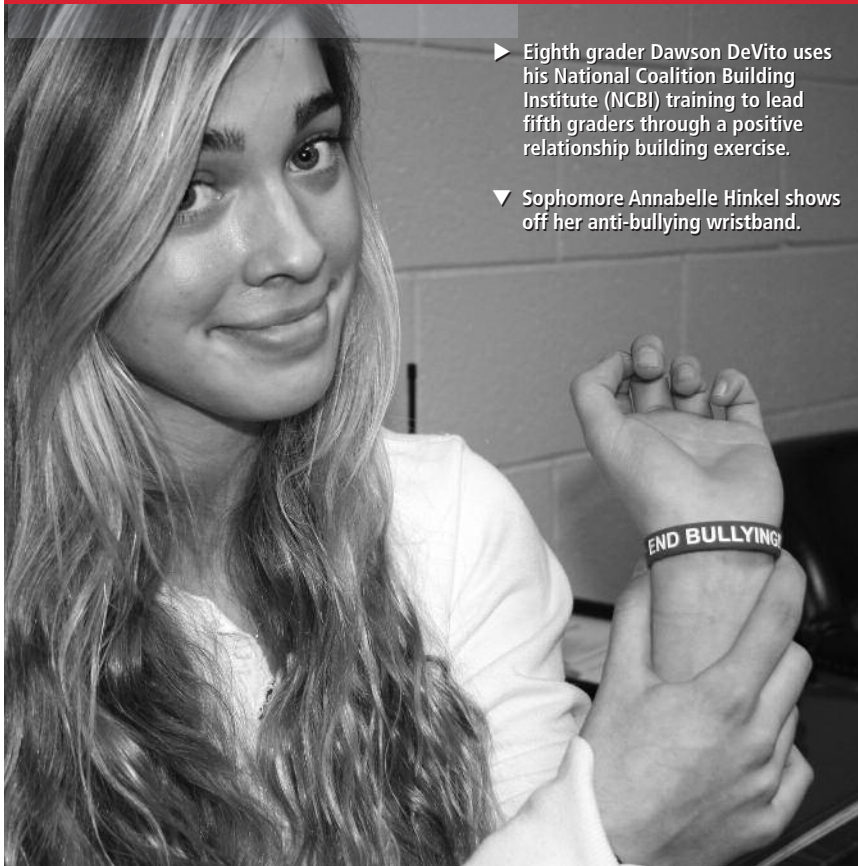




Chatham Connections

SPRING 2012

A NEWSLETTER FOR CHATHAM STUDENTS, PARENTS & COMMUNITY



▶ Eighth grader Dawson DeVito uses his National Coalition Building Institute (NCBI) training to lead fifth graders through a positive relationship building exercise.

▼ Sophomore Annabelle Hinkel shows off her anti-bullying wristband.



John Kelly from the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children speaks with students about the dangers of cyber-bullying.

Anti-Bullying Efforts Run Deep at Chatham CSD

The Chatham Central School District is committed to providing an educational environment that is safe and promotes respect, dignity and a sense of community. As part of a continuing effort to address bullying and other forms of harassment and discrimination, the District has put in place numerous measures to promote tolerance and respect among students, and prevent acts of bullying from occurring.

In 2010, an anti-bullying committee comprised of teachers, administrators, parents, bus drivers and students was formed as part of a District-wide push to decrease incidents of bullying and help students build more supportive relationships with one another. The committee has worked effectively to identify the extent that bullying affects students within the District and has implemented bully-prevention initiatives throughout CHS, CMS, and MED.

“We are going above and beyond the requirements of the state in regard to preventing bullying,” said Chatham High School assistant principal Amy Potter, who chairs the anti-bullying committee. “Our efforts are not only about prevention, they are also about making sure students have a safe place to report bullying and have the issues resolved.”

Staff are trained on how to recognize the warning signs of bullying, and how to respond if an incident is reported to them by a student or if they witness bullying behavior firsthand.

Because bullying and other forms of harassment – whether at school, on the bus or online – can be detrimental to the achievement and well-being of students, reports of bullying are taken very seriously in all Chatham schools. Students who engage in this sort of behavior are given a clear message that their actions are wrong and their behavior must improve. Disciplinary action is taken where appropriate, and if behavior rises to the level of criminal activity, law enforcement is contacted.

Bullying-prevention initiatives such as character education are integrated into classroom instruction. Focus is placed on development of positive character traits like respect, compassion, responsibility and fairness. Students are taught the value of tolerance and acceptance, and learn how to be an ally to one another if they see bullying going on. Students also learn what to do if they are bullied themselves, and who they can talk to if they ever feel threatened. Guest speakers and visiting experts bring added experiences and awareness through assemblies and special programs.

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Fostering Literacy Independence with the Daily Five

At the Mary E. Dardess Elementary School, students are developing life-long literacy skills through a set of purposeful, authentic, and meaningful literacy experiences known as the Daily Five. The term “Daily Five” refers to the five core concepts of literacy that students are immersed in on a day-to-day basis: reading, writing, listening, speaking, and word work (vocabulary and spelling).

The Daily Five is based on the concept that students need to learn independence in their literacy development. During the classroom literacy block, students work independently on reading and writing skills while the classroom teacher delivers small-group instruction to other students.

When working by themselves or in small groups, students are given the leeway to choose from different literacy building activities, such as reading to themselves or to others, listening to their favorite stories, playing word games with friends or on a computer, writing stories, exploring language with art, or other activities designed to strengthen use of the written word.

“It allows my students to be independent and choose what they work on for each section, but it is also guided, so they



know what is expected of them and what their responsibilities are,” said first grade teacher Lauren Wheeler.

Daily Five tasks are leveled – that is, matched to the ability and age of the student. Students select activity materials, such as books, from leveled sources that match their literacy level, ensuring they are appropriately challenged yet don’t become frustrated.

“There is a lot of choice built into this,” explained MED principal Kristen Reno. “We want reading to be a pleasurable experience that students can carry with them throughout their lives. If you don’t

give students the opportunity to choose what they are reading, it can become a chore.”

The Daily Five also helps students develop concentration skills. Younger students, who have shorter attention spans, work on a task for a short period of time before moving on to the next. As students move up in age and grade level, literacy tasks are lengthened and longer periods of attention are required.

“As we lengthen the daily five, we are building stamina,” added Reno. “Being able to remain engaged and focused on a specific task is an important skill that students will need for the rest of their lives.”

To support implementation of the Daily Five in every classroom, MED recently introduced a comprehensive set of instructional materials known as the Journeys program. Journeys provides a common framework for guided literacy instruction, complete with related instructional practices and tools, lesson plans, assessments, large selections of leveled-reading books, and a huge online database of support materials.

The Journeys program is already in place in the third and fourth grades, and will be introduced to kindergarten, first, second and fifth grades in 2012-13.

Anti-Bullying Efforts...

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Developing strong student leadership is also a District focus. At Chatham High School, new student organizations like the CHS Anti-Bullying Committee and the Gay-Straight Alliance now work alongside the Student Council and Yellow Ribbon Club to promote tolerance, dissuade harassment, and sensitize students to the harmful effects of negative words and actions. At the Middle School, student leaders receive training in coalition building, conflict resolution and peer mediation. Under the direction of school counselors, they lead self-esteem building workshops, work closely with their peers to build positive relationships, and help mediate disputes between students. Young leaders from both schools participate in youth leadership conferences that focus on tolerance-building techniques.

“We want people to know that teasing, jokes, and judgmental comments are serious,” said sophomore Annabelle Hinkel, who

is an active member of the CHS Anti-Bullying Committee, a Student Council representative for her grade, and a member of the Yellow Ribbon Club. Hinkel and others recently organized a campaign encouraging fellow students to stand up to bullying by signing a pledge and wearing a symbolic wristband. “Ending bullying is about standing up for yourself and for others, and if you bully someone, realizing you have done wrong and apologizing.”

In 2012, the Board of Education adopted new policy to address bullying, harassment and discrimination within the school community. The policy meets state requirements under the Dignity for All Students Act, which goes into effect in July, 2012. Most importantly, the policy provides the District with a clear definition of bullying behavior, and lays the groundwork for a comprehensive, K-12 anti-bullying curriculum, which the District is in the process of developing.

Tax Cap Promises Additional Challenges for School Budget Development

The 2012-2013 school year promises to be yet another financially challenging time for school districts across NY State. As in the past several years, Chatham Central School District faces rapidly inflating costs at the same time as experiencing significant limits to its revenue. While Governor Andrew Cuomo has proposed modest increases in education aid, state aid for schools remains low while state mandates continue to drive up costs. Add to this a property tax cap which potentially limits a school's ability to make up the difference through taxes.

A public school in NY must now follow a state formula to determine how much they can increase their tax levy. The tax cap has been promoted by politicians as a "2% cap," but in reality it allows districts to increase their tax levies by more than two percent, due to a growth rate factor the state formula provides and exemptions that are allowed for certain expenses districts have no control over, such as pension costs.

According to the formula, Chatham CSD can increase its tax levy by 2.2176% while still staying within the cap. Under the law, the District would need a supermajority (60%) of support from voters to exceed this number. However, because of mandate driven costs, inflation and other current economic factors, if Chatham CSD were to make no cuts to the projected 2012-2013 budget, the tax levy would increase by 6.39%. According to these preliminary projections, Chatham will need to reduce its budget by over \$865,000 in order to stay within the cap.

In order to reduce the tax levy, school officials are care-

fully reviewing every line item of the budget to identify all areas where savings can be realized. As the District strives to stay within its cap, focus remains on building a budget that provides for a strong educational program and for the long-term financial stability of the District.

"We are continuing the process started last year of maximizing revenue while finding operational efficiencies," said interim business administrator Chuck Snyder. "For example, we are refinancing some of the District's prior debt to take advantage of lower interest rates, with the hope of saving over \$400,000 over the seven years remaining on bonds."

The District also expects to use reserves and allocate fund balance to close the budget gap.

Development of the 2012-2013 budget continues, and difficult decisions may lie ahead. You are encouraged to learn more by attending School Board meetings between now and the May 15th budget vote. A public hearing on the budget is scheduled for May 8th, at 6:30 p.m. in the MED Elementary School cafeteria, and additional school budget presentations in each the District's townships will also be scheduled. Community organizations interested in scheduling an individual budget presentation may contact the superintendent's office at 392-1501.

Budget information is also provided on www.chatham-centralschools.com and will be updated throughout the budget development process.

Voting on the 2012-2013 school budget will take place on May 15, from 9 a.m.-9 p.m. in the MED Gymnasium.

What's New at the Chatham Public Library

Chatham Public Library (CPL) offers more than just an outstanding collection of classic literature and popular new titles. Want to experience some of the hot new video games out there? The Library recently purchased Wii and X-Box 360 gaming consoles, each complete with a bevy of new games. Teens are encouraged to bring a friend and check out the new consoles, as well as enjoy computer and board games at the next teen game night, held April 13th at 6:30 p.m.

Like movies? CPL now offers monthly movie nights where families can enjoy such films as "The Green Lantern" (March 17), "The Wizard of Oz" (April 21) or the Academy Award winning "Hugo" (May 19).

In March, the library offers its youngest readers a Babies & Books program every Wednesday at 4 p.m. and Preschool Story Hour every Friday at 10 a.m.

April offerings include kite making, t-shirt printing, and an Earth Day discussion on trees.

For a complete list of events and more information on the many programs and services Chatham Public Library provides, visit the library's website at <http://chatham.lib.ny.us>



UNSUNG HEROES: ELEMENTARY



Studies show schools benefit when they are part of a supportive community, especially when members of that community are willing to volunteer their time to help students learn. The popular phrase “it takes a village to raise a child” could not be truer.

“I have a mom and dad who come in every week to volunteer in my kindergarten classroom,” said MED teacher Anne Cipkowski. “The children have gotten to know them both and love having them here. It’s a gift to have them help out at station time.”

Mrs. Cipkowski is by no means alone. Chatham is lucky to have a large number of parents and other community members who take time out of their busy schedules to help out in class. Children, particularly in the younger grades, benefit from having more adults in the classroom, where they enjoy one-on-one time, encouragement and a heightened sense of the importance of their learning.

“I go to help the school, help the teacher, show them we

are partners,” said Luis Castro, who volunteers once a week in his daughter’s kindergarten classroom. “If you go and show support, the children know. My daughter Lucile loves it and she is very proud.”

Mr. Castro works with students at the class’s creation station, where students connect with literacy through creative projects. “I help kids glue and cut paper, or sometimes I read short stories that have a relationship with what the kids are making,” he said.

April Mountain is a parent of three Chatham students who has volunteered in MED classrooms for the past six years. “Olive’s Mom,” as she is known to her daughter’s first grade class, comes in once a week to spend an hour-and-a-half working hands-on with the children. She helps the teacher with the myriad of tasks that are inevitable in a room full of youngsters, encouraging students to stay focused during individual study time, helping students practice their literacy skills, and giving the teacher more uninterrupted time

CLASSROOM VOLUNTEERS



for lessons. In her years volunteering in MED classrooms, she has wiped a lot of noses and tied a lot of shoes.

“The students are very receptive to seeing a parent figure in the middle of the day,” said Mrs. Mountain. “They treat me like I’m a treat every day I am there.”

Other parents, like Emily Warrington, volunteer as room parents. As a third grade room mom, she helps keep school fun by organizing classroom celebrations and holiday parties. With a son now in third grade, she has been volunteering as a room parent for the past four years, giving teachers fewer things to worry about throughout the school year. She also helps out on school picture days and during field day.

“There are a lot of fun things to do and your efforts are very well appreciated by the teachers,” said Mrs. Warrington.

Volunteers also support education in Chatham by chaperoning field trips, organizing special events, acting as guest readers, or sharing their passion and knowledge in a particular field through classroom presentations.

Volunteers find their time spent in school rewarding as well. “You get to experience the dynamic of the classroom,” explained Mrs. Mountain. “You see what your children are learning and get to know the kids who are in their class.”

Mr. Castro mentioned that spending time in his daughter’s class has given him new insight into the job teachers do. “It’s unbelievable how hard they work,” he said. “The kids are very sharp and full of energy. I go for an hour and I am like, ‘whew, I need a break.’ I love it, but it takes a lot of energy.”

Every day, men and women like April Mountain, Emily Warrington and Louis Castro make a big difference in the lives of children by contributing to their educational experience. These volunteers show the children they work with, and the teachers they support, how much they value their school. While too numerous to mention here, the Chatham Central School District would like to thank everyone who has ever given their time to be part of our students’ education.

Academic Team Time at Chatham Middle School

In 2011-2012, Chatham Middle School introduced a forty-minute instructional period known as Academic Team Time. This regularly scheduled block of time was put in place to allow every student, regardless of achievement level or ability, to receive either additional support or enrichment in English Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics.

“Academic team time provides targeted instruction for all students in ELA and Math,” said CMS interim principal Annemarie Barkman. “Students are placed in small groups where they get additional instruction in the areas they need it.”

During academic team time, teachers focus lesson content on the particular areas where students are struggling or need further clarification, while students performing at the mastery level are provided with enrichment opportunities. Using test results and other performance indicators, students are grouped according to ability and need. Groups are fluid and students are regularly assessed and regrouped according to the progress they make.

“Instruction is completely dependent on what the student needs,” said Tracey Fuller, the school’s math academic intervention services teacher, who, along with ELA academic



intervention services teacher Patricia Smith, coordinates academic team time grouping and lesson content. “We are able to accommodate every student without having to change schedules or take away from regular class time.”

As a result, students are showing better performance in class and have demonstrated improvement at every grade level.

Eighth grade student Mariah Becker agrees that academic team time has helped her improve her schoolwork. “You are always going to have trouble with something,” she explained. “Getting the opportunity to work on it more makes you better at it. It helps you achieve more.”

Over the summer of 2011, CMS redesigned its school day to better meet needs of students, allow for a greater focus on academics, and ultimately improve student achievement. Academic team time is part of that focus, made possible through the new school schedule.

“Improving student performance at CMS is not all about the state assessments,” added Barkman. “It’s about producing proficient readers and mathematically functional students. It’s about students being able to use what they learn.”

Chatham CSD Now On Facebook



This winter, Chatham launched an official District fanpage on the popular social media network Facebook, where the public can find information and updates on the latest issue facing the District, the successes of our students and staff, and information concerning our challenges.

“Our Facebook page is part of the District’s continuing effort to extend and strengthen our community outreach,” explained Superintendent of Schools Cheryl Nuciforo. “We hope our community finds it a convenient avenue to stay in touch with all that is happening in Chatham.”

The District Facebook page may be viewed directly at www.facebook.com/ChathamCSD or by clicking the link provided on the District’s website www.chatham-centralschools.com. You do not need a Facebook account to view the page, but account holders may get District news and updates fed directly to their Facebook accounts by visiting our Facebook page and clicking the “Like” icon.

Fifth Grade Moving to MED

Chatham’s fifth grade program will be relocated to the Mary E. Dardess Elementary School, beginning with the 2012-2013 school year. The fifth grade will be housed alongside the fourth grade in what is currently the third and fourth grade wing of MED. Third grade classes will move to the second and first grade wing, where ample space exists to accommodate those students. CMS will house the sixth, seventh and eighth grades.

“The decision to relocate the fifth grade to MED is based on programmatic need,” said superintendent Cheryl Nuciforo. “Having the fifth grade follow an elementary school model will give teaching staff larger blocks of consecutive time to focus on core academic subjects.”

By locating the fifth grade to MED, students will experience a schedule that is more in line with the common core requirements for fifth grade instruction, with fewer encore subjects, or “specials,” and more time spent on reading and

writing. However, many of the clubs, counseling services and leadership opportunities enjoyed by fifth graders at the Middle School will be provided for them at MED.

The move was unanimously approved by the Board of Education in January, after a months-long study to determine the best learning environment for Chatham’s fifth grade.

The District took a long look at what benefits and challenges existed between keeping the fifth grade at the Middle School and moving it to MED. The study included a review of physical space at the two buildings and input from the fifth grade teaching team, as well as elementary and middle school parents, and fourth, fifth and sixth grade students. While research into both models demonstrated benefits and challenges for each, the study determined an elementary school model would best accommodate the fifth grade educational program.

Creative Writing Students Put Their Talents to the Test

Seniors explored their creativity and writing skills by penning books for young children. The projects were part of Chatham High School's creative writing course, an elective open to seniors with an interest in poetry and short fiction.

Writing children's stories may seem simple, but using fewer words to do more work and keeping diction within age-appropriate levels offers a unique challenge. The students spent weeks drafting their stories before putting them to the test, with a live reading at the Mary E. Dardess Elementary School.

Knowing their books would face an actual audience turned up the heat on the project. "I felt pressured to make my book better because I knew I would be reading it to kids," said senior Taylor Martino.

To familiarize herself with this style of literature, Taylor and her class scouted out lots of children's books and studied themes, sentence structure and verbiage appropriate for their target readership. They brainstormed ideas from their own childhoods to help develop their themes, characters, conflict and resolution. They utilized online grade level spelling lists and computer software to gage the reading level of their tales.

In children's books, images are often as important as the words, and throughout the writing process, the students

envisioned illustrations to accompany the text. The students drew their own pictures, partnered with an artist, or used existing images to create visuals to support their words.

The real test came in January with a visit to MED. The seniors brought their finished books, complete with covers and art, to introduce their stories to the elementary students.

The MED students enjoyed having the "big kids" in to read and the book reviews were positive. After each story was read, lots of little hands shot up to offer comments and questions.

"You could see their faces light up as you read to them," remarked senior Courtney Lockenwitz.

"My students got a kick out of it," said high school English teacher Barbara Roosevelt, the creative writing course instructor. She explained that having her students read their work to the students at MED not only helps them connect with the younger students, it gives real-world meaning to their work. "It's rewarding for them to read to a real audience and get real feedback on what they have created."

The creative writing course is offered as a half-year elective open to seniors only. The class is devoted to helping students use words in a visionary way through writing workshops, critique sessions and literary projects.



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ADMINISTRATORS

Cheryl Nuciforo <i>Superintendent</i>	392-1501
Chuck Snyder <i>Interim School Business Administrator</i>	392-1503
Jean Scheriff <i>Director of Pupil Services</i>	392-2417
Kristen Reno <i>Mary E. Dardess Elementary School Principal</i>	392-2255
Annemarie Barkman <i>Chatham Middle School Interim Principal</i>	392-1560
John Thorsen <i>Chatham High School Principal</i>	392-4142
Amy Potter <i>Chatham High School Assistant Principal</i>	392-4142

BOARD MEMBERS

	<i>Term Expires</i>
John Wapner <i>President</i>	2012
James Toteno <i>Vice President</i>	2014
James Cartin	2014
Michael Clark	2012
Gail Behrens Day	2013
Francis Iaconetti	2014
James Marks	2014
David O'Connor	2012
Melony Spock	2013
Catherine Fowler <i>Student Representative</i>	2012

Facilities Study Progressing

The Chatham Central School District is currently undertaking a facilities study to determine the feasibility of consolidating our current three school buildings into two school buildings. In November, 2011 the Board of Education hired a consultant group from Questar III BOCES to perform the study and determine the most efficient use of Chatham's school buildings. The team is now at work within the District, focusing on how the utilization of District space can best support our educational program.

Among the challenges Chatham faces are diminishing financial resources and declining student enrollment. In order to remain responsible to our students and to our community, the District is exploring every option available to find efficiencies, realize savings and preserve educational opportunities for students, both now and in the future.

The four major questions to be answered by the study are:

1. Can Chatham's educational program be delivered in two of the existing three buildings?
2. If so, which two buildings should be utilized?
3. How should the program, grade levels, and space be configured to best achieve the District's educational goals?
4. Will there be any cost savings to such a move?

"While efficiency is the goal, program is the defining factor of this study," said David Sicko, a consultant on the Questar facilities study team. "We are focusing on the educational program first, and then looking at how the physical space can accommodate that program."

The team will use the data they gather to make recommendations to the Board of Education on how Chatham's space can best be used in the future, as well as make recommendations on any changes to the existing space, including possible renovations or new construction that might become necessary.

The study is expected to be completed in mid-spring of 2012. When the results of the study are available, the District will schedule community meetings to discuss the findings of the study and determine the best actions for our students, our educational program, and our community. No decisions have or will be made about closing a school until the study is completed and these community discussions have occurred.

The District has set up a page on www.chathamcentralschools.com where the community can find information particular to the facilities study. This page will be updated with the latest information as it becomes available.