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Mrs. Jennifer Delaney, Asst. Principal  
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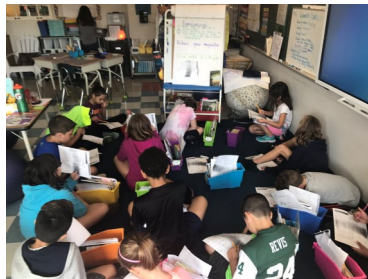
Mrs. Susan Murray, Principal  
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# Spotlight on New Milford Schools

Volume 8, Issue 4

October 2017

## Flexible Seating: Making Learning Comfortable



The concept of flexible seating is taking off in many of our K-5 classrooms as teachers look to create a more comfortable environment that helps students be their best learning selves. Proponents talk about the ability to channel student energy in a productive way, allowing them to better focus on tasks at hand, along with the need to create an environment that is conducive to open collaboration, communication, and creativity. Talk about 21st century learning! We share two examples below.

*SNIS Grade 4 teacher Cindy Bonnell talks about how flexible seating relates to 21st century learning:*



Flexible seating is one way to make the classroom 21st century friendly. Flexible seating allows students many options for a "seat" in the classroom. Allowing students to have choice in their seating can help increase their academic performance. Giving students the power to choose which type of seat is right for them will also empower them to know where/how they learn best.



Student-centered classrooms are effective, motivating, and enjoyable. Flexible seating is one part of creating a student-centered classroom. When students are in control they are actively engaged in their own learning.

Additionally, some flexible seating allows for movement and therefore extra "exercise". Students should not be expected to sit at a desk all day. Simple in-class activities can boost performance. Studies suggest that children who participate in short bouts of physical activity within the classroom have more on-task behavior, with the best improvement seen in students who are least on-task initially. Seating options in my room include: stability balls, core disks, floor cushions, "dorm" chairs, "Roma" chairs and more.

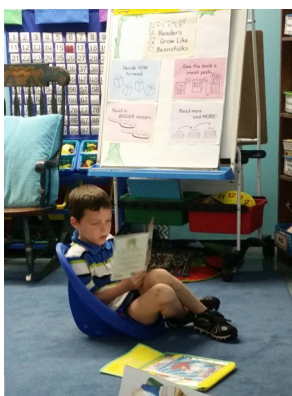


*NES Grade 2 teacher Kate DeBarber talks about the evolution of her classroom to flexible seating:*

I first heard about flexible seating through teacher vlogs that I watch on YouTube. I follow one teacher who teaches fourth grade. This Pennsylvania teacher took most of the desks out of her classroom and replaced them with farm tables, low tables sitting close to the floor, balance balls, pillows, etc.



After watching this I considered my own teaching. Many teachers (myself included) allow students to sit where they choose during reading time. You'll often see students in "nooks" around the classroom engrossed in a good book. Why not apply this model all day?



I also considered myself. Ever since I was young (and even now) I have a desk at home. Yet, I NEVER work at it! Through my K-12 schooling, a bachelor's degree, and an online master's program, I complete work sitting on my couch or in an armchair (where I am typing this right now). However, we expect young children to work in uncomfortable desks all day?

In the middle of last year I took half of the desks out of my classroom and replaced them with tables, cushions, and "scoop chairs." I also took the leg extenders off a circular table in my room so it sat close to the floor. Students sit at this table on cushions. My routines included me teaching a mini-lesson and then having my students find a spot around the classroom where they felt like they could work best. You would find students in "scoop chairs,"

which are like tiny rocking chairs, gathered around a low-set table, or some still sitting in traditional seating. It was important to me to keep chairs and tables because many students find this more comfortable when completing certain tasks. The PTO also got each classroom at Northville a "standing table" which is a great addition to our flexible seating options.

This year I started out the year assigning students seats and spending more time explicitly teaching how to use each flexible seating option. I made a chart that pictures each type of seat and we listed the appropriate ways to use the seat, almost like a "Dos/Don'ts" list for each seating type. I found that modeling appropriate use was important and discussed with students why and how flexible seating is used. I decided to assign students "base spots" too this year because last year when I had substitutes the seating was confusing. So, students do have an assigned spot but can sit elsewhere during the day and can be moved back to the assigned spot if/when needed.



I have found that in order to implement flexible seating you must have excellent behavior/routine management within the classroom. There are certainly pitfalls to flexible seating and I would adjust my expectations based on the particular students I had. Students vary in their ability to use flexible seating appropriately and the teacher really needs to differentiate the experience when necessary. Once students understand the expectations involved in flexible seating they can experience

more freedom. So far, everyone is enjoying the choices.



## Fostering Teamwork with STEM

Students returning to school in the fall are starting out new in many ways: new teacher, new classroom, new classmates. Our district teachers use part of their initial lesson planning to build a sense of belonging amongst the group. SNIS Grade 3 teacher Megan Lago enlisted the help of Susan Brofford, the district's K-5 Science Enrichment teacher, for STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics) ideas for her class to try. Mrs. Lago says, "I was looking for activities to foster teamwork, strategy and a sense of community in the first few weeks of school. So far my class has completed the STEM lessons *Saving Sammy* and *Helping Harry*."

In each lesson, students were presented with a situation and materials that they must use to solve the given task. In *Saving Sammy*, student teams were given a gummy worm (Sammy), and 4 paper clips. Sammy was placed on top of an inverted cup (his capsized boat) with his gummy life preserver underneath. Student teams had to figure out how to get Sammy his life preserver without touching Sammy, the boat, or the life preserver directly with their hands. In *Helping Harry*, student teams needed to design a perch for googly-eyed puff ball Harry to better see the classroom. Materials for use included pipe cleaners, muffin liners, aluminum foil and index cards.



Mrs. Lago says, "These lessons allow students to evaluate and solve problems, given what they know, make sense of this information and execute their plan with the given materials. Living in the innovative world that we do, these skills are a necessity to prepare students for the higher-level thinking and problem solving of the real world (all while having fun). My students were highly engaged during these activities and evaluated themselves at the end of each task on areas such as planning, execution, success, respect of all ideas, and teamwork."

## CT Grown for CT Kids Week



The Food and Nutrition Services Department celebrated CT Grown for CT Kids Week in all of the New Milford cafeterias the week of October 2 - 5. This event is celebrated annually as part of National Farm to School Month and features CT grown and manufactured items. Local participants vary from year to year.

Mrs. Sandra Sullivan, Food Services Director, said "This year, Roger's Orchards of Southington and Starberry Farm of Washington provided Macintosh, Macoun and Gala apples. Our own Kimberly Farm here in New Milford supplied butternut squash which was served roasted. Also right out of New Milford, Villarina's Pasta provided fresh homemade whole wheat pasta shells served with Ragozzino Tomato Sauce from Meriden. Students also enjoyed all beef Hummel Hot Dogs out of New Haven."

The CT Department of Agriculture features more information regarding CT's Farm-to-School Program along with a link to *CT Grown Information for Consumers* with website listings and publications to help you find and enjoy Connecticut Grown products from farms, farmers' markets, and local businesses across the state. To find out more about CT apple picking, recipes and varieties visit the For Kids page of the [Connecticut Apples website](#) kids' page. The Department also offers [links](#) for agricultural fairs, apple and Christmas tree growers, forest products, honey producers, maple sugarhouses, specialty food products and more.

## Book Tasting at SNIS

One of the most popular events in the SNIS fifth grade ARCH (Assessment, Routines, Choice, and Healthy Community) reading unit is the Book Tasting. This activity is meant to get the students engaged in reading and encourage them to try different genres. Each table is set with a collection of books from one genre. The genres that are offered include adventure, fantasy, realistic fiction, historical fiction, mystery, and the year's Nutmeg Book nominees. The students review the characteristics of each genre then are ready to "taste".



As the tasting begins, the students select a book they think may be just right for them in a specific genre. After reading the book for a few minutes, the students respond to questions on the "menu". They record their impressions of the book and what evidence they found to support the genre of the book. The readers then give the book an overall rating and decide if it is a book they'd like to read. The children share their impressions of the book they tasted with their classmates. After the students share, they all move to the next genre table. After the students visit each genre, they return to their seats to record their selections to their *Must Read* list.

SNIS Fifth grade teacher Dianne Johnson says, "The students love participating in the activity and it is evident from their enthusiastic responses and high level of participation. The event is so popular, we are considering hosting another tasting after the children have read some of the books on their *Must Read* list."

## Fall Fitness Intramurals at SNIS



Interested SNIS students were able to start their day on the right foot with some exercise, thanks to a before-school program of fall fitness intramurals. The focus of the program, offered in five sessions, was on introducing, improving, and testing cardiovascular exercise, muscular strength and endurance, and flexibility - all while having some fun. Students met on the outside track, weather permitting, or in the main gym during inclement weather. According

to SNIS PE teacher David Mumma, "Students who joined the activity learned the differences between dynamic and static stretching techniques, worked on maintaining various running paces based on distance traveled, and set personal goals for distance and speed. They also competed in a baton relay where they were able to demonstrate teamwork and perseverance." Over 100 students chose to participate, a good sign for future fitness.



Another fall fitness opportunity was offered to all elementary students in grades PK-5 through their voluntary participation in the 5th annual Maureen Haas PK-5 Cross Country Meet on October 21st. The Meet is named in honor of a longtime paraeducator at HPS who encouraged exercise and good health in our students. District staff, student volunteers, and the NMPTO all contributed to making this a fun event for all.

## District Work Continues All Year Round

*The work of the district continues all year round as evidenced by results from this year's Summer Bridge Program and discussions at the past few meetings of the Committee on Learning.*

### Summer Bridge Program Builds Success



This was the second year for the Summer Bridge program, offered at Sarah Noble Intermediate School for select students entering grades four, five, and six. Students were invited to participate based on their performance during the 2016-17 school year. The program gives opportunities for students to learn and practice skills in both reading and math in preparation of the upcoming school year. At the beginning and end of the three week program, students were given assessments and the teachers designed their lessons based on those assessment results.

With 55 students in the program, attendance remained consistently above 80% throughout the three weeks. "The students were happy to be here and they came ready to learn. I owe their positive experiences and success to the great teachers and staff who made their lessons engaging and fun," said Jeff Bronn, administrator of the program.

The results of the students' post-assessments reflect the success of the program and show promise for the upcoming school year. In reading, 96% of students improved by at least one grade level on the learning progression for informational reading. Of that group, 11 students progressed two grade levels. In math, close to 90% of students improved to at least 80% mastery of grade-level skills. Of that group, 21 students scored 100% mastery of grade-level skills on their post-assessments.



### Updates from Committee on Learning

#### August

The August Committee on Learning meeting featured two presentations which spotlighted some of the enrichment opportunities offered to NMPS students. September and October meetings showcased curriculum writing by district teachers over the summer.

At the August meeting, Mrs. Susan Brofford presented regarding her work as the district's Grades K-5 Science Enrichment teacher. Mrs. Brofford completed her second year in this position during 2016-17. She said her role is twofold: to support teachers with professional development, such as enrichment lessons they can do in their own classrooms (the Mystery Science units profiled in the [February 2017 Spotlight](#) are a good example of this), and to provide pull-out enrichment opportunities to identified students.

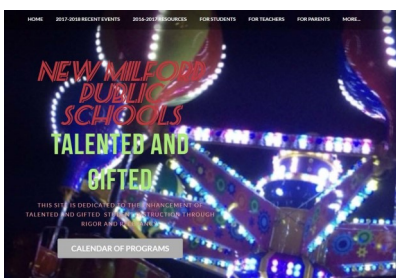
In 2015-16, her first year in the position, Mrs. Brofford was able to offer four Project Lead the Way (PLTW) courses over six sections as enrichment to approximately 55 students. She also offered the Hour of Code at SNIS and computer science instruction to Grade 2 at HPS. In 2016-17, the second year of the program, Mrs. Brofford was able to offer ten PLTW courses over sixteen sections to 164 students. She offered the Hour of Code school-wide at SNIS and to Grade 2 at both HPS and NES. In addition, Mrs. Brofford ran after-school clubs for grades 3, 4, and 5 in computer science for any interested student, as well as a robotics workshop for fifth graders during





their recess time. Students were also welcome to participate in the family science fairs which Mrs. Brofford coordinated with a great deal of help from the New Milford PTO and New Milford High School student volunteers.

Ms. Yvonne de St. Croix presented regarding her role as the Talented and Gifted (TAG) teacher. Ms. de St. Croix said her role has many facets. A primary focus is to identify students with high potential, then develop or modify enrichments and curriculum extensions in response to their needs. She also identifies and provides the training and curriculum needed to prepare teachers to differentiate for TAG students. Her goal is to structure gifted services to be sustainable so that they grow from year to year, and to facilitate frequent and ongoing communication with TAG students and stakeholders. Additionally, Ms. de St. Croix works to nurture the social and emotional well-being of TAG students by recognizing their individual strengths and learning styles and diverse backgrounds.



Ms. de St. Croix said she had planned for 24 program offerings last year for TAG and high achieving, non-identified students, but ended up adding offerings in music and poetry to bring the total to 29. This year she is starting with 26 planned offerings but expects that number to increase as gaps to programming are identified. Ms. de St. Croix said one of her goals for this coming year is to make ongoing improvements to the <http://www.nmpstag.com> website she has developed. Another is to start a quarterly TAG newsletter.

The presentation concluded with a discussion of new CT state legislation regarding TAG that went into effect in July. The act requires that the Department of Education have a designated expert to be responsible for providing assistance regarding TAG; that they develop “best practices” guidelines for academic and social-emotional services to gifted and talented students, as well as professional development for teachers; and ensure that all high-ability students in CT receive appropriate services. Assistant Superintendent Alisha DiCorpo said the state sent a survey to TAG coordinators across the state as a first step in this process. She said she is confident that New Milford’s program already has a strong foundation, and the work this year will focus on identifying students and building for the future.

### September

In September, Art teacher Jennifer Amodeo highlighted the K-3 Art curriculum which she wrote in conjunction with Art teacher Nicole DuVerger. The newly written curriculum is aligned with the National Visual Arts Standards and common core. They are based on four artistic processes: create, present, respond, and connect. The curriculum is grade specific and content based, including work in two and three-dimensional art, and is designed to allow for great individual choice within the standards.



### October

October’s updates focused on Social Studies. NMHS teacher Mike Abraham presented curriculum updates for Honor’s Freshman World History and AP World History. SMS teacher Patrick Smith presented the curricula for the Grades 6 and 7 two-year course on World Regional Studies which he co-wrote with fellow teacher Mary Maloney, while SMS teacher Tracey Olmsted presented the Grade 8 Social Studies curriculum for U.S. History. All curricula have been updated for the new Social Studies frameworks and for common core. Emphases include increased rigor, presentation skills and performance tasks.

Ms. de St. Croix was back to the Committee in October with an update on a new referral process for TAG, using the nationally normed universal screening test CogAt (Cognitive Abilities Test). All students in third grade, as well as students transferring into district, will be given the 30 minute classroom test this fall. Assistant Superintendent Alisha DiCorpo says, “Use of CogAt will broaden access, increase inclusivity, and offer equitable opportunities for all NMPS students regarding TAG. It will increase the potential for identification of students instead of testing only some students based on the recommendations of teachers, parents, and/or historical achievement data. It will provide a fast, reliable, valid data point when determining eligibility for the program and can anchor other measures to inform decisions on student placement in accelerated coursework.”

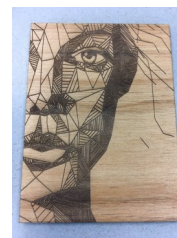
Also in October, Ms. DiCorpo and Professional Development Evaluation Co-Chair Linda Scoralick gave an update on the newly revised Teacher Evaluation Plan. Ms. DiCorpo says, “The rationale for the suggested revisions relates to the desire of administration and the Professional Development Evaluation Committee to improve teacher practice focusing on specific, meaningful feedback; to enable administrators to move from the management aspects of their positions into more instructional leadership roles; and the need for the overall time for evaluations to be lessened so that administrators can spend more time planning for and leading instructional work. The ultimate goal of the plan remains to improve teacher practice and support development over time of all teachers in all phases of their careers.”

### **Goodwin College Mobile Manufacturing Unit Visits SMS**

SMS Grade 8 students had an in-house field trip this fall designed to gain exposure to 21st century manufacturing and related careers. Staff from Goodwin College delivered a presentation to students, sharing information about innovations in manufacturing, followed by a tour of their “Advanced Manufacturing Mobile Unit”.



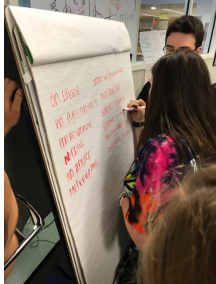
This 40-foot mobile van, which visited SMS on three separate days (one day per 8th grade team), travels to schools to show students what a career in manufacturing can offer. Facilitators want to show students that today’s manufacturing facilities are clean, high tech spaces which utilize computers, and require workers to have advanced skills. Students received hands-on exposure to equipment such as CAD, CNC equipment, and 3D printers, coming away with a few souvenirs and a new appreciation for a possible career path.





## Mental Health First Aid at NMHS

On Monday, September 25th, New Milford High School hosted an all-day Youth Mental Health First Aid training for 22 interested students. The session was facilitated by Ms. Denique Weidema from Positive Directions: The Center for Prevention and Counseling.

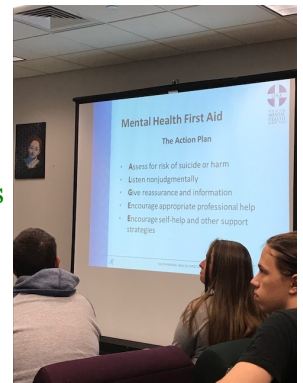


Youth Mental Health First Aid introduces common mental health challenges for youth, reviews typical adolescent development, and teaches a 5-step action plan for how to help young people in both crisis and non-crisis situations. Topics covered include anxiety, depression, substance use, disorders in which psychosis may occur, disruptive behavior disorders, and eating disorders.

NMHS Health teacher, and New Milford Substance Abuse Prevention Council Chairperson, Erica Keane says, “We hope by providing this training on an on-going basis for interested students, that as a school community, we will increase students’ awareness of issues related to mental health and empower our youth to best assist a friend in need by referring them to school and community professionals who can further assist.”

Student participants discussed changes and challenges that teens face on a daily basis in the domains of physical, social, and emotional health and well being. Each group was given scenarios to read and respond to. Who would/ could they tell, what warning signs did they see, are there any red flags in this scenario? They practiced and discussed how they should respond and how to non-judgmentally and safely be present for their friend.

Students also learned the five-step action plan, ALGEE, to support someone developing signs and symptoms of a mental illness or in an emotional crisis: Assess for risk of suicide or harm; Listen nonjudgmentally; Give reassurance and information; Encourage appropriate professional help; and Encourage self-help and other support strategies.



At the end of the session, all participants were proud to say they are now YMHFA certified. Another training will be offered in March. Interested students should contact Mrs. Keane.





## Unified Sports Continues Growth in NMPS

Unified Sports, a program of Special Olympics, is continuing to expand throughout the New Milford Public Schools. The program combines approximately equal numbers of athletes with and without disabilities on sports teams for training and competition.

This pioneer sports program started five years ago at New Milford High School. Teams participate in soccer, basketball, track and field and bowling events. The high school students have also participated in SWC sponsored events at Bunnell High School and Newtown High School. NMHS Athletic Director Keith Lipinsky reports, "The parents have been so appreciative of their children getting the opportunity to compete in different activities and the positive experiences they have had attending events. The atmosphere is so positive and so much fun for the participants. When you attend an event, every school in attendance and every spectator in the stands is cheering and supporting everyone. Unified Sports has provided our students with the opportunity to develop lasting relationships and memories with both participants and coaches from New Milford and other schools."



Sarah Noble Intermediate School is beginning its third year of Unified Sports participation. At this level, the program is non-competitive and skill based. Students participate in relay races, long jump, javelin throw, volleyball, baseball and soccer. Approximately 90 students participated in the program last year. SNIS Principal Anne Bilko reports, "Parent and student response was terrific. In particular, one parent shared that her son was always resistant to team sports but after his Unified experience he joined a

baseball team for the first time. Staff response was also great; in addition to our coaches, we had many staff members come join our early morning practices."

This past school year, Schaghticoke Middle School came on board. They are currently participating in Unified Sports for basketball and track. SMS Principal Chris Longo states, "The programs have been excellent. Students enjoyed this new opportunity and we were excited to have two excellent, experienced coaches who work with our adaptive PE students



as well (Ms. Blood and Ms. Holden) which was an added bonus. Parents appreciated an opportunity like this for students who don't always have the chance to interact in activities throughout the year. We are looking forward to continued success with the program."



To see more about the Unified Sports program, including videos, visit the [CIAC website](#).

## New Milford Adult Education Welcomes American Job Center

New Milford Adult Education continues to look for partnerships and opportunities to improve or enhance the lives of our community members. Staff was particularly excited to announce their newest partnership with the American Job Center.

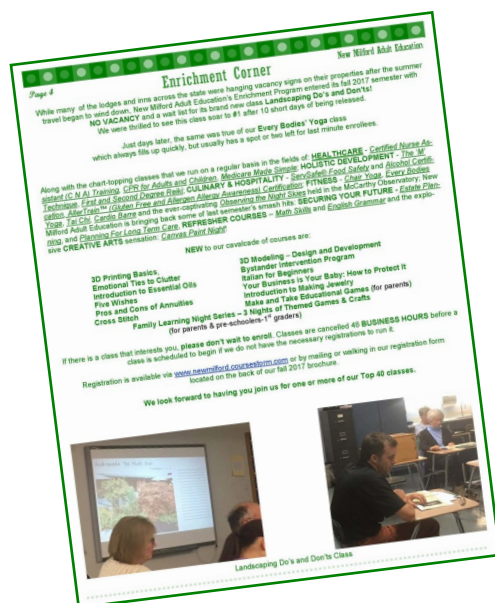
American Job Centers are designed to help businesses find qualified workers and help job seekers obtain employment and training services to enhance their careers. These services include assessment of skills, abilities, aptitudes and needs; assistance with Unemployment Insurance; access to employment services such as the states' job board and labor market information; career counseling; job search and job placement assistance; and information on training, education and related supportive services such as day care and transportation. Eligible individuals can obtain more intensive services and training.



Adult Education Facilitator Christy Martin says, "Currently the American Job Center has locations in Waterbury, Torrington and Danbury that operate during the day. For those with transportation issues, or who cannot get there during the day, this provides a challenge. Our partnership with the Job Center has them on site at New Milford High School and available to the greater New Milford community the last Wednesday of the month from 4:00 p.m. to 6:30 p.m."

Ms. Martin is happy to report that the American Job Center held a very successful opening day on September 27th in New Milford. "Twenty-two participants received an orientation to some of the services and opportunities available to the community. Two area residents received assistance with resume questions and one area resident was able to find job opportunities leading to an interview!"

For more information regarding the program, call Ms. Christy Martin at (860) 350-6647 ext. 1170.



Registration for Adult Education classes takes place online. To see what classes are offered, check out [their page on the district website](#). The program has its own monthly newsletter too. The October 2017 issue can be [viewed here](#).

Finally, don't forget to follow them on twitter @AdultEd\_NM.



## Congratulations to the New Milford Public School “Stars” for the month of October!



**Debbie Clark  
Priscilla Fisher  
Cindy Gallagher  
Andrea Norem  
Rose Simmons  
Joanne Weber**



Special congratulations to Joanne Weber who will drive the  
Ingersoll Auto of Danbury NMPS courtesy car.

Don't forget to visit the district website to [submit your staff nomination](#).

### Are you a Twitter follower?



NMPS can keep you busy all week following its various Twitter accounts. Superintendent Joshua Smith (@nmps\_supt) and all our schools tweet. You can follow their feeds on the district and school home pages of [our website](#). Their feeds are just the tip of the iceberg though, as many of our school departments and staff offer their own unique perspectives. A few recent examples and suggestions to follow are offered below.

**@HPSLMC:** just one of the twitter feeds offered by our school libraries. This feed has been featuring a joke of the week. (HPS students should know the answer.)

**@SnisHealth:** SNIS Health is tweeting a Health question of the day. Here is a recent one for you: MyPlate shows how many food groups? A:2 B:67 C:5 D:7 Health ? of the day. Ask your student for the answer.

**@SMS\_SchoolCounseling:** Counseling office info for our middle school students and parents. High school parents and students can follow **@NMHSGuidance\_CT**.

**@GoGreenWaveNM:** the official site for New Milford High School Athletics. Need we say more? Or **@NewMilfordBands:** to see sights *and* hear sounds.

**@NMPS\_Technology:** sometimes a quick Technology note, sometimes a peek at school happenings.

**@NMPSFoodService:** our district's Food Service staff keeps you updated.

On any given day, you don't know who will be tweeting about what. As you start to follow one, you will see ideas for others. If you need still more ideas, plug in the name of your child's teacher(s) on twitter; you'll be surprised how many of them are tweeting.



## New Milford Public Schools

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**Mr. Kevin Munrett**  
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**Mr. Anthony Giovannone**  
Fiscal Services & Operations  
Director

**Mrs. Laura Olson**  
Pupil Personnel &  
Special Services Director

**Ms. Roberta Pratt**  
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## Thoughts of Inclement Weather



The days are getting shorter and it won't be long before the winter season is upon us. A variety of communication tools are used to announce any change to the district's regular schedule.

The [School Delays and Closings page](#) of the district website provides a complete listing and information to register where necessary. These tools include:

### New Milford Public Schools website

Notification of school delays, closings and early dismissal are posted on the district's homepage at [www.newmilfordps.org](http://www.newmilfordps.org). Parents are also encouraged to sign up for email notification through [www.ctweather.com](http://www.ctweather.com) by selecting "e-Notifications." There is a link to this site on the school district's website.

### Text message and Twitter alerts

Text message and twitter announcements go out as soon as a decision is made to delay or close school or in the event of early dismissal. Telephone notification follows later, around 6:00 a.m.

### Television stations

Channel 3 (WFSB) Channel 6/NBC 30 (WVIT)  
Channel 8 (WTNH) FOX61 (WTIC)

**The ability to deliver a message is only as successful as the contact information that we have for your child. Please make certain that your child's school has your most up-to-date contact information.**

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.

October 12, 2015