

Education Update

October 2017

Hitting it out of the PARCC!

Another home-run year for student achievement; MOHS in top 10% of best NJ high schools

MOUNT Olive's overall level of student achievement edged up slightly in 2017 after a banner year in 2016. According to data recently released by the New Jersey Department of Education, the district's students scored **higher than their peers in the surrounding towns and far above state averages** on the standardized exams administered by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The results show that Mount Olive students are continuing to perform at or near historically high levels. Overall, the percentage of Mount Olive students passing the **English language arts PARCC exams rose 4.3 %** from 2016; the percentage passing the **math PARCC exams dipped .9% percent.**

When compared to the rest of the state, the results are impressive. The percentage of Mount Olive students that passed the **English language arts exams was about 54% higher than the state average**; the percentage passing the **math exams was about 48% higher than the state average.**

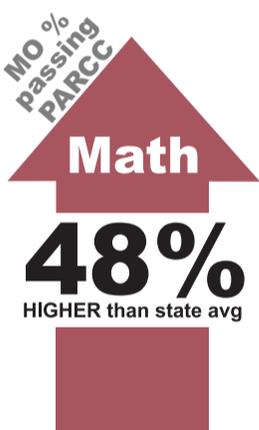
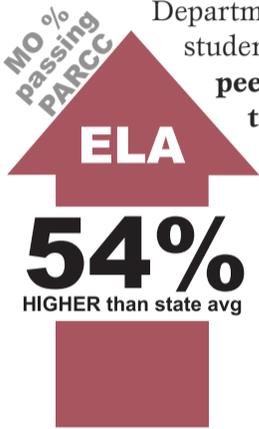
"The PARCC results show the concerted effort and hard work of our students, parents, teachers, support staff members, and administrators," said Dr. Larrie Reynolds, superintendent of schools. "They indicate the strong academic health of the school district."

Rankings just released by SchoolDigger, a popular website that annually evaluates U.S. schools based on standardized test scores, placed Mount Olive High School in the **top 10% of the best New Jersey high schools** for the second time in MOHS history. When you consider only the public high schools (i.e. exclude regional vocational/technical schools and charter schools), MOHS is in the top 5% in the state.

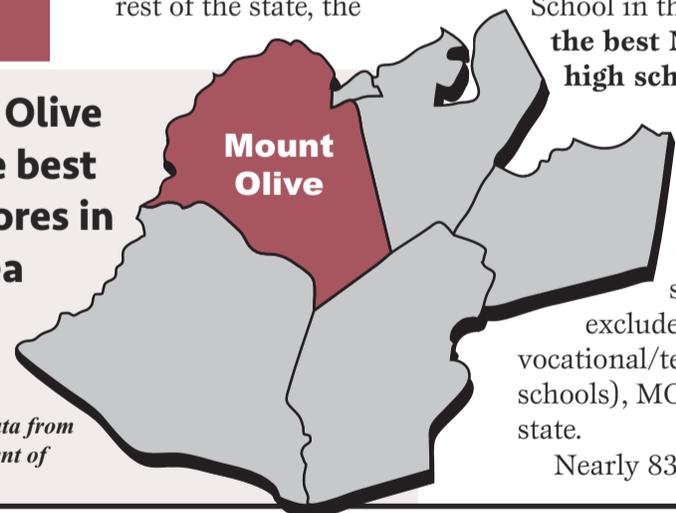
Nearly 832,000 New Jersey students in grades 3-11 completed the PARCC exams in April, May, and June. In Mount Olive, approximately 99% of all students took the exams.



THEIR FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL: September 5 was the first day of school at Tinc Road Elementary School for both Scott Lipson, new principal, and kindergartener Avery Grant. Mr. Lipson joined Mount Olive from the Westfield school system.



Mount Olive has the best test scores in the area



SOURCE: data from NJ Department of Education

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NEW THIS YEAR

Facilities and program upgrades

See inside spread



Students see renovations and program improvements

WHEN Mount Olive students returned to school on September 5, they saw **new and improved courses**, and a host of **building upgrades**.

New educational opportunities

Improvements to the district's educational program have been made at the elementary, middle school, and high school levels. Many of the curricular improvements continue the district's emphasis on broadening the science, technology, engineering, arts, and math (**STEAM**) skills of students.

New equipment was installed in Mount Olive High School's **makerspace** which allows students to design and create products and components using 3D printers. A new tank was also put into place for **MATE (Marine Advanced Technology Education)**, a program begun last year that guides students through the design and construction of underwater robots.

At Mount Olive Middle School, students have an opportunity to immerse themselves in **cutting edge technology** through new and improved STEAM courses that take advantage of a makerspace/STEAM lab. (See sidebar below.)

Elementary students are also going hands-on with science and technology. A **hands-on laboratory science program** has been started in all elementary schools. **Science kits and materials** have been purchased that complement the newly written science curriculum, allowing kids to learn by exploring, inventing, and discovering.

In addition to the added technology offerings at MOHS, an Air Force Junior

Reserve Officer Training Corps (**JROTC**) program has been created. Sponsored by the United States Air Force, JROTC develops leadership, self-confidence, self-discipline, and character, and teaches military history and customs. Physical fitness training and drill instruction is an important part of the program as well.

Open to students in grades 9-12, JROTC is taught by Chief Master Sgt. Robert Bedell who recently retired after 29 years of service. In his past post, Sgt. Bedell served as the command chief for the 30th Space Wing at Vandenberg Air Force Base, the nation's West Coast space hub.



Chief Master Sgt. Robert Bedell

Building improvements

Numerous renovation and improvement projects were completed during the summer. While much of the work focused on Mount Olive High School, improvements were made to every school in the district.

- **Eight classrooms** at MOHS were renovated in the third-floor tower section. New lighting, ceiling, and flooring were installed.

- A new **speaker system** and sound board were installed in the MOHS performing arts center to improve the audio experience of concerts and presentations.

- The **MOHS football field** was renovated with new bleachers, outdoor restrooms, and concession stand. (See sidebar at right.)

- Plans were put into place to cover the soccer/lacrosse field at MOHS with an **air dome**, beginning in December. The new structure will allow students to use the field during physical education classes in the winter months and will also be available for rent by community organizations.

- A new **auxiliary gym** was constructed at MOHS. The facility will be used for physical education classes and also house numerous student activities, from wrestling to JROTC drills.

- The **library/media center** at Mountain View Elementary School was completely renovated. The library features an open design and easier access to technology. A new HVAC unit was also installed. (See bottom right sidebar.)

- New **boilers** were installed at Mount Olive Middle School and Tinc Road Elementary School.

- Parking lot repavement was completed at all district schools.

- Four new 54 passenger **school buses** were purchased to replace aging buses.

Athletics

Ribbon-cutting opens football field

MOUNT Olive High School celebrated the completion of upgrades to its football field facilities with a ribbon-cutting ceremony, held before the team's September 8 game against Morris Knolls. Liz Ouimet, Mount Olive Board of Education president, and Dr. Larrie Reynolds, superintendent of schools, cut the ribbon as they stood at the 50-yard line among a gathering of board members, administrators, and representatives from the district's architectural firm.

The new facilities include covered bleachers which seat approximately 2,000 fans, a new concession stand, and new restrooms. The improvements will not increase taxes since the construction project was

paid for using existing money in the district's capital reserve fund.

This was the final stage of a multi-year initiative to renovate the football field. Over the past several years, the district has modernized the field's lighting and replaced the turf.

Mount Olive High School won the game by the score of 28-7.

Top right, spectators pack the new home team bleachers at MOHS.

Right, guests participate in the ribbon-cutting ceremony: Anthony Gianforcaro, architect; John Kehmna, board member; Glenn Miller, director of buildings and grounds; Kevin Stansberry, high school principal; Liz Ouimet, board president;



Dr. Larrie Reynolds, superintendent of schools; William Robinson, board member; Brian Schaechter, board member; Rhonda Cohen, board member; Anthony Giordano, board member; Anthony Strillacci, board vice president.

New courses at MOMS focus kids on STEAM



Carly Solowski, Roshni Desai, and Lauren Jones work together on a STEAM project

THREE newly-created Innovation & Design classes, one for each grade, have been added at Mount Olive Middle School. The classes explore how science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) are integrated and applied in the real world. They're held in what was once the school's woodworking shop – a perfect indication of how “hands-on” instruction has changed in the 19 years since the middle school was designed.

Instead of foot-stools and tables, students here will be building hydraulic machines, creating circuits, and fabricating objects using a 3D printer. With new Rockenbok sets and the TeacherGeek Maker Cart, they'll be learning

The classes explore how science, technology, engineering, art, and math (STEAM) are integrated and applied in the real world

advanced engineering principles by constructing robots and mechanized models. Later in the school year, they may also be exploring and creating their own virtual reality worlds using Oculus Rifts.

Recently, eighth-graders were challenged to create several simple mechanisms that would allow them to remotely pick up a barrel of “radioactive” material from a safe distance and dump it into another barrel (i.e. pour bits of colored plastic from one cup to another). Certainly in the real world, engineers would have more sophisticated components to

work with than straws, dowels, tape, rubber bands, popsicle sticks, and string. The project, however, took the students through the complete engineering design process, from brainstorming and planning to construction and redesign, while also testing their ingenuity and teamwork.

Cooperation and feedback are important parts of the Innovation & Design classes. After a team demonstrates its projects, the whole class offers constructive input on the improvements that might add simplicity and efficacy to the designs.

Library renovations completed

THE RENOVATED Mountain View Elementary School library/media center was officially opened at a ceremony on September 18. The former labyrinthine section of the building, with the library and computer lab at its center, has had its main corridor walls removed, transforming the area into a wide-open space.

The library has been designed as an urban park, anchored by a floor-to-ceiling wooden Tree of Knowledge. Picnic tables and benches are set on grass-green carpets. Illuminated photo panels on a section of ceiling let the light shine in from the perennially sunny day. And the walls are covered in brick and siding with illuminated faux window panes.

The library has sections designed for its many functions. Its computer lab is in a half-walled patio area off to one side. In the center at the base of the Tree of Knowledge is a large area with chairs suitable for reading or whole class instruction. Behind that, through the classical facade of a city library replete with white columns and gable, are shelves of reference books and



materials.

On the other side of the library are shelves of fiction, the circulation desk, and a newsstand hut where students can find periodicals as well as computers linked to the Destiny library system which makes searching through the library's collection a breeze.

County Teacher of the Year

DIANE Phares, an art teacher at Mount Olive High School, was recently named Morris County Teacher of the Year by the New Jersey Department of Education.

“Diane is a master educator who leads her students on a journey of self-discovery infused with creativity, imagination, and wonderment,” said Kevin Stansberry, MOHS principal. “She fosters the love of art and cultivates the artistic expressiveness of her students, allowing them to reveal their heart, soul, and individuality in their work.”

Mrs. Phares is now in her 13th year at MOHS. She teaches advanced and AP art classes, and serves as co-advisor to the school’s chapter of the National Art Honor Society.

“As a teacher, you just don’t expect to receive recognition because you see so many devoted educators giving of themselves every day without any special appreciation, so receiving this honor is very special,” she said. “I am grateful to be surrounded by talented colleagues who freely share their expertise, hold each other up, and delight in being educators.”

“Teaching art is my passion and my students inspire me every day in so many different ways. Helping each one of them find their individual voice through the visual arts is



Morris County Teacher of the Year: MOHS’ Diane Phares

incredibly gratifying.”

County Teachers of the Year are first selected at the school level and district level. They then compete for county recognition and are selected by panels representing a cross-section of administrators, teachers, and parents.

NEWSBRIEFS

MOHS marching band takes 1st place

Mount Olive High School’s marching band took 1st place and the awards for Best Visuals and Best Overall Drum Major at the annual Roxbury Marching Band Classic on September 23. Under the direction of teacher John DiEgidio, the band performed its 10-minute halftime show which features five selections, each documenting a different decade in popular drum corps sound. The final movement includes band members running up and down a 10-foot-tall slide.

Percussion instructor Jason O’Brien arranged the selections which include melodies from “America the Beautiful and “A Whole New World.”

Choral students selected to perform

Four Mount Olive Middle School students were recently accepted into the 2018 American Choral Directors Eastern Division Honor Choir. Eighth-grader Shayna Wilson and seventh-graders Kayla Constantino-Marvin, Johnny Narcise, and Dhruv Raghuraman will travel to Pittsburgh in March to perform as part of the choir, which includes the best young voices from 11 states.

The students applied in the spring and submitted audio audition files online for review by the choir judges.

Team wins all-girl robotics event

Girls on Mount Olive High School’s JV robotics team, MORT Beta, recently piloted their robot to victory in GirlPOWER, an annual Pennsylvania event designed to encourage young women to enter the engineering field. The MOHS girls won the event as part of an alliance with two other schools.

Newsletter receives national awards

The district’s newsletter, **Education Update**, recently won two awards from the National School Public Relations Association. **Education Update** was one of just two publications from New Jersey to be honored in the Print Newsletter category, which recognizes quality in writing, photography, and graphic design. It was the only New Jersey publication to be honored for Excellence in Writing, the second consecutive year the newsletter has been feted in this category.

Students run in Jr. Olympics

Two Mount Olive Middle School sixth-graders competed during the summer in Detroit at the Amateur Athletic Union Junior



Natasha Redmond stands ready to compete

Olympics. Michaela Eason and Natasha Redmond, members of the Pure Acceleration Track and Field Club in Wayne, qualified for the Junior Olympics after performing well in the state and regional competitions.

Michaela competed in the 4x4 relay; Natasha also competed in the 4x4 relay as well as in the 100-meter dash and the 200-meter dash. Though neither of the girls took home medals, there was no disappointment. They were happy with their performances and enjoyed being part of something so huge.

“Going to the Junior Olympics and competing was a great experience,” said Michaela. “I liked how everyone stuck together and were supporting each other and cheering no matter what team you were on.”

The track and field events were held on the sprawling grounds of Eastern Michigan University. In addition to running in the events, Michaela and Natasha heard presentations by current and former track and field athletes including New Jersey native Carl Lewis, the legendary nine-time Olympic gold medalist and AAU Junior Olympics alumnus.

Michael Cravotta - editor

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