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Spotlight on New Milford Schools

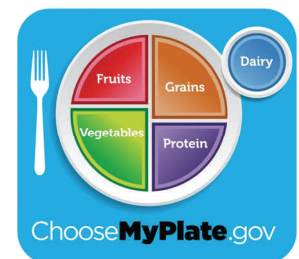
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Spotlight on Health

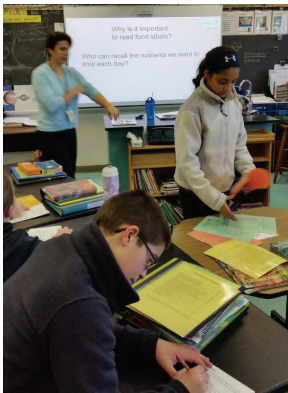
The new year is right around the corner and it is time to start thinking about new year's resolutions. For many of us, those resolutions revolve around health and wellness goals. The staff at New Milford Public Schools have health and wellness in mind all year long when it comes to our students.

For the younger grades, the focus is on healthy eating. Making healthy food choices can be a challenge at any age, so establishing a strong knowledge foundation around nutrition is the key to helping our students make smart food choices now through adulthood. It starts in kindergarten and first grade when children are introduced to **Myplate**, the five food groups, and identifying which foods belong in each group. Grades 2 and 3 develop a deeper understanding by creating meals that include foods from all five food groups, and learn why breakfast is the most important meal of the day. Students in the middle grades learn about essential nutrients and where to find them on **Myplate**. They also learn how to analyze a food label so they can determine whether a food is nutritious or not. Health teacher Mariann Schirizzo says, "The fun part comes when students get to analyze their favorite snack foods. By Grade 6, students have a working knowledge of nutrition basics, so I challenge them with our healthy fast food makeover activity. Here students visit a virtual restaurant with a coupon that allows them to choose any three food items on the restaurant menu. Then they review the nutritional content of their choices. If needed, they go back to the menu to make healthier, more nutritious (yet still tasty) food choices."



Another fun activity, designed to encourage healthy snack choices is the monthly "Snack Attack" challenge. Here a random day of the month is chosen for teachers to tally up how many students brought healthy snacks to school. Prizes are awarded to the class with the highest percentage of healthy snacks. It is quick, fun and a great motivator for kids to try to make smarter food choices on a daily basis.

SMS Health teacher Scott Hoffman says, “In 7th and 8th grade health, students are supported in establishing healthy behaviors and perspectives about who they are and the decisions they make. They complete self-evaluations on mental/physical/social health that guide them to set goals for self-improvement. Students also set dietary goals after creating balanced meals and completing dietary self-evaluations. Some lessons involve accessing valid sources of health information that can support students to make informed decisions.”



Now that you've seen how to cut back on the amount of fat in your fast food meal, try to makeover a meal from two more restaurants of your choice. Remember that your healthier Menu should add up to no more than 25 grams of total fat.

Menu Item	Grams of Fat
My Menu from Burger Joint	
Cheddar burger	12g
Fried onion rings	13g
Apple cinnamon pie	5g
Total:	30g

Menu Item	Grams of Fat
My Menu from Cheese Food	
House Fried Rice	50g
Beef with Broccoli	30g
Wonton Soup	13g
Total:	93g

Menu Item	Grams of Fat
My Healthier Menu Makeover	
Cheddar burger	12g
Apple cinnamon pie	5g
Apple cinnamon pie	5g
Total:	22g

Menu Item	Grams of Fat
My Healthier Menu Makeover	
Egg roll	11g
Hot and sour soup	4g
Wonton (small)	3g
Total:	18g

My Menu from: Charlie

My Healthier Makeover Menu



In class, students work together to practice conflict resolution skills and learn healthy ways to handle emotions. Mr. Hoffman provides opportunities to practice communication and demonstrate avoidance skills when faced with peer pressure. Students learn their role in slowing the spread of diseases in our community and also practice using information to advocate against substance abuse. For example, in health class, students review decision making and how to think their way out of a peer pressured situation involving substance abuse. Students work together to create dialogue and role play alternatives for other students to consider when faced with pressure.

Instruction in healthy choices continues at the high school level. In Freshman health, for example, the main focus of each unit is on choices that lead to healthy behaviors and learning to make good life decisions. The first unit students complete is a unit on mental health. This unit covers topics such as taking a personality inventory, looking at strengths and weaknesses, values, goal setting, and resources for helping student who are having, or know of someone who is having issues concerning mental health. Health/Physical Education department chair Denise Duggan says, “We connect the discussions from this unit to important life milestones such as looking for colleges, career choices, and making good decisions that will impact their lives in a positive way. The mental health unit stresses communication skills, and we practice ‘I’ messages in order to teach students how to be assertive, and advocate for themselves. We continue to stress the use of positive communication skills when the lessons advance to more serious topics concerning teens such as substance use, sexual activity, and healthy relationships. The importance of looking at values, goals and communication skills in our first unit sets the groundwork for discussions and role playing activities when we cover more difficult topics in future lessons. As we

advance to more serious topics we stress refusal skills, and review effective communication skills. At the end of the substance abuse unit, students compose a letter to a younger student stating the reasons for not using drugs, and the importance of good decisions that will not result in negative consequences. We include opportunities for parental input on assignments to inform parents of the issues we are discussing with their child. We hope this will provide a chance for parents to discuss these important topics at home. We also have the Students Against Destructive Decisions (SADD) group that stresses making healthy decisions about substance use. They create activities several times a year to involve students in this cause.”

Other units teach students to be health consumers not only for the short period, but for a lifetime of wellness. Students look at nutrition and healthy food choices. They learn to read labels, calculate heart healthy levels of ingredients, and also look at our food supply in general, as they discuss current issues such as the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs) in foods we eat. Students are taught the warning signs of disease, such as the seven warning signs of cancer, signs of diabetes, warning signs of depression and various other signs and symptoms of topics so as to recognize them and seek appropriate early medical advice. As a culminating unit, students are taught cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) and become certified. They are then members of the community with lifesaving skills.



High school physical education classes also teach and encourage life-long fitness. Mrs. Duggan says, “Students can choose from a large variety of activities, and be active in units ranging from traditional sport activities to fitness/aerobic level classes. There is also a walking unit that goes over health related topics such as heart rate, eating habits, calorie intake, exercise intensity, and pedometer use.”

In the area of mental health, the district seeks to provide support and education to students, parents, and staff alike, supporting a variety of initiatives in order to promote understanding and accelerate prevention. Our schools offer a wide range of services, interventions, and supports for our students and families. Support staff, in the form of guidance counselors, social workers and psychologists, are present in all of our schools and provide services and support in collaboration with outside mental health providers as well as consultation with outside agencies for behavioral health.

Director of Pupil Personnel and Special Services Laura Olson says, “Over the past two years, we have increased the number of social workers by 50% district-wide. We now have social workers at each of our schools and new this year, a full time social worker at NES and HPS. The school district has also recently hired a Substance Abuse Counselor to work full time in the school district to support and educate students and staff about prevention as a key component in addressing the growing concerns regarding substance abuse.”

In addition, the school district is in the second year of the Mental Health Forum. The forum provides education and training for our K-12 guidance counselors, social workers, psychologists and administrators in the area of mental health. Speakers are brought in to discuss current issues such as grief, school avoidance, depression, and staff wellness, to name a few. So far this year, the forum has been able to cover topics such as anxiety, eating disorders, and substance abuse. The conversations are rich and our staff has an opportunity to learn from the mental health professionals in our area. The information they acquire through the forum is then shared with school level staff during staff meetings as well as other instances when staff and/or parents may have a specific need.

The NMPS district is also an active member of the Regional Crisis Team. Now into its third year, the crisis team was formed to provide crisis intervention and support at a regional level in Connecticut. Along with our neighboring school districts, our related services staff meets monthly to discuss topics and trends. The Regional Crisis Team also brings in a variety of presenters so that staff throughout the region are up-to-date on information and related resources which are available.

Fitness for All



On November 19th and 20th, PE/Health teacher Deirdre Burke attended the Connecticut Association of Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (CAHPERD) fall conference. At this conference Ms. Burke presented a workshop with 11 year-old Stratford student Jimmy Galpin. The workshop, titled “Leveling the Playing Field”, is designed to promote awareness for the blind and visually impaired and to provide a physically active experience that takes all students out of their comfort zone and onto a level playing field.

This presentation originally started at New Milford High School and Sarah Noble Intermediate School when Jimmy came to New Milford and taught students how to play goalball, a sport designed for the blind and visually impaired. Jimmy also taught students about the blind community in general while teaching sighted guide techniques and exposing students to his favorite book, *The Hunger Games*, in braille. Jimmy spoke to students about overcoming obstacles in their lives as well as being accepting of obstacles in other people’s lives. As you can see from the pictures below of this year’s visit by Jimmy to SNIS, the event is a fun learning experience for all involved.



School Breakfast and Lunch Promote School Wellness



Studies show that diets high in fruit, vegetable and whole grains are low in fat, saturated fat, sodium and sugar and promote healthy weight gain, prevent obesity, high blood pressure and heart disease.

The New Milford Food and Nutrition Services Department works hard to provide meals that are nutritious, well balanced and appetizing. School breakfast and school lunch are available to all students in grades K-12 daily at all schools. The United States Department of Agriculture requires that meals meet the Dietary Guidelines for Americans. Nutritional Standards are set for calories ($\leq 30\%$ calories from fat, and $\leq 10\%$ of calories from saturated fat), protein, calcium, iron, vitamin A and vitamin C. There are several lunch choices available each day. Locally grown and seasonal produce are offered whenever possible. The School Breakfast and Lunch programs promote wellness by serving only fat free milk and 1% milk. Only whole grains are offered and served daily. Products can include cereal, bread, pasta and rice.

Every day, Food and Nutrition Services offers **Rainbow Fruit** and **Vegetable** trays, giving students a wide selection from which to choose - over 5 vegetables and 5 fruits daily. Each tray includes seasonal and local fruits and vegetables when available. Choices can be **apples**, **pears**, **oranges**, **bananas**, **cantaloupe**, **grapes** and **honeydew melon**. Vegetables include a **Red/Orange** choice such as **carrots**, **red peppers** and **grape tomatoes**; **Dark Green** choices like **broccoli** and **romaine lettuce**; Starchy vegetables such as **corn** or **peas**; **Legume** choices such as **chick peas** and **black beans**; and **Other** vegetables like **celery**, **cucumbers** and **green peppers**.

Food and Nutrition Services Director Sandra Sullivan says, "We encourage students to choose vegetables and fruit daily. Signs are posted to help guide them. In addition to the breakfast and lunch offered, a selection of snacks is available for purchase. New Milford is a Healthy Certified District and all snacks comply with the USDA and CT nutrition guidelines. Choices can be a muffin, string cheese, popcorn, baked chips, Greek yogurt, frozen dessert or a whole grain cookie."

If you are concerned about the choices your child is making, please know that you have the ability to limit their accounts. Let the school's kitchen manager or the Food and Nutrition Services office (860-354-3712) know.

The Hour of Code Returns



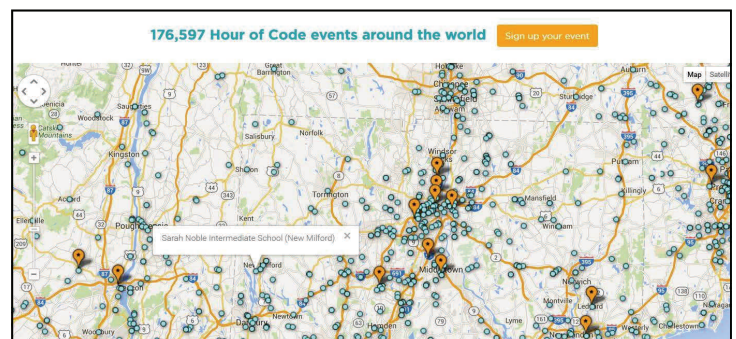
Once again this year, New Milford Public School students celebrated Computer Science Education Week (December 7-13) by trying an Hour of Code. This annual initiative is designed to provide a one-hour introduction to computer science, demystifying code and showing that anybody can learn the basics.

According to the [program's website](#):

The goal of the Hour of Code is not to teach anybody to become an expert computer scientist in one hour. One hour is only enough to learn that computer science is fun and creative, that it is accessible at all ages, for all students, regardless of background. The measure of success of this campaign is not in how much CS students learn - the success is reflected in broad participation across gender and ethnic and socioeconomic groups, and the resulting increase in enrollment and participation we see in CS courses at all grade levels. Millions of the participating teachers and students have decided to go beyond one hour - to learn for a whole day or a whole week or longer, and many students have decided to enroll in a whole course (or even a college major) as a result.

Besides the students, another "learner" is the educator who gains the confidence after one hour that they can teach computer science even though they may not have a college degree as a computer scientist. Tens of thousands of teachers decide to pursue computer science further, either attending PD or offering follow-on online courses, or both. And this applies to school administrators too, who realize that computer science is something their students want and their teachers are capable of.

NMPS students are participating at various grade levels. SNIS is even listed on the program's map! Students work alone or with partners to solve their coding puzzle. Parents are encouraged to give coding a try too. The website offers [many coding activities from which to choose](#). Perhaps your child could give you some pointers?



Showing Compassion

The New Milford Public Schools' Character Education Program promotes a school culture and climate that reinforces positive character attributes throughout the school year. Focus is placed on a different character trait each month. Compassion is December's character attribute and our students and staff really take it to heart. Initiatives designed to help community members in need are abundant throughout this holiday season.



Food drives are ongoing during the year, and especially during the winter months. HPS made a large donation of food and personal care items in October to benefit the New Milford Food Bank. At SNIS, in addition to their First Friday food drives, staff and students stuffed seven Thanksgiving baskets for SNIS families in need. NMHS' National Honor Society collected over 500 items for

New Milford Social Services' food drive. SMS Leo Club members helped out too, participating in the Walk a Mile for Food program to provide groceries for the New Milford Food Bank and serving at the New Milford seniors' holiday party. Not to be outdone, SMS Student Council members baked treats for Loaves and Fishes.



Every school has a "giving tree" on display where donations of warm clothing such as hats, mittens, and scarves are placed before being donated to New Milford Social Services.



At SMS, study hall students are even weaving scarves for the tree in their spare time. National Honor Society members at NMHS showed their compassion by assembling "Cancer Care" bags for donation to New Milford Hospital.



Sometimes, the gift is to the spirit. The SMS Crane-a-thon, an annual tradition, provides over 3,000 origami peace cranes for hospital patients. This year, NES kindergarteners created gingerbread door decorations for residents of Chestnut Grove.



Other projects take place year after year. Students and staff in schools and at the central office participate in the New Milford Social Services Santa Fund Drive to help those in need. At NMHS, the French Honor Society has been hosting the Star Project since 1999! This year, over 80 boots and books were purchased and will be donated to Social Services. With additional monetary donations, the FHS was also able to contribute over \$1,000 in gift certificates (for local restaurants, gas stations, groceries). The NMHS Key Club, in conjunction with the New Milford Police Department, held their annual (and very successful) Stuff a Cruiser event on Saturday, December 5th. The NMHS Art Department uses their annual holiday sale to benefit Loaves and Fishes.



Our students' compassion will not fade away when the holidays are over. At SNIS for example, all three grades are working on a grade level service project. Principal Anne Bilko says, "They are doing three separate projects all related to veterans and military service. In *Operation Gratitude*, students will write to service men and women. *Cell Phones for Soldiers* will collect old cell phones to recycle to help provide phones and calling cards for military members overseas. Students are holding a *Penny Drive* throughout the year to collect money to donate to assist with the purchase of calling cards. Students are even using the pennies in math before donating!"



Building Character Year Round

The Character Education program spotlights the following attributes:



September	RESPECT
October	RESPONSIBILITY
November	HONESTY
December	COMPASSION
January	PERSEVERANCE
February	CITIZENSHIP
March	INTEGRITY
April	LOYALTY
May	COURAGE
June	COOPERATION





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Mr. Kevin Munrett
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Mr. Jay Hubelbank
Fiscal Services & Operations
Director

Mrs. Laura Olson
Pupil Personnel & Special Services
Director

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Read a New Book Month



*There are many little ways to enlarge your child's world.
Love of books is the best of all.*

~Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis

We love the idea of cozying up on a winter night with a great book so it is fitting that December is “**Read a New Book Month**”. Reading can be a great way to relax and unwind from all of the busy holiday happenings. The idea for Read a New Book Month is not just to encourage readers to keep reading during this busy time of year, but also to stretch yourself as a reader.

Maybe this means reading a genre or author you or your children have never read before; maybe it is an excuse to visit one of your “lesser favorite” genres; or maybe it is a reason to try a book in a different format. It might even be to go back to a book you started a long time ago but never finished, like one of those classics from long ago. Whatever the reason, it is a perfect time to start anew ... and model being a reader for your children.

Want to take it a step further?

Make it your goal to read a new book each week for a month.

Go to your local library and pick out four books that look interesting. Set aside some time each day to just relax and read. Not only will you expand your horizons, but you'll also get some much-needed “me” time.

Organize a book swap with friends for you and your children.

A book swap can be a great way to experience books you would otherwise never read. Set up a time to get together with other families. Ask them to bring several books to share for both adults and children along with a 3×5 index card labeled with the title of each book they bring. As people borrow books from each other, they can sign the cards with their name so that the owner can keep track of who has which books. Meet every few weeks to swap again.

Besides providing new reading material, the swap is a great excuse for a social get together!

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.

December is