faith Dressel is all smiles as she hangs onto a steel bar lifted into the air by Omegaman (Marc Wilkes)

respect and responsibility."

To underscore the importance of good character, Mrs. Kester visited every classroom in the building and delivered lessons designed to heighten students' awareness of the impact of their words and actions on the lives of others.

Schools of rock

Rock 'n' roll academies have begun at Mount Olive High School and Mount Olive Middle School. Run as both classes and afterschool clubs, the academies are designed to teach instruments not typically found in traditional school ensembles (e.g., concert band, orchestra, chorus). Students learn the techniques and music spanning the six decades of rock 'n' roll, including classics and popular contemporary hits.

"Students who play instruments like the guitar rarely get a chance to play in band at school," said music teacher Steve Thompson. "The rock 'n' roll academies are for those kids. Playing in a rock band is what inspired me to love music, so I would like to help the next generation of musicians to find that same passion."

Members of the high school academy recently opened for the production of the rock opera, "Tommy," which was staged at the school's performing arts center by popular Who tribute band "Who's Next."

"Participating in this production was honestly so amazing," said Thalianna DeJesus, an MOHS senior who performed with her band. "I was so nervous... but after actually doing it, it was exhilarating. I can't wait to get on stage and perform again."

Learning about food allergies

Angela Brancato, Mountain View Elementary School nurse, recently conducted lessons for grades 1-5 about food allergies. She discussed the precautions to take if an allergic student is in the classroom and the various types of exposure (inhalation, touch, and ingestion of an allergen).

"We want all students to understand that food allergies are very serious," Ms. Brancato said. "Chances are that every student has a friend or knows someone that has a food allergy, if they don't have one themselves. By doing the presentations, we can make sure that all kids have the same knowledge and are aware of the precautions that need to be taken."

In her lessons, Ms. Brancato also stressed the importance of being sensitive to the needs of others and the importance of never teasing or bullying someone because of an allergy or illness.

Plaque installed

A new dedication plaque for Mountain View Elementary School's gazebo has been installed. It is embedded in a pedestal created by the district's buildings and grounds crew, and replaces the original plaque which had been missing for some time.

The gazebo was dedicated in 1997 to Mae McEntee, a long-time resident who worked as a secretary at Mountain View for more than 22 years – from 1975 until her death from pancreatic cancer in 1997. Mrs. McEntee was the mother of Larry McEntee, a former Board of Education member who served from 1999-2007.

Celebrating Independence Day

There were no barbecues or fireworks this Independence Day, but freedom and choice were on display everywhere. Students at all four district elementary schools recently celebrated being independent learners by engaging in projects that allowed them to work alone or in small groups with minimal direction.

It was a day that focused the students on the control they have of their own learning and developed **critical thinking skills, creativity, leadership, and the interpersonal skills needed to work well with others.** While this type of active learning is regularly done in our schools,

Independence Day was a way to for students to celebrate their ability to work independently and recognize the responsibility they have in their own education.

Each elementary school implemented Independence Day differently. For example, fourth- and fifth-graders at Mountain View Elementary School completed a STEM challenge that asked students to tap into their creativity. Using only pipe cleaners, pencils, rubber bands, string, tape, and craft sticks, each student designed, constructed, and tested a device that could securely cradle an apple on his or her head during a relay race.

Second-graders at Sandshore spent most of the day rotating among nine different learning stations where they completed hands-on activities about elections and U.S. presidents. Activities involved reading, writing, and math.

At Chester M. Stephens, fifth-graders worked in small teams researching endangered animals of their own choosing. They then developed presentations in a variety of different formats that they thought would best communicate to their classmates what they had learned.

At Tinc Road, small groups of fourth-graders each researched a system of the body and created a poster detailing the chosen system's function and importance. Teams of fifth-graders researched vertebrates and presented the information to their classes.

"What I saw today was an incredibly high level of engagement and enthusiasm," said Dr. Richard Fair, Tinc Road principal. "I appreciated watching the children choose how to best share with their peers the information they had learned. These are the types of decisions that teachers have to make every day and I think many students learned to appreciate what goes into a lesson and the work of their teachers."

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Dr. Richard Fair
Tinc Road Principal



Above, Dr. Tracey Severns, director of student performance, looks over the work of CMS fifth-grader Michael Machen on Independence Day; right, Mountain View students work on a STEM project



Drone club takes off at MOHS

The new drone flying club at Mount Olive High School has taken off. About 30 students are actively involved in the new club – one of just a handful of such clubs in northern New Jersey schools – and interest continues to build.

"This is a club that the kids were pushing for," said science teacher Brian Holton, the club's advisor. "All of these students are excited to be a part of something that's cutting-edge."

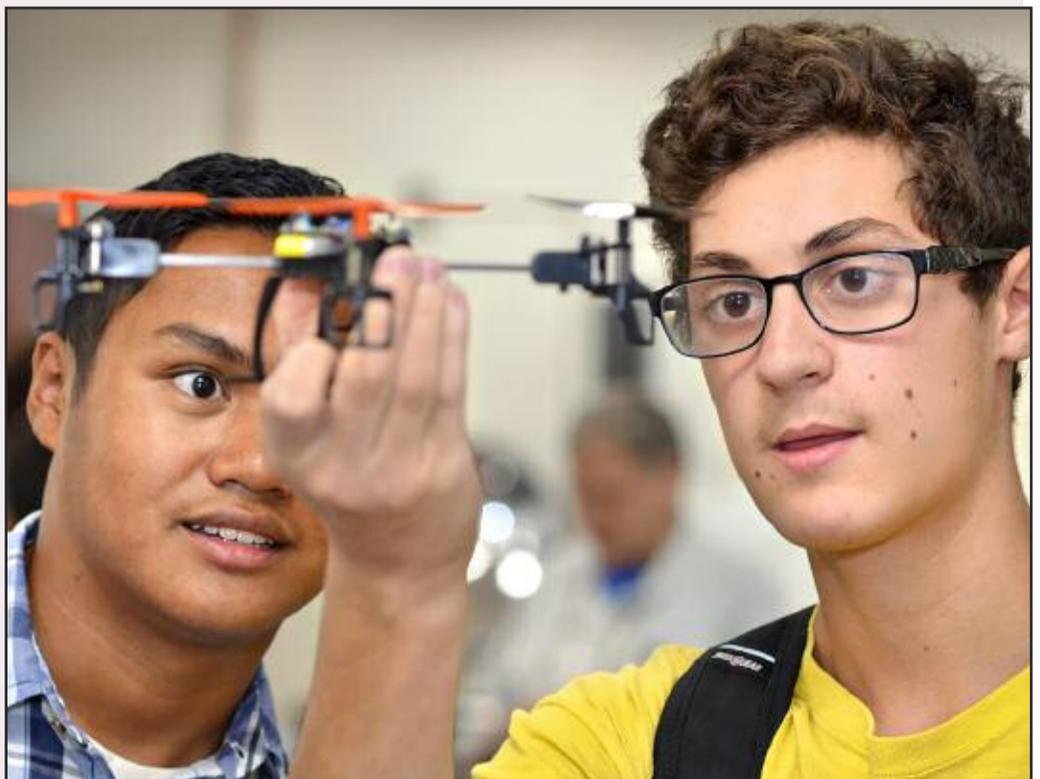
While the club uses a variety of pre-built drones in some of its activities, students build their own for racing purposes using separate components (e.g., flight control boards, motors, rotors). The racing drones can reach speeds upwards of 50 mph and some are equipped with cameras that can be accessed with goggles,

putting the kids in the virtual driver's seats. With courses that feature twists and dips, the growing hobby is a fusion of engineering prowess and video game expertise.

"Before drones, I did remote control cars and things," said sophomore Nick Colasurdo, the club's co-president who owns his own drone. "Then I saw the drones and here we are."

According to Mr. Holton, the hope is to hold competitions in the future with drone clubs from other school districts.

Mike Casaren, the co-owner of Sparkhouse toy and hobby store in South Orange, visits regularly to share his experiences. Mr. Casaren helped start the drone club at Columbia High School in the South Orange-Maplewood School District.



Matthew Oyales and drone club co-president Nick Colasurdo test the motors of a quadcopter during a recent club meeting

Learning they can help the world

Mount Olive Middle School students recently learned about the rewards of volunteerism and the true impact that people can have on others from Alainie Costas, a Massachusetts nurse.

“It makes you aware of how lucky you are. I'm safe, I have clothes, I have a nice home... All these things that we take for granted these kids dream of.”

Hailey Carlo
Eighth-grader

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

“The discussions provided students with the opportunity to see what a difference they themselves could make in the world with the

right education,” said MOMS library media specialist David Eisenberg, a friend of Ms. Costas who arranged the presentations. “So much good can be done in the world if people bring their skills and passions to those who need it most.”

Parts of the presentations tugged on the heart strings, both for students and staff. Particularly affecting were the before and after photographs of patients treated for facial and bodily abnormalities such as club feet, tumors, and cleft lips and palates. The patients, many of whom had suffered from their conditions for decades, saw their lives radically transformed as a result of their procedures.

“I just thought it was amazing for her to volunteer so much of her time and change lives,” said eighth-grader Hailey Carlo. “She’s a real life hero.”

Ms. Costas’ presentations and photographs also provided a window into the Third World. Since many of those treated by Mercy Ships are children, the MOMS students saw just how

much their lives differ from the children in most of Africa.

“It was hard seeing kids growing up in such poverty and without medical care and all the things we have,” Hailey said. “It makes you aware of how lucky you are. I’m safe, I have clothes, I have a nice home... All these things that we take for granted these kids dream of.”

According to the Mercy Ships website, the organization has helped 2.5 million people in nearly 600 ports of call.



Pictured above is the Africa Mercy, the hospital ship where nurse Alainie Costas helped patients in Benin, Togo, and Sierra Leon

The basics of programming



CMS fifth-grader Justin Dattolo examines the inner workings of a Sphero SPRK robot

It's not what you imagine when you think of robots. But that's part of what makes the Sphero SPRKs so much fun. The programmable polycarbonate balls are the perfect tools to teach elementary students the fundamentals of programming and the logic necessary to code effectively. With Bluetooth-paired tablets, students can control the direction, speed, and color of the SPRKs using a simple drag and drop interface.

The district recently purchased two sets of SPRKs as part of an initiative to bring more STEM-related activities to young students. The four elementary libraries share the resources along with two sets of Cubelets,

snap-together robotic modules.

Michele Beddow, library media specialist at Chester M. Stephens Elementary School, is teaching fifth-graders how to use the SPRKs during their weekly library period.

“The students love them,” she said. “They provide a hands-on activity that's engaging and that lets kids apply their knowledge of math and technology.”

The SPRKs can be programmed to roll in specific patterns and run mazes, for example, and be used to teach the practical uses for geometry and even physics. There is also a mission-based game that teaches students about the movements, controls, and tricks that a SPRK can do.

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