

Education Update

December 2018

New report cards provide more information on achievement

REPORT cards for elementary students in grades 1–5 now identify specific subject strengths and weaknesses. Beginning with the December 14 report cards, each subject is broken down into **standards** – specific skills and knowledge that students should master. A student receives an evaluation in each.

“This kind of feedback allows parents to more effectively help their kids and also lets students set their own goals so they can chart their own progress.”

Dr. Robert Zywicki
Superintendent

Fifth-grade math is similarly broken down and a student assessed on such abilities as “Demonstrates fluency and accuracy with multiplication and division math facts” and “Solves real world problems involving fractions and mixed numbers.”

A two-letter reporting system is used:

- ES = Exceeds the standard
- MS = Meets the standard
- AS = Approaching the standard
- NS = Needs support

Since there is more specificity, the standards-based report card paints a more complete picture of a student’s level of achievement and better communicates how well the student is progressing toward meeting year-end goals. With this understanding, parents can more effectively guide and support their child’s learning.

“If my child in the second-grade receives a ‘C’ in reading, I don’t know what that means,” said Dr. Robert Zywicki, superintendent of schools. “That doesn’t give me any information. When you break down a subject into specific skills and provide separate evaluations of each one of them, then that reporting becomes understandable and meaningful. You can pinpoint what work needs to be done and what areas are already strong. This kind of feedback allows parents to more effectively help their kids and also lets students set their own goals so they can chart their own progress.”

The standards follow the New Jersey Student Learning Standards that were revised and adopted by the New Jersey Board of Education from 2014-2016. Only the standards that district educators deem to be most important are included on the report cards.

Traits critical to success

In addition to standards, the new report cards also assess students on work and study habits that are critical to success in school and beyond. These include such qualities as “Listens and follows directions,” “Thinks and communicates with clarity and precision,” and “Works cooperatively



TEDDY BEAR DAY: To celebrate Teddy Bear Day, first-graders at Sandshore Elementary School brought in their favorite stuffed animals and learned about Teddy Roosevelt, the president who lent his name to the iconic toys. **Above,** Andrew Clark holds Jay and Besiana Hadzovic holds her friend, Lily.

with others.”

A two-letter reporting system is used as well:

- AT = All of the time
- MS = Most of the time
- ST = Some of the time
- WS = With support

Report cards for kindergarteners and students in grades 6-12 will remain as they have been in the past.

The process to change to standards-based report cards started a year ago. Dr. Zywicki, who began them while at the helm of the Weehawken School District, supported their continued development and implementation here after he was appointed superintendent over the summer.

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SPECIAL PROJECT

**A literary
escape room at
MOMS**

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'Curious' play at MOHS

THE MOUNT Olive High School Drama Club recently performed "The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night-Time."

The play, based on the best-selling novel by Mark Haddon, tells the story of Christopher, a 15-year-old boy with an autism spectrum disorder who falls under suspicion of killing a neighbor's dog. When Christopher sets out to identify the true culprit, he winds up on a journey that changes his life forever.

Directed by Chris Bosch, a MOHS special education teacher, the show used images projected on the background LED curtain that runs almost the full length of the stage, monitors on both sides of the stage, and dramatic lighting to take audiences into the unique mind of the



Jared Case on stage during a performance of "Curious"

main character. The visual design brought to life the first-person point of view that is so important to the novel.

The cast and crew rehearsed for two months in preparation for the performances. MOHS junior Jared Case had the lead.

Helping the environment

STUDENTS in Christine Rogoff's class at Mountain View Elementary School are helping to protect the environment. The class organized a school-wide initiative to collect plastic bottle caps for recycling.

Because of their small size, caps are difficult to recycle when not attached to bottles. They are often discarded since they cannot make it through an automated recycling facility on their own. As a result, plastic caps are one of the most frequently found forms of trash in the world's oceans and on beaches.

The Save the Caps Gimme 5 program addresses the issue. The students set up a trash can in the cafeteria dedicated for the collection of loose caps. In just two months, the class has collected nearly 40 pounds of them. Mrs. Rogoff has made two runs to the Whole Foods in Madison, a partner in the Gimme 5 program, to drop off the plastic for recycling.

"It's important to instill a sense of social responsibility in my students," said Mrs. Rogoff. "I thought that this would be an effective way to show that everyone can make a difference. My students take a great deal of pride and ownership in this program. I hope that it will inspire them to be environmentally aware as they get older."

To launch the program, the students wrote and produced a video which explained Gimme

5 for their schoolmates.

The students also weigh the caps every month and graph the results, giving them a chance to apply their math skills to something in real life.

The Save the Caps Gimme 5 program is run in association with Preserve, a U.S. company that manufactures household products from 100% recycled materials. Items include toothbrushes, cups, tote bags, and cutting boards.



Lino Rosa, Alex Vega, and Samira Gbor in front of the plastic cap collection can in the Mountain View cafeteria

NEWSBRIEFS

Mountain View principal selected

Melissa Kolenski was unanimously approved by the board of education as the Mountain View Elementary School principal.

Mrs. Kolenski, the instructional supervisor at Tinc Road since 2014, had been serving as Mountain View's acting principal since the start of the school year.

"It is an honor and pleasure to be working with such amazing students, staff members, and parents," she said. "I'm thrilled to be a part of this warm school community."

The veteran educator, who has a background in early childhood education and special education, originally came to Mount Olive from Middlesex. She taught third grade there at Hazelwood Elementary School for 11 years before deciding that her abilities and knowledge could serve students in a more meaningful way as an administrator; that's when she joined Tinc Road as instructional supervisor.

Ms. Kolenski has a bachelor's degree in early childhood education and a master's in leadership and administration, both from Seton Hall.



High school honored by College Board

Mount Olive High School was recently named to the College Board's 9th Annual AP District Honor Roll. The distinction recognizes the school's efforts in increasing the number of students from underrepresented demographics who take AP courses, while also increasing or maintaining the percentage of students earning AP exam scores of 3 or higher.

This is the second consecutive year that MOHS has received this distinction.

Students to sing in national choirs

Three Mount Olive choral students were selected to perform in national honor choirs in Kansas City, Missouri in March.

Mount Olive High School freshman Shayna Wilson and Mount Olive Middle School eighth-grader Kayla Marvin will sing with the American Choral Directors Association National Junior High Honor Choir; MOMS seventh-grader Brendan Blazier will sing with the ACDA National Children's Honor Choir. The performances are part of the ACDA's 60th Jubilee Conference.



Escape room without an escape

EDGAR Allen Poe, master of the macabre, would have been proud of the eighth-grade literary escape room that was based on "The Masque of the Red Death." Much like the castle in which his short story is set, there was no escape.

“**By making it a game, it made you want to do. If someone said ‘Do you want to take a test?’ you’d say ‘No.’ But if they asked if you want to do an escape room, you’d be in.”**

Nate Miller
Eighth-grader

literary challenge before being allowed to move on to the next room. There were stations designed to test comprehension and understanding of the short story’s literary devices (e.g., foreshadowing, alliteration, simile, etc.), symbolism,

representing the seven castle rooms where the story’s action, a masquerade ball, takes place. In each "room," students wearing masks were tasked with completing a specific

allegory, and theme, among others.

“The kids loved it,” said teacher Jenna Barstow of the escape room. “We’re going to try to do more later in the year.”

The students competed against each other to be the first to solve all seven challenges which included sets of multiple choice questions, a short essay, riddles, and cryptograms. At the end of the seventh challenge, the eight-graders pretended to do what the characters did in the story’s seventh room: die. Not really an escape at all.

“Things like this make you really comprehend things,” said student Nico D’Amico. “And it made you work.”

“It adds a spin,” said student Nate Miller. “By making it a game, it made you want to do. If someone said ‘Do you want to take a test?’ you’d say ‘No.’ But if they asked if you want to do an escape room, you’d be in.”

In addition to “The Masque of the Red Death,” eighth-grade classes also read other Poe classics including “The Cask of Amontillado,” “The Tell-Tale Heart,” and “The Raven.”



Nico D’Amico, Emily Rose Murray, and Ryan Kennedy wear masks for the Edgar Allen Poe escape room

Book’s lesson comes alive

THESE students at Chester M. Stephens Elementary School know the importance of teamwork. After reading “Pop’s Bridge,” a story that tells of one boy’s realization that all workers on a team play a vital role, third-graders taught by Kelly Garry and Carrie Polglase learned the lesson themselves.



Jayden Momo and Matthew Corso learn the value of teamwork by stacking plastic cups without using their hands

Small teams completed a hands-on assignment involving STEAM – science, technology, engineering, art, and math. Students worked together to

stack plastic cups in a pyramid shape without actually touching the cups with their hands. The challenge, which used a device composed of string and rubber bands in a web-like design, was impossible to complete without at least three students.

“The kids experienced firsthand how everyone had to work together to succeed in making the tower,” said Mrs. Polglase. “No one’s role was more important than anyone else’s. On a collaborative project, different people bring different skills.”

As with many STEAM activities, communication was also essential to get the job done.

Before the classes read any story, an essential question is asked. The question presents one of the story’s themes that students should be mindful of as they read. For “Pop’s Bridge,” the essential question was “Why is everyone’s role in a project important?”

“**On a collaborative project, different people bring different skills.”**

Carrie Polglase
Teacher

Second-graders learn about Veterans Day

SECOND-GRADE teachers at Sandshore Elementary School saw the opportunity. They were teaching their students the parts of a friendly letter and decided to have the kids practice by writing letters to veterans and active military personnel. It was the perfect way to have the students apply what they had learned about both letters and Veterans Day.

All the teachers know either a veteran or a current service member so kids wrote to those men and women. In the letters, the students recognized the bravery of the veterans and active service personnel, and thanked them for keeping the country safe.

The students in Kelly Wilson’s class addressed their correspondence to Sgt. Andrew Guth, a Roxbury resident and friend of Mrs. Wilson’s. Sgt. Guth serves in the Army National Guard and recently returned from the Middle East.

A special guest in Shelley Credidio’s class provided deeper insight into the military.

Capt. Peter Tatum, an Air Force doctor, spoke about the meaning of Veterans Day, his daily activities, and the wide variety of careers found in the armed forces.

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superintendent, and
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Writing themselves into history

Fourth-graders at Tinc use social studies knowledge to write first-person narratives

TINC Road Elementary School fourth-graders recently took what they had learned in social studies about the great wave of U.S. immigration that ended in 1920 and applied it to a first-person English

“We talked about how we are all related to immigrants and that makes us all unique and special.”

Joy Spevak
Tinc Road teacher

assignment. The students were tasked with writing a short story from the POV of a new immigrant seeing the Statue of Liberty for the first time after a long voyage to America. At the heart of the stories were descriptions of the emotions that the characters experienced when entering New York Harbor and what Lady Liberty meant to them.

The students incorporated some of the factual information they had learned. They wove in the reasons the immigrants of this time period came to the United States. Some classes had taken virtual field trips on the Ellis Island website and added some of that material as well.

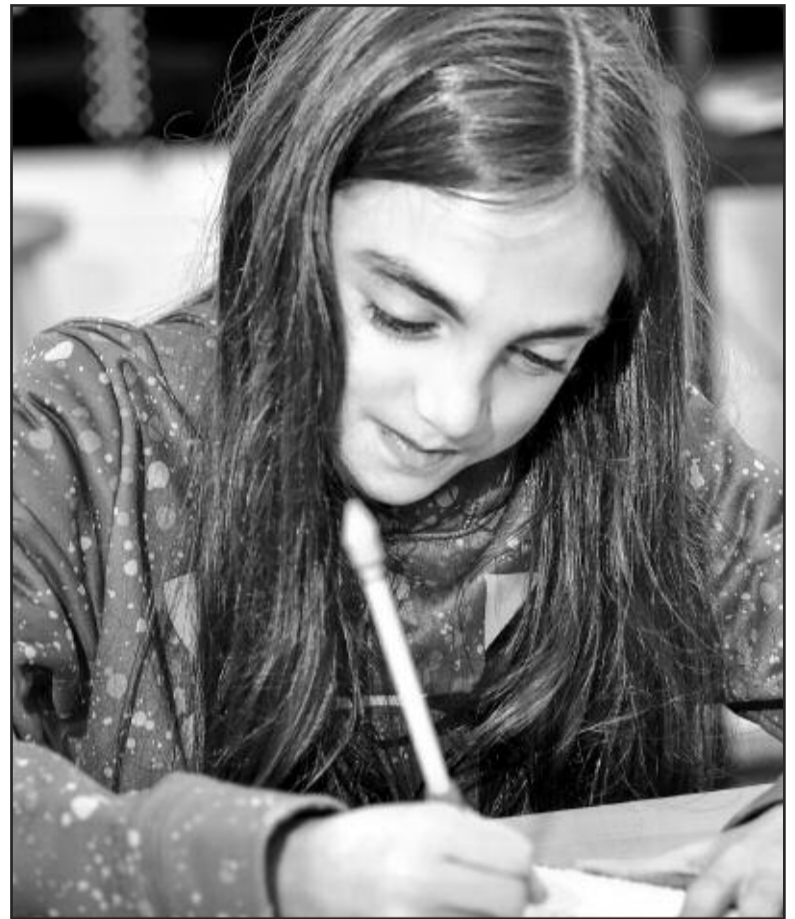
Joy Spevak asked her students to focus on writing about the sights, sounds, and feelings that their characters were experiencing. The details added a depth and richness to the narratives, making them come alive:

I was watching for the Statue of Liberty through the thick fog. The boat was making a lot of noise so it was hard to concentrate. My eyes started hurting and I was about to look away but then I saw her. She was beautiful. When my mom saw her she started crying tears of joy... This was the best moment of my life.

– Elena Cohen

The lesson on immigration served as an opportunity to discuss the students' own ancestry. Relatives might have come to the U.S. during the great age of immigration or could have been motivated to come here for the very same reasons: freedom of religion, escape from war, and the hope for better jobs and wages. Despite different journeys, this common background and our ancestors' hope for a better life unites us all.

“We talked about how we are all related to immigrants and that makes us all unique and



Elena Cohen works on a draft of her essay

special,” said Mrs. Spevak. “Kids need to appreciate diversity, learn sensitivity, and treat other respectfully.”

Learning to raise a guide dog

DYLAN is already a celebrity at Chester M. Stephens Elementary School. It's tough not to be when you're a 7-week-old pup this

adorable.

Dylan is being raised by school nurse Kathleen Olup to be a guide dog. He's the third puppy she's brought up through the puppy-raising program of the Seeing Eye, a philanthropic organization in Morristown dedicated to enhancing the independence of the blind. Mrs. Olup brings Dylan into CMS periodically and conducts presentations to classes to teach kids about the program and Dylan's unique training as a service dog. By the end of the spring, she hopes to visit every classroom

in the building. The activity and interaction with children and staff members also benefit Dylan, helping him acclimate to people and the world.

“It's so rewarding,” Mrs. Olup said of the program. “Raising a puppy into a dog that can provide someone with independence is so worthwhile. It's hard to say goodbye after giving them so much love and care, but I think of it like having an exchange student. You give them a home and your support, a year goes by and they leave and go off to live their life.”

Mrs. Olup and her husband, both dog lovers, raised their first Seeing Eye puppy four years ago as a service project for their daughters. The family regularly attends 4-H Club meetings where they learn how to properly raise and train puppies to be guide dogs. There are specific commands to use in various situations, for example, and the dog must be taught to always walk on the owner's left side.

Raising a pup for the visually impaired is a process that generally lasts 15-17 months.



CMS nurse Kathleen Olup holds Dylan, a pup she's training to be a guide dog

Michael Cravotta – editor

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December 2018

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