



New Milford Public Schools
50 East Street
New Milford, CT 06776
860-355-8406
www.newmilfordps.org



New Milford High School
860-350-6647

Mr. Greg Shugrue, Principal
Mr. Marc Balanda, Ass't. Principal
Mrs. Liz Curtis, Ass't. Principal
Dr. Christopher Longo, Ass't. Principal



Schaghticoke Middle School
860-354-2204

Mrs. Dana Ford, Principal
Mrs. Jennifer Chmielewski, Ass't. Principal
Mrs. Emily Gervasio, Ass't. Principal
Mrs. Suzi Greene, Ass't. Principal



Sarah Noble Intermediate School
860-210-4020

Mrs. Anne Bilko, Principal
Mrs. Emily Gervasio, Ass't. Principal
Mrs. Jennifer Meyers, Ass't. Principal
Mrs. Barbara Nanassy, Ass't. Principal



Hill & Plain Elementary School
860-354-5430

Dr. Len Tomasello, Principal
Mrs. Jennifer Hankla, Ass't. Principal



John Pettibone Elementary School
860-354-3218

Mrs. Paula Kelleher, Principal
Mrs. Jennifer Hankla, Ass't. Principal



Northville Elementary School
860-355-3713

Mrs. Susan Murray, Principal
Mrs. Jennifer Chmielewski, Ass't. Principal

Spotlight on New Milford Schools

Volume 5, Issue 9

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Spotlight on Reading

While the structure of curriculum and instruction has changed over the years, in many ways it still comes down to the old standards of “reading, writing and arithmetic” that so many of us grew up with. The development of reading skills is a primary focus at all levels of instruction.

At the elementary level the emphasis is on the initial development of the fundamentals of reading as a basic building block for all other learning. When students move to the intermediate level, teachers continue to deepen reading instruction, incorporating text-dependent questioning and close reading strategies to promote students to higher levels of conversation about the texts they read. Literacy coach Karen Brenneke says, “At this stage, students are becoming quite the critics, as they read longer and stronger and at higher levels of text complexity.” By the time middle school rolls around students are using their reading skills as pathways that lead to other areas of instruction such as argumentative writing, oral debate and exploration of complex, real world issues. By the high school years, students are making their own reading choices through the selection of electives that specialize in particular genres or literary studies. Throughout it all, teachers and administrators look for events that help to promote a love of reading for its own sake. Many of these events are happening now and in the next few months.

JPS recently celebrated its annual *JPS Loves to Read* day where community members were invited in to read to the various classes. Readers could choose to share a favorite book or have one provided by the event coordinator, JPS reading teacher Ann Mueller. Other schools will be hosting similar events in the days to come.



Retired JPS teacher Cathie Hyde shares a story with a first grade class during *JPS Loves to Read* day.



Elementary school students celebrated Dr. Seuss' birthday on Read Across America Day on Monday, March 2nd. As part of the celebration, students took a reading break as a community, gathering in the hallways for a 15-20 minute school-wide read. Students at Northville Elementary School have been participating in the third annual Dr. Seuss Contest hosted by the Reading Room. Reading teacher Ms. Linda Siladi says "Each year, students and staff are encouraged to read as many Dr. Seuss books as they can in celebra-

tion of Dr. Seuss's birthday on March 2nd. As a motivator, a specific excerpt from one Dr. Seuss book is chosen and read during Morning Announcements each day during the last week of February. Students need to do a bit of reading in order to locate from which book the excerpt is taken. Then, they enter their best guesses into the Contest Box. The book is revealed on March 2nd, and Dr. Seuss prizes are given to all students who have selected the correct book." For the curious, this year's universal read-aloud was *Oh, the Places You'll Go!*.

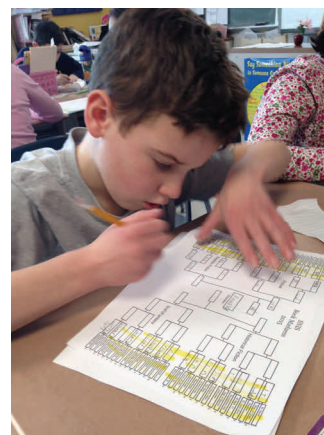
Read-a-thons are an annual event at most levels. New Milford's Town-wide PTO helps coordinate these events which encourage students to keep track of their reading minutes and perhaps raise a little money for the PTO on the way. Any money donated goes directly back to students in the form of author/illustrator visits, books for classrooms etc. Each school has a particular theme and spotlights student progress on bulletin boards weekly. John Pettibone School students go "Under the Sea". At Northville Elementary School, students are encouraged to "Dive into a Good Book", while at Hill and Plain they are "Flying into Fantasy".

HPS Assistant Principal Jenn Hankla says "The entire month of February was devoted to HPS's 8th annual read-a-thon. Students counted the number of minutes they spent reading each week both in school and at home and the PTO tracked progress on a bulletin board with dragons for each class flying their way toward a castle. During the first three weeks of the read-a-thon, the HPS students read a total of 410,694 minutes! As an addition to the read-a-thon, the PTO hosted the first "S'more Reading" night at HPS on February 20th. Students came to school in their pajamas and were treated to read-alouds and s'mores-on-a-stick. Nine staff members (administrators, teachers, and paraprofessionals) volunteered to read books for an hour and a half as approximately 100 children rotated through their stations."



Donations from the read-a-thons are put to good use to sponsor authors and illustrators for another annual favorite at the elementary schools: Literature Week which will take place April 6-10 this year. Authors and illustrators will visit for special presentations throughout the week. This year, guest presenters include author/wildlife photographer Stephen Swinburne, author/illustrator Lizzy Rockwell, illustrator Pat Schories and authors Tony Abbott and Jerry Pallotta, just to name a few.

The elementary schools are not the only ones hosting special events around reading. This is the second year for Sarah Noble Intermediate School's Book Madness which was launched last year as a way for intermediate students to "buzz" about books. Literacy coach Karen Brenneke says "Modeled after the NCAA's March Madness, students nominate their favorite titles in four genre-regions. The top 16 nominations in each region comprise the bracket. The building's master bracket is featured in SNIS's main hallway. Students then predict the winner of the coveted 'SNIS's Favorite Book' championship title. Each week students vote online, advancing titles on the bracket. Once we arrive at the Sweet Sixteen round, we select students who originally nominated the titles to do a quick video blurb, recommending the title to other readers. We have posters around the building with QR codes that link directly to these videos, so students and visitors with QR readers on their smartphones can view the video advertisements for the books."



Schaghticoke Middle School has hosted "The Battle of the Books" for the last 10 years or so. SMS reading teacher Robyn Hicks explains the competition. "The reading committee, made up of a group of teachers, paraeducators and the library media specialist, selects a list of 20 books. The reading levels are varied as are the genres and target audience. Students are encouraged to read as many books from the list as possible. The PTO is incredibly supportive; they purchase books and help along the way. We usually have a read-a-thon after school to kick off the battle. Students stay after to read books, the PTO provides pizza and snacks, there are questions and prizes - usually gift certificates for books. Along the way we continue to encourage reading, staff and students compose questions about the books and students have the opportunity to submit an answer to win a small prize for correct answers weekly. There are then grade level competitions, the grade level champions compete against one another and the winning team has a limo ride into town and lunch that the PTO funds while the other students get an after-school movie and snack event."

Our schools at all levels recognize National Poetry Month in April. SNIS started early and indulged in a little read-aloud "[Pi Day Poetry](#)" in March. At JPS, students will celebrate "Put a Poem in Your Pocket Day" on April 10th. Ms. Mueller says students can write their own poem or pick a favorite one. Throughout the day students may be asked if they have a poem in their pocket. If the answer is yes they will be encouraged to read it aloud. NMHS

will hold its annual Poetry SLAM on April 24th. This is a fun, competitive event in which student poets perform their work in front of fellow students and selected judges.

New Milford High School students share their love of reading in other ways as well. Students enrolled in the elective Children's Literature create original children's books which they then share with elementary students during a read aloud visit. In conjunction with advisors, they produce the [Wave Review](#), the school's online student newspaper, and The Piper, NMHS' literary magazine which has won an award of "excellent" from the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) for CT. In addition, the high school schedule has a built in "3TR" feature which provides 30 minutes of time to read for every student every "B day", which is every other day in their schedule.

All schools require and encourage a summer reading program. Parents and students will receive more details on each school's program as we get closer to the end of the year, which will be here faster than we think!

HPS Accepts Challenge to Fight Hunger

All of the New Milford Public Schools host food drives off and on throughout the year. Hill and Plain Elementary is no exception and Dr. Tomasello told us about their First Friday Food Drive in the December 2014 issue of *Spotlight*. Now the school has taken it a step further by participating in the A+ School Rewards Fighting Hunger Challenge sponsored by Stop & Shop. Dr. T says that Hill and Plain already participates in the Stop & Shop A+ School Rewards program. "When parents from Hill and Plain shop at Stop & Shop and have their Stop & Shop card linked to our school, we get 'points' for every dollar spent. In the spring of every year, the store gives us a check reflecting the dollars earned for us by our parents. This year, Stop & Shop introduced a Fighting Hunger Challenge Contest for schools in MA, RI, CT, NY and NJ. Each competing school was asked to choose a local, not for profit food bank, soup kitchen or food pantry, and conduct a food drive. The schools were then directed to build a unique and creative display using the donated products, to be placed in a prominent area of the school."



Hill and Plain's display is called "Bridging the Gap to End Hunger". The display was a collaborative effort from teachers and paraeducators, complete with vehicles donated by the HPS Excel class. Six winning schools, **(of which HPS was one!)**, will receive \$1000 that will be added to the earned "points" at the end of the year. Dr. T says "Because of the high interest in the contest (we do a food drive every month) our school community donated more than 400 food items this month which is more than four times the number of items for any other month! We are so pleased to have won the contest and are very appreciative of the level of participation in each month's drive. Our local food bank is the true winner."

March is National Nutrition Month



National Nutrition Month® is a nutrition education and information campaign created annually in March by the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. The theme for 2015 is "Bite into a Healthy Lifestyle," which encourages people to adopt eating and physical activity plans that are focused on consuming fewer calories, making informed food choices and getting daily exercise in order to promote overall health.

In an effort to support this campaign, the NMPS Food Services Department sends out a "nutrition tip of the day" to all staff during March with information from the Academy's website to share with students, family and friends. A few of the tips are highlighted below.

New Milford Public Schools Food Services Director Sandra Sullivan says "Besides the daily nutrition tips, school cafeterias will be offering high protein, nonfat yogurt parfaits with strawberries and homemade granola through March and April. Also to celebrate National Nutrition Month we will have a menu featuring locally grown in New Milford Adirondack blue potatoes."

The Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics has many other helpful resources for National Nutrition Month online including tip sheets for a Good Nutrition Reading List, a month's worth of tips for Healthy Eating on the Run, ideas for Smart Snacking for Adults and Teens and much, much more. Visit their site at www.eatright.org/nnm for these helpful materials and the National Nutrition Month® toolkit.

EATING RIGHT

Eating right doesn't have to be complicated — simply begin to incorporate a healthy eating plan into your daily routine. These recommendations from the Dietary Guidelines for Americans can help get you started.

- Emphasize fruit, vegetables, whole grains and low-fat or fat-free milk and milk products.
- Include lean meats, poultry, fish, beans, eggs and nuts.
- Make sure your diet is low in saturated fats, trans fats, cholesterol, salt (sodium) and added sugars.

BE A ROLE MODEL

If your eating habits are not the ones you want your children to copy, now is a great time to make some improvements. Model a healthy attitude about your body image. If you always complain about your weight or call certain foods bad foods, your children will learn to do the same. If you follow fad diets, they'll learn that restrictive eating is more important than balanced, healthful eating.

Obsessing about calories, carbs, fats or any nutrient is not healthy eating. It makes meals stressful and unpleasant, the opposite of what every kid and adult deserve. Teaching that a healthful dinner has half of the plate full of fruits and vegetables and is eaten at a dinner table each night sets your children up for a healthy future. Offering a variety of foods at regular meal and snack times is another positive step.

Love our New Lunchrooms!

In the January issue of *Spotlight*, we shared the good news that our school cafeterias were getting a face lift thanks to the *Love Your Lunchroom* cafeteria design project. Two schools have since been completed.

NES Principal Susan Murray says “We chose a farm theme to incorporate our school mascot, Nessy the Cow. The mural also includes our school garden, the Plant Patch, and our little red schoolhouse logo. Both parents and students are very happy with the colorful displays in the serving and dining areas.” Principal Len Tomasello says the Hungry Lion Café theme was a little simpler, “We just thought the jungle theme was really fun and would appeal to our students and we are happy to report that they love it!”

Look below to see some images of Northville Elementary School’s Country Café and Hill and Plain’s Hungry Lion Café.



SNIS Physical Education Classes Try Snowshoeing!

The Physical Education department at Sarah Noble Intermediate School teamed up with the Pratt Nature Center to bring an awesome winter snowshoeing experience to SNIS students. All students in grades 4, 5, and 6 got a chance to participate in the event as part of their physical education class time during these snowy winter months. Ms. Duque's classes were the first to go followed by Miss Holden and Mr. Mumma's classes. Students first watched a Pratt Center created video during PE class so they would be properly prepared with winter gear and learn how to put on the shoes.

<http://youtu.be/s4Se-wH9Esw>



The PE department was excited to offer the program since snowshoeing provides a healthy aerobic activity for people of all ages to participate in during a time of year when options are sometimes few and far between. PE teacher Ms. Duque says, "Snowshoeing can burn about 750 calories in one hour, which is more than twice as much as walking for an hour. It's a low impact activity that provides not only an excellent cardiovascular activity, but also a fantastic lower body workout that utilizes muscle groups that may not otherwise be engaged in everyday activities or exercise. Also, this experience allows students a chance to enjoy the outdoors in the winter with their classmates and teachers. This is the first year for this program. Students and staff had such a blast outside in the winter wonderland that I hope we are able to offer it for many years to come!"



Visit SNIS' twitter feed
@SNIS_CT to see more pictures.



REMINDER: The next Sit Down with the Superintendent

will be held on May 20th from 7:30 a.m. to 8:15 a.m.
at the Lillis Administration Building,
50 East Street



NMHS Key Club Sponsors Fun Events for a Cause

The Key Club is one of many clubs and activities offered to students at New Milford High School. This service club, which has a national affiliation with the Kiwanis, is dedicated to working on projects within the community. Club members are going to be busy over the next few months as they sponsor two worthwhile events.

The first event took place on March 16th as high school students and staff participated in a fundraiser for the St. Baldrick's Foundation called Brave the Shave. The St. Baldrick's Foundation is a volunteer-driven charity committed to funding the most promising research to find cures for childhood cancers. The Foundation is known for its head shaving events where volunteers get bald to stand in solidarity with kids fighting cancer and raise money to support childhood cancer research.

NMHS Assistant Principal Marc Balanda says "I have organized events and shaved my head for St. Baldrick's Foundation three times in my previous district and each time I saw the joy in the faces of the people involved. It is a wonderful way to get a school community involved in an unbelievably fun event that raises money for a cause that everyone can support. Shavees, barbers, volunteers, family, and friends commit what they can and the end result helps to preserve the lives of children with cancer along with future generations of children." When Mr. Balanda mentioned the idea to Key Club advisor Mrs. Danette Lambiase she knew the Key Club would gladly sponsor the event. She and her Key Club officers took the lead in putting the pieces in place to get ready for the March 16 event.



Volunteer stylists from Sharoan's Hair Studio and the Southbury Barber Shop donated their time to shave the heads of 30 staff, students and community members alike as a nice crowd cheered them on. Before and after shots above are courtesy of the event's photographer, NMHS Health teacher Erica Keane, who was on hand to record the event for participants and their families. When all was said and done **\$11,400** was raised for childhood cancer research! Mr. Balanda says "Our hope is that our inaugural event grows (pardon the pun) and we have even more students and staff involved next year."

In 2014, St. Baldrick's saw more than 57,000 people "brave the shave" at more than 1,300 events, raising more than \$38 million. With the start of 2015, already more than 19,000

volunteers have registered to “brave the shave”, raising more than \$5.4 million. Since 2005, the St. Baldrick’s Foundation has granted more than \$154 million, making it the largest non-government funder of childhood cancer research grants. Kudos to NMHS and Key Club for helping the effort!

Key Club’s second worthy event has become an annual tradition at NMHS. It is New Milford High School’s **Reinvent the Dress** program.

Mrs. Lambiase says, “Many families struggle with prom-related expenses. From the cost of tickets and flowers, to the purchase of a dress, the expenses can be overwhelming. Realizing this need, a group of teachers began this special program in 2009 with an after school boutique and operated it through donations from staff and students. Members from the NMHS Key Club took over where they left off and have been running it each year for the past six years.”



A team of students volunteer their time after school to organize the dresses by size and color and transform the Career Center at the high school into a makeshift boutique complete with dressing rooms, full length mirrors, shoes and accessories. Girls are welcome to come in and try dresses on with the hopes of finding that perfect dress at no cost to them. This year’s boutique will open on April 2nd.

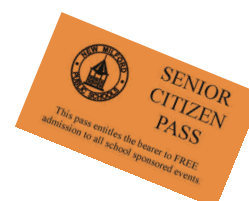
If you’re not in the market for a prom dress but would like to donate a gently used dress, shoes or accessories, Key Club is accepting donations through March 27th. You can drop them off in the Main Office at the high school between 7:15 a.m. and 3:00 p.m. Please contact Danette Lambiase in the counseling office via email at lambiased@newmilfordps.org for more information.

NMHS presents *The Secret Garden*



Tickets are on sale now for this year’s All School Musical production of *The Secret Garden*. Evening performances will be presented on **March 20, 21, 27, and 28 at 7 p.m. in the NMHS theatre. Matinees will be offered on March 22 at 3 p.m. and on March 28 at 2 p.m.** All seating at \$10 per person is reserved. Tickets can be purchased by visiting the high school box office Mondays through Fridays from 2:30 p.m. to 4 p.m. and Mondays through Thursdays from 6:30 p.m. to 8 p.m. Tickets are also available by calling the high school box office at 860-350-6647 ext. 1552.

Senior citizen passes are available that provide FREE admission to the musical and other school events. Please call the Central Office at 860-355-8406 for more information.





Transition Update

Here's just a little bit of what's been happening since our last issue of *Spotlight*:

PARENT ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETINGS

The parent advisory committee had its second meeting and continued to brainstorm ideas both for the welcoming events and for improving communication between parents and the schools during this time of transition. In particular, they discussed strategies for making the Q&A section of the welcome meetings more effective.

Some parents who cannot attend a parent advisory committee meeting are sending in suggestions through e-mail to the project managers who are sharing the input with the whole committee. The project managers have also added an online day meeting for parents who find it difficult to attend meetings in the evening.

INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING TEAMS ARE NOW MEETING IN THEIR NEW SCHOOLS

Third and sixth grade instructional planning teams are continuing to meet at SNIS and SMS to plan effectively for the next school year. Each team has now met at least once in their new school and will continue to do so through the end of the school year.

WELCOMING MEETINGS

Plans are being put into place for evening welcoming meetings at NES, HPS, SNIS and SMS to take place in late April and early May. Both elementary schools will hold their welcoming events on the same evening. SNIS and SMS will have multiple nights for each grade to better accommodate the needs of a large number of parents and students.

Many of the ideas being considered for the welcoming events were based on suggestions provided by the parent advisory committee (art projects, scavenger hunt, smaller groups, PTO table, Q&A session, and powerpoint slideshow or video presentations about the schools).

The PTOs are planning to have tables set up at each welcoming event to introduce parents to their school's PTO.

SPECIAL LIBRARY MOVING COMPANY HAS BEEN HIRED

The district provided a letter of agreement with a company that specializes in moving school and college libraries. The company has met twice in the last month with the school library media specialists to review the process. Books will be moved and shelved during the month of July in preparation for use on the first day of school in September. Library media specialists have been meeting regularly since the beginning of the school year to plan for the distribution of their collections.

PACKING INSTRUCTIONS HAVE BEEN PROVIDED TO FACULTY

Detailed packing instructions have been provided to faculty. These include non-instructional packing times, safe packing practices, and procedures for labeling boxes to aid in unpacking.

More Transition News...

THE PODS ARE COMING

New Milford Public Schools has contracted with the POD company to provide containers for outside of the building storage. The PODS will function as staging areas for supplies and materials that are no longer needed for instruction through the end of the school year. This innovative approach is designed to ensure that packing and storage do not affect instruction and is part of the district's commitment to maintain a positive, nurturing, and instructionally productive environment during every school day of the year.

There will be three PODS at JPS and one POD each at NES, HPS and SNIS. During July, the PODS will transport materials and supplies to their permanent locations for unpacking and remain at their new location until unpacking is completed.

NMHS Symphonic Band Performs at Carnegie Hall



New Milford High School band students recently had what for many may be a once in a lifetime experience when they traveled to New York City to perform on the world famous Ronald O. Perelman Stage in the Isaac Stern Auditorium at Carnegie Hall. The NMHS Symphonic Band performed on Friday, March 6th in conjunction with four other schools representing three different states. Our band performed an All American Program with selections including *America the Beautiful*, *Shenandoah*, an arrangement of *Simple Gifts* entitled *Chorale* and *Shaker Dance II* and ending with *Americans We*, a march by Henry Fillmore. The students gave a powerful and emotional performance to the over 1000 audience members in attendance!

NMHS Band Director David Syzdek says "It is hard to describe with words but the experience was exciting, beautiful, and memorable for all those involved to say the least. I am so very proud of our students and of the performance they gave that evening."



New Milford Public Schools

50 East Street
New Milford, CT 06776
860-355-8406

Dr. JeanAnn C. Paddyfote
Superintendent

Mr. Joshua Smith
Assistant Superintendent

Ms. Ellamae Baldelli
Human Resources Director

Mr. John Calhoun
Facilities Manager

Mr. Jay Hubelbank
Fiscal Services & Operations Director

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Music in Our Schools Month



Sponsored by the National Association for Music Education (NAfME), Music in Our Schools Month celebrates “students and all of the ways that music education drives their personal and academic success”.

The New Milford Public Schools is lucky to have dedicated and talented music educators and equally dedicated and talented music students!

Their accomplishments, both chorale and instrumental, are presented throughout the year at local concerts and in regional and statewide festivals.

The Connecticut Music Educators Association (CMEA) sponsors regional events to which students may audition. This school year, 25 middle school aged students at SNIS and SMS were chosen for participation in the CMEA Northern Region Middle School Music Festival. New Milford High School proudly sent 19 students to the CMEA Northern Region Music Festival, 6 students to the CMEA Northern Region Youth Honor Band/Flute Choir, 7 students to the CMEA All State Festival, and 4 students to the NAfME All Eastern Festival.

Whew, that’s a lot of talent!!

All schools offer musical programs throughout the year that are **FREE** of charge. Check the school calendars on the district website for dates and times.

Remember too, the NMHS All School Musical is coming up soon. Talk about talent!! See page 9 for details.

The mission of the New Milford Public Schools, a collaborative partnership of students, educators, family and community, is to prepare each and every student to compete and excel in an ever-changing world, embrace challenges with vigor, respect and appreciate the worth of every human being, and contribute to society by providing effective instruction and dynamic curriculum, offering a wide range of valuable experiences, and inspiring students to pursue their dreams and aspirations.

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