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Spotlight on New Milford Schools

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Coming of Age in Freshman English

The freshman year of high school brings many transitions as students move to a new building, adapt to a new schedule, and begin their journeys to post-secondary life and adulthood. NMHS English teacher Ms. Michelle Minto (@MsMinto1 on twitter), a freshman herself in some ways having made the move from SMS to NMHS this year, is sharing her experience through a [classroom blog](#) where she is chronicling her students' instructional year.



For those who may not know, NMHS English classes meet every other day in 80-minute time blocks. Ms. Minto says she wants her students to be engaged as soon as they walk through the door. To that end, she set up a routine at the beginning of the year where students are greeted everyday by a poem displayed on the smart board or by a song (poetry set to music) playing over speakers. Ms. Minto says this start to class has been a great success. "These can be used in any way, to develop and deepen themes, to explore character development, to review figurative language. I like it because every single day, my students walk in happy and excited to see what is going to happen. They are called to the music that can be heard in the hallway, and when I hand them a lyric sheet and say hello as they walk in, students know that I care about them. They come in and talk about the song with their peers and then take their seats and get out their notebooks. Every day, the routine is the same, and they actually do it. Once the bell rings and I take attendance, we listen to the song again, and depending on the day I will give them a prompt about it to respond to, or just ask them to jot down things they like or notice. It is low-stakes writing that I do not grade. It gets them engaged, and thinking, the second they walk in the door."



The Freshman English (English I) class is a required full-year course offered to ninth-grade students at the college prep and honors levels. Students read classical and contemporary literature including nonfiction, and they routinely

write for a range of tasks, purposes, and audiences. The freshman language arts theme of “Journey of Discovery,” includes study of the “coming of age” novel.

Ms. Minto’s classes read the classic novel *To Kill A Mockingbird* to start the second quarter as they got their feet wet exploring the concepts of theme, symbolism and character development. Now that they have mastered some basic skills, Ms. Minto is taking the learning to the next level. “I really feel that my role should be as a facilitator to allow students the freedom to master skills and then transfer those skills to become more active participants.” With the start of the new year, Ms. Minto’s classes are doing just that through a unit long class project that has been given the hashtag #getlitcircles.



For this project, students were given a choice of eight diverse coming of age novels and asked to rank their top three in order of interest. Ms. Minto then assigned small groups (circles) of students to each book. Students will have six class sessions to read the novel, create lesson plans for each day of the unit (including the modeled daily poem), create quizzes to test knowledge, compare the novel to *To Kill A Mockingbird* and produce a video blog documenting the experience of reading the novel together. Whew!

Ms. Minto says the project has been a big success so far. In class, “Students work, work, work (I have never overheard so many amazing conversations between students that were self-directed). Students come to class and get into their novels immediately, without me even asking them to get them out. It is amazing. Their discussions about the poems are rich and lead to some new insights about the texts. About 60 percent of students are already filming vlogs (video blogs). During this time period, I check in with each group, discuss their progress, and what’s happening in the books, but honestly, they haven’t needed me much yet.”

Students will be sharing their video blogs with their fellow classmates at the end of January and Ms. Minto will be sure to share samples on her blog as well.



SNIS Book Clubs

“Page by page, book by book, student readers take a look”

Walk into a Grade 5 classroom at SNIS on any given day and you may see students clustered in small groups discussing their latest read. These “book clubs” are based on the Columbia Teachers College units of study in reading which incorporate the practice of book clubs as one way to allow a text to have a profound impact on its reader. Book clubs are formed as a student-driven routine by considering readers’ interests as well as the level at which they are reading. Participants agree on a set of expectations, sometimes called a “constitution”, whereby they tackle potential potholes like preparedness, scheduling their reading of the text, and thinking about when to reflect on their reading in writing. The teacher’s role in the book club structure becomes that of a coach, teaching students how to respond to the ideas of others, grow their peers’ thinking, respectfully disagree, and to provide more targeted instruction one-on-one with students, teaching them what is worth noting to talk about when their group meets, reflecting on discussions, and writing about their reading.

SNIS Grade 5 teacher Mrs. Lisa Montemurro says “Book clubs are designed to instill the idea that the best part of reading with others is that it changes the reader by allowing the reader to see the text through other perspectives. Being open to seeing the text differently through other reader's eyes broadens how they may have seen the text on their own. Book club members exchange ideas with their peers, allowing their own thoughts to change as they grow a larger understanding of the book together.”



As students debate in book clubs based on their different viewpoints, they dig deeper into the book’s theme, naming the problem that a character faces, the lessons the character learns from that problem and collecting evidence to support their positions. This close reading of the text is helpful when the students begin to write about the same topics in the Columbia Teachers College units of study in writing.

Speed Dating in the NMHS LLC

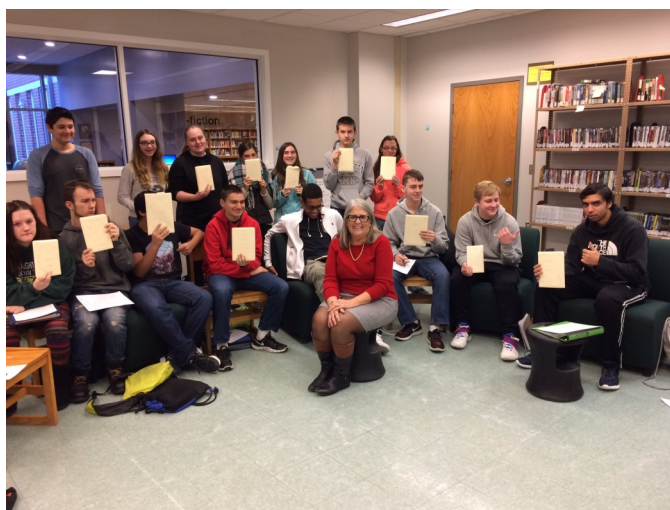
Socializing and spending time with friends are very important to high school aged students. NMHS Library Media Specialist Mrs. Robin Stiles has been mimicking both in order to foster student interest in reading something new.

"Speed Dating with Books" started last year with class visits to the NMHS LLC. Mrs. Stiles says the concept revolved around students selecting multiple books to read quickly (3-4 minutes timed) from the newest books collection. The books were spread out on library tables, and students made choices based on title, design, size, shape, cover, or reading the flyleaf. Mrs. Stiles said "I told students to think of it as asking someone in the crowd to dance at a school dance or asking someone new out on a date. You've got to take a chance and get to know the person to see if you click."

Once students made their multiple selections, they then had time to review their choices, tell why they selected the books they did, and make a final choice of a book to check out and "date." Books that weren't as good a match were returned to the table where other students could then browse for a connection. In keeping with the dating theme, Mrs. Stiles said "It's like going to a game or a dance hoping to spend time getting to know one person and you wind up meeting someone else who you find has more in common with you."

This year, Mrs. Stiles cranked it up a notch, with an idea that is finding its way to libraries and bookstores called Blind Speed Dating. "I selected enough books so students would have choice, wrapped them in brown paper and placed about eight words on the cover to grab their curiosity and interest. Students had a certain amount of time to choose two each based on size, shape, and the descriptive words on the books. They had to tell why they chose the book they did, which one they might prefer to 'date', then deselect one to give other students a chance to 'steal a blind date' all while the books were wrapped. Not until they checked out the books at our Main Desk did they get to take the cover off to reveal their choice."

Mrs. Stiles said the students were good sports about trying something new and seemed to enjoy the exercise. In the end, Mrs. Stiles said "This is just a different, fun, enticing and entertaining way to get more books into the hands of our kids and maybe give them a fun way to laugh and think about some of the choices they make, whether it be with books or dates. Maybe you can judge a book by its cover, or maybe not!"



NMPS Technology Department Supports Instruction

Do you own a smart phone, tablet or desktop computer? Do you consult Siri or Alexa for answers? Do you video conference or share information via social networks? Perhaps your home is equipped with wireless security? Technology in one form or another is everywhere, touching almost every part of our lives, our communities, our homes and our schools.

The Technology Department of the New Milford Public Schools is dedicated to providing technology tools to students and staff, both at the district level and through building based support. Technology Director Ms. Roberta Pratt says many recent upgrades are designed to strengthen the district's technology base. "Just like at home, when technology is working seamlessly, you shouldn't even notice it is working!" To that end, the district has made some internal moves: shifting its internet connection from the Lillis Building to SNIS where the server is based, replacing aged wireless controllers to assist with increasing wireless needs, improving wireless capabilities at SMS, and creating a redundant server site at SMS in case of emergencies. Equally important, the district's antiquated phone system has been replaced with a new digital phone system.

Within the schools, the Department has updated the computer media labs at the high school and middle school and assisted with creating an iPad music lab at SMS. The PLTW program at SMS now has increased lab capacity and the K-5 Science enrichment program received additional technology devices to assist student learning. Fifteen aged Smart Boards have been replaced with new LED boards as part of a planned refresh cycle. Over 400 Chrome Books have been added to district inventory, increasing the overall number of devices at each school.

TWEET! TWEET!



All our schools tweet and more staff members everyday are joining Twitter. Start at the school's webpage to find someone to follow (We suggest Superintendent Smith @nmpps_supt). Once you start following one person, others will pop up and you can follow them. Many times their profiles will lead you to twitter feeds for school clubs and athletics. It's a quick, immediate way to catch a glimpse of student work, special events and even videos like [this one by SMS Music teacher Mr. Paul Shim](#).

Ms. Pratt says the Technology Department also helps with training and professional development. "Sometimes this consists of helping teachers and students connect to online resources such as Type to Learn or Pearson's Easy Bridge Program, two programs new to the district. Other times it involves training staff in district resources as was done when the K-2 schools completed training in Gradebook. During the professional development days, techs assisted with Google and Smart Board sessions. We also recently helped with the installation of an Energy Savings program to assist with district energy initiatives."

The Technology Department is working to provide ongoing resources too. Staff and parents can follow them on twitter at @NMPS_Technology Dept and they have recently updated

[their district webpage](#) to add multiple links for staff use, and parent tips as well. They have even begun a series of inaugural “Tech Tips” sessions at the schools to assist interested staff in such topics as starting their own twitter feeds, working with Excel, or any other staff determined need.

Moving forward, the Department’s focus will be to continue its mission of providing resources to assist with student learning and help staff and students acquire the skills they need for our complex, highly technological knowledge-based world.

SMS Holds School Geography Bee

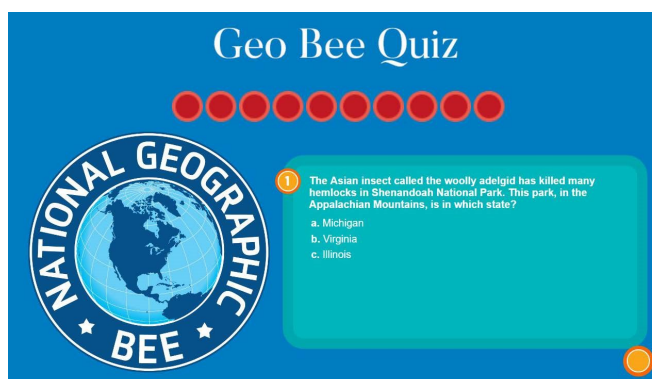


Students from all grades at Schaghticoke Middle School recently competed in this year’s National Geographic Geography Bee. Over 11,000 schools around the United States are participating in this year’s annual contest. Eighth grader Sophia Conklin won the school competition and will now complete a qualifying test to see if she can become one of the top 100 students in Connecticut who will compete in the state competition on March 31, 2017.



Congratulations to all the SMS school finalists: Griffin Bock, Jason Christos, Annabelle Colonna, Quinn Danvers, Chris Miller, Jared Piliero, Eloise Poirier, Sam Quigley, Kelsey Stewart, Annika Stuerken, Maddie Sweeney, Andy Xu, Sandy Xu, and **Sophia Conklin**, winner of the school level competition.

Like to get a taste of what contestants might be asked? Go to the [National Geographic Geography Bee website](#) to take an online quiz or to download the GeoBee Challenge app.



Hands on Learning

Course selection for next year's classes will be taking place shortly at New Milford High School. Students will choose from a variety of courses, some required, some elective, in order to fulfill credits needed for graduation.



One elective area that offers students a little something different from the norm is Tech Education which includes classes in woodworking. Students without previous experience in woodworking start with the beginning course, Introductory Woodworking, where they become acquainted with woodworking through the study of technical nomenclature and raw materials. The students also become proficient in identifying, using, and maintaining all

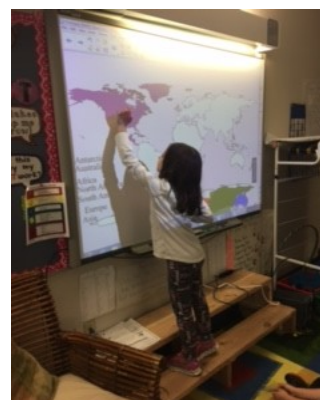
hand tools used in woodworking. Shop safety, proper and safe use of hand tools, and the proper use and identification of quality craftsmanship with wood as the construction material are also emphasized.

General Woodworking is a class for more advanced students. After an in-depth review of tools, project design, and planning, General Woodworking students learn the safe and proper use of various woodworking machines including the table saw, surface planer, and radial arm saw. They work on both individual projects and line production of a project.

At this level, students can also elect to take the *Projects Unlimited* class. Tech Ed teacher Mr. Jeff Teravainen says, "This hands-on class is run as a company by students who build from scratch and customize projects to meet clients' specifications. Technical skills with hand and power tools are refined as students design, plan, and complete a wide variety of products. Recent projects include a booth for the *Guidance on the Go* cafeteria program at NMHS, a mirror/hat rack for a customer in the district and step stools."



SNIS Principal Anne Bilko said she spotted the step stools in a classroom while visiting the high school in August and coincidentally they were very similar to something SNIS was looking to buy. "Our students often need a little boost to use the Smart Boards here at SNIS which are positioned for staff height. I was excited to see just what we had in mind being built in-house by high school students. We've already taken delivery of the finished product and are putting them to good use."



Acts of Kindness Continue

The December Spotlight recognized the many acts of kindness taking place in our schools. In our rush to the holiday break, we missed a few.

Crane-a-Thon

The annual Crane-a-Thon took place in December at SMS. A record number 125 students created over 9000 cranes, another record breaker! These cranes, and their inspiring story, were given to New Milford and Danbury Hospitals as a “wish for peace” for all. SMS Administrator Dr. Tomasello said there were so many created this year that he was even able to share them around town, in other schools, town buildings, and local stores for display.



One Thousand Cranes

*“This is our cry. This is our prayer.
Peace on Earth.”*

This quote is inscribed on the golden statue of a little girl who perished from the effects of the atomic bomb at Hiroshima. According to Japanese legend, one who folds 100 cranes will be granted a wish, and this little girl’s attempt to fold enough cranes to heal herself has inspired compassion in many since that time. Every year SMS students are inspired by this story to create origami cranes that can be shared in the community as a wish for peace for all.

Take What You Need Board

SADD students created a “take what you need” board for NMHS teachers visiting the teacher work room. While picking up mail, making copies, or just passing by, teachers were invited to check it out and take what they might need to hang in the classroom or prop on a desk. The heartfelt, kind notes that students created were the very meaning of kindness and guaranteed to provide a pick-me-up!



Food Drives

All schools continue to collect food for fellow community members in need. Mrs. Cosgrove’s Grade 4 class at SNIS pictured to the left is just one example from January. Collections will continue at all the schools throughout the end of the school year.

Random Acts of Kindness

NMHS DECA students provided 26 random acts of kindness to fellow students in December, echoing the movement started following the tragedy in Newtown. During the month, they randomly distributed 26 gifts to the student body in a tangible gesture to spread kindness! DECA students also spent their lunch waves reminding fellow NMHS students that a little kindness can change someone's whole day.



Not to be outdone, sixth grade Leos prepared a kindness tree poster for display in the sixth grade hallways at SMS along with "random act of kindness stickies" for the taking. Stickies have simple messages for fellow students such as:

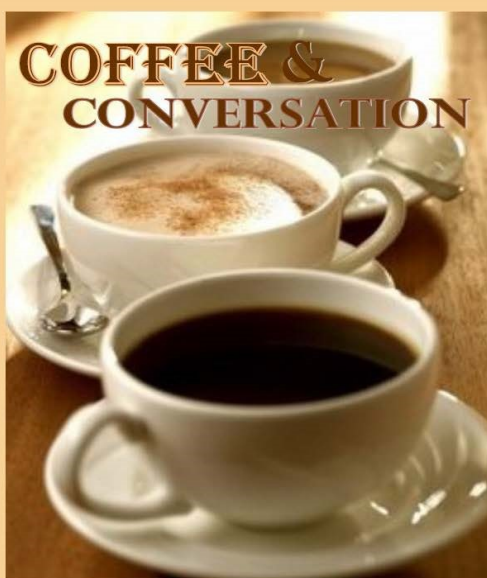


- ◆ You be you
- ◆ Make new friends
- ◆ You're awesome
- ◆ You can do it
- ◆ You're great
- ◆ Smile bright
- ◆ Your voice is beautiful
- ◆ Your smile is amazing



In January, DECA and SMS students worked on a joint initiative for the Diebold Cancer Center at New Milford Hospital. Students wrote personal notes of encouragement and inspiration. As patients come in for treatment at the Center, they are free to choose a random note from the jar. The students hope knowing that someone else is sending positive thoughts their way will help patients get through the day.

Save The Date



What's on your mind?

Please join us for casual conversation with
Superintendent of Schools Joshua Smith

Wednesday, February 22, 2017
10:30 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

**Connecticut Room,
New Milford Public Library**

Can't join us but have a question or concern?

Call (860) 355-8406 or email:

suptoffice@newmilfordps.org

New Milford Adult Education Offers New Courses

Did you make a new year's resolution? If not, now might be the time to do so, as the [Adult Education Winter/Spring 2017 brochure](#) is hot off the press and provides plenty of choices for self-improvement.

Ms. Christy Martin, Adult Education Program Manager and Facilitator, says "The New Milford Adult Education program strives to meet the ever-changing needs of our community. We are pleased to announce the creation of several new programs aimed at refreshing skills in the areas of Math and English for community members who have a diploma. Whether it is to provide homework help to their child or re-enter the workforce, we all can use a brain jump-start at times. In addition, workshops in searching for a job, resume writing and job interviewing skills will assist those in the community looking to enter or change their work situation."

Enrichment courses are always popular and there are many in a variety of areas offered this spring. Participants can begin to learn a new language; develop their creative side with sewing, painting or photography; or work on their well-being and fitness with yoga or tai chi, even becoming certified in Reiki. Several new "just for fun" course offerings have been added as well.

The Adult Education program continues to provide college and career readiness skills to community members who are working towards their high school diploma. In addition to obtaining credits towards their diploma, students can obtain certification in health care as a Certified Nurse Assistant (CNA) and in the culinary field in ServSafe food safety and ServSafe alcohol training. This spring, the program is also adding the National Retail Federation Certification in Customer Service and Sales as well.



Online registration for all courses is available at
[www.newmilford.coursestorm.com](https://newmilford.coursestorm.com)



New Milford Public Schools

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Mrs. Laura Olson
Pupil Personnel &
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Ms. Roberta Pratt
Technology Director

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Safer Internet Day Tuesday, February 7th

Launched in 2004, [Safer Internet Day](http://www.saferinternetday.org) is an awareness raising campaign now celebrated in more than 100 countries.

Globally, it's coordinated by the Brussels-based Insafe Network for the European Commission. Safer Internet Day gained official recognition in the U.S. in late 2012, with a joint agreement between the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the European Commission to work together to build a better internet for youth. In 2013 Insafe and the European Commission appointed ConnectSafely.org as the U.S.'s Safer Internet Day coordinator and host.



SAVE the DATE
Safer Internet Day
2017 | Tuesday
7 February
www.saferinternetday.org



This year's theme is "Be the change: Unite for a better internet!" The official U.S. event will take place at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia. "We picked Philadelphia because it's the cradle of our democracy," said ConnectSafely CEO Larry Magid. "The National Constitution Center is an ideal venue because it commemorates and celebrates our founders and the signers of our Constitution."

The event will be attended by more than 200 elementary, middle and high school students and adults, and streamed live to schools around the U.S. High school and middle school students will visit the museum's Signers' Hall, where they will pose for selfies with life-size statues of the signers of the Constitution and then participate in a group activity about how each signer would respond to some of the issues facing today's internet generation, including free speech, personal responsibility online, and personal privacy.

ConnectSafely.org is a Silicon Valley, Calif.-based nonprofit organization dedicated to educating users of connected technology about safety, privacy and security. To see their research-based safety tips, parents' guidebooks, advice, news and commentary on all aspects of tech use and policy, [visit their website.](http://www.saferinternetday.org)

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 experi-

February 7th