



Chatham Uses Common Core to Challenge Students

Chatham Central School District is using the Common Core Curriculum Standards to offer opportunities and more rigorous learning experiences to all of our students. The Standards aim to teach all students higher order thinking and problem solving skills, and carry higher expectations of what students are expected to know at the completion of each grade level. Common Core is not, as some people believe, a testing program, but the standards are measured by the new, more challenging state assessments.

Chatham Central Schools now uses these higher standards to guide instruction in every grade level. Over the past two years, our educational staff has worked hard to make sure the Standards are implemented here in a way that works best for our academic program and our students.

“It causes us to reflect on our own teaching to make sure the things we are doing are not because we have always been doing them, but because they are best practices,” said high school English teacher Jodi Sullivan, who also co-chairs the District’s professional development committee.



In short, our staff, not the State, has decided how to integrate the standards at the classroom level, and Chatham teachers continue to plan their own lessons and shape instruction to meet their students’ individual needs. Rather than adding additional materials or standardized tests that do not match our needs, teachers have worked to identify or develop activities and assessment tools that support their teaching.

“The Common Core is all about rigor and expectations are higher. The District has been dedicating a lot of time to keep on top of all the changes through professional development about integrating the Common Core into the curriculum,” said MED kindergarten teacher Kimberly Cowles. “In kindergarten, we have been trying to keep it developmentally appropriate and keep a balance between rigor and keeping it fun for our students, which is very important at this age.”

The Standards aren’t just more challenging; they dig deeper into core concepts and skills. This means lessons actually focus on fewer topics but more time is spent exploring the subject areas that matter most.

“There is a shift from just concrete learning to more critical thinking and inferencing, and having a deeper understanding of the concepts,” explained third grade teacher Theresa Rossi.

For example, prior to the shifts brought about by the Common Core, elementary students learned multiplication concepts, in part, by memorizing multiplication tables. Now, instruction has shifted away from memorization drills and students are using more manipulatives and real world problem solving.

“The students need to understand how they reached that answer, not just what the answer is,” said Rossi. “There are many ways to solve a problem and reach an answer, and we are teaching all of them.”

The same is happening in English classes across the District, where, along with an increase in vocabulary, students are reading more complex texts and more nonfiction, creating written arguments, and citing sources of evidence to defend their conclusions.

“We are asking them questions like, ‘Why does the author choose to characterize the character this way?’ when before it would have been, ‘How was the character developed?’ You have to read more carefully and thoughtfully to find the answers to questions like ‘why?’” explained Sullivan. “That changes class discussions and makes them richer.”

The Standards also put a focus on integrating learning across multiple disciplines, meaning students are seeing more lessons that bring math and English language arts together with social studies, science and other subjects. In eighth grade physical science, for example, students are now learning about earthquakes by writing

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New eReaders Put Digital Library at Student's Fingertips

Danielle Wallace is a 9th grader at Chatham High School and an avid reader. When she heard her school library would now be offering Barnes & Noble Nook eReaders for students like her to check out, she wasted no time in heading to the library, filling out the proper Nook Check-Out Form, and wrapping her hands around a good digital book.

"It's great that the library has these available to students who want them because you can basically read any book you want on them," she said of the tablet-sized, elec-

tronic devices that can be loaded with and store literally hundreds of books, magazines, newspaper articles, and other "print" material. "It's really portable and you don't have to lug around all these books."

The school's Nooks were obtained through a grant from the Chatham Education Foundation of the Berkshire Taconic Community Foundation. School librarian Donna Eager applied for the grant this fall and used it to procure six Nooks for the High School Library, which began loaning them out to students this January, and another six for the Middle School Library, which are being used for in-school projects.

Both the High School and Middle School libraries recently gained access to vast digital libraries through Questar III's School Library System, and for card holding students, the Chatham Public Library.

"One of the reasons we got the Nooks is to make sure everyone has access to digital libraries," explained Eager.

Before the Nooks, if students wanted to checkout eBooks from the school library, they had to bring in their own personal device.

The Nooks also give students the added bonus of useful text features that allow them to look up unfamiliar words with a swipe of a finger or make notes about par-

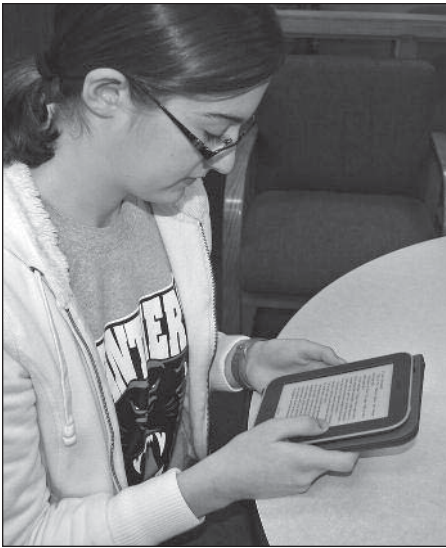
ticular parts of the text, and a glowlight feature provides illumination for reading in low light conditions.

Just like a regular library book, the Nooks are available for students to use for in-house reading at the library or high school students can check one out for up to three weeks. However, eBooks and other reading materials can only be loaded onto the Nooks through the library's system.

"And if you want to order a book from the library, you don't have to wait for it," added Wallace. "With the Nook you just go online and order it, and it takes maybe five minutes," an important feature for Wallace, who in her first few days with her Nook had finished two of the books she had downloaded onto it and was already well into a third.

Eager also used the grant to purchase a number of attractive titles, like "The Fault in Our Stars" and the "Divergent" series, which she loaded onto the eReaders to entice students to check them out.

"Our print books are not going away. This is just another way for them to borrow and access free books," explained Eager, who added, "We are trying to push borrowing and want students to understand that you don't have to go out and buy it, you can borrow it from the library for free."



District Explores Campus Access Road

District officials are exploring the idea of building an emergency access road to Chatham's main school campus. The campus, which houses Chatham High School and the MED Elementary School, is currently accessed by vehicles via a single paved entrance/exit way, and the new emergency-only road would provide a secondary vehicle entry. The route being considered would run from the easternmost side of MED out through a parcel of land owned by the Village of Chatham, where it would connect with Shore Road.

"While we have evacuation plans to get our students out in any emergency, having this second road would give police, fire, and other emergency vehicles immediate access to the campus in the event that Woodbridge Avenue or the campus drive were blocked," said superintendent Cheryl Nuciforo.

Two years ago, the District explored purchasing land directly behind Chatham High School with the idea of building an emergency access road out to Pond Hill Road. However, it was discovered that the project would cost over \$3 million to complete and the road would have to cross over protected wetlands, which would require special permits and further complicate the project.

The new route being considered is estimated at a cost of less than \$500,000. Due to its location, the road could also serve as pedestrian access to Village park land on the south end of Smith Pond.

Superintendent Cheryl Nuciforo presented the idea to the Chatham Village Board of Trustees in December, and the Village leadership was receptive to the idea. The District and Village will be meeting together this month to discuss what requirements would need to be met in order for the proposal to move forward.



Common Core...

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mock speeches to the U.N. on earthquake preparedness. Alongside concepts like plate tectonics, fault lines, and the Richter scale, the students are researching how national culture and governmental policy also play a role in the widely varying magnitude of human loss seen from earthquakes in different parts of the world.

"We read scientific articles from the New York Times to get information out of them. They read up on building codes from Japan and how those practices are used worldwide," said 8th grade science teacher Jason Kahn, explaining how the lesson required his students to "dissect the text and apply the information to a real world scenario."

Another good example of how Common Core changes are impacting classroom instruction is a recent 11th grade research thesis project Sullivan assigned her students. She collaborated with school librarian Donna Eager on a new approach to research papers, notoriously unpopular assignments among students. Previously, students were assigned a topic around which to research and base their argument, but this year, students were required to pick a topic based on their own personal interests and develop their own questions from which to draw conclusions.

"They are reading informational texts with a purpose, thinking about authorship and bias, and it just feels different; it feels exciting. They are evaluating the credibility of their sources, not because we are making them do it but because they want to make their arguments strong. They like their topics and they are into it," Sullivan said. "This project was revised to better meet the needs of the Common Core, and that's good."

Much of the controversy surrounding the Common Core has stemmed from the State's timeline for the implementation of its new assessments measuring student growth under the Common Core Standards. While the rollout of these tests has been bumpy, parents should understand that the goals of the Common Core have students' best interests in mind and our school will continue to give our staff the support and resources they need to make the Common Core something that benefits students in Chatham.

BUDGET NEWS:

State's GEA Cuts School Funding for 5th Straight Year

According to Governor Cuomo's recently proposed state budget, Chatham CSD will receive an increase in state education aid of about 1%, or \$65,563 over what the District received in aid this school year. However, the governor's budget continues the State's Gap Elimination Adjustment (GEA) for a fifth straight year. This means Chatham will see approximately \$640,000 less in state aid for next year than it would if the GEA were discontinued. This equates to state aid levels remaining well below what our school received in 2008, even though the costs associated with operating a school have gone up considerably since then.

To put this into perspective, if our District were to make no changes from this year's budget to next year's budget, expenses would be expected to go up by approximately \$875,000, or about 3%.

The District's ability to make up the difference through taxes, a school's only other real source of revenue, will be severely hampered this year by the property tax cap, which will be 0.66% for 2014, down from 4.34% in 2013.

"After several years of budget reducing cuts, it's getting more difficult to find additional areas where we can realize efficiencies and savings without affecting educational programs," said school business administrator Michael Chudy. "We have some upcoming retirements that will help us this year and have identified some other areas where we can reduce operating costs, but we will also need to apply reserves and fund balance in order to close our budget gap."

Although the Gap Elimination Adjustment was put in place in 2010 by Governor Patterson as a one-time solution to address the State's fiscal emergency, it has been included in every budget since that time. Over those years and the coming year, the GEA has represented a loss of \$4,243,037 to Chatham.

This limited revenue will not be enough to offset inflation, increasing health insurance premiums, state retirement system contributions, State and Federal mandates, and other areas that continue to drive up costs for schools. This means the District will again need to reduce spending in 2014-15.

A schedule of upcoming dates is provided below. All Board meetings are held in the High School library and community members are encouraged to attend. More information about the 2014-15 budget development is also available at www.chathamcentralschools.com.

- March 11 . . . Board Workshop, 6:30 p.m.
(Budget Presentation – Transportation, Benefits & Cafeteria)
- March 17 . . . Petitions for Board of Education candidates become available
- March 25 . . . Board Meeting, 6:30 p.m.
(Budget Presentation – Special Education & Budget Adjustments)
- April 8 Board Workshop, 6:30 p.m.
(Board Adopts Proposed 2014-2015 Budget)
- April 21 Last day for Board of Education candidates to submit petitions
- April 24 Voter Registration, 4:00-8:00 p.m., MED Lobby
Copies of budget and required documents made available to public
- May 13 Public Hearing on Budget, 6:30 p.m., CHS Library
Voter Registration, 2:00-7:00 p.m., MED Lobby
- May 20 Annual Budget Vote and Board Election,
9:00 a.m.-9:00 p.m., MED Gymnasium

To view our complete budget calendar, along with copies of Board presentations and other budget information, please visit our Budget News page at www.chathamcentralschools.com.

NYS Names CHS a Reward School

This fall, Chatham High School had the distinction of being honored as a Reward School by the New York State Education Department (NYSED). The award recognizes CHS as a school leading the state toward the accomplishment of educational excellence through an increase in student achievement and closing the gap in student achievement. CHS received this honor because NYS deemed it a “High Progress” school, meaning CHS is in the top ten percent of all NYS high schools in terms of student academic growth over the past two school years.

“This school is among those in New York State that has made the most progress or has the highest performance with no significant gaps in achievement,” explained NYSED Office of Accountability Assistant Commissioner, Ira Schwartz, in a letter that accompanied the award.

During a Chatham Board of Education meeting this fall, the Board of Education presented CHS principal John Thorsen with a mounted certificate from the State recognizing CHS for this important accomplishment, which Thorsen accepted on behalf of his school.

“I am very proud of this accomplishment. It is a reflection of the efforts of our faculty, staff and student body,” said Thorsen. “We are working extremely hard to prepare our students for the challenges that lie ahead. This is evidence that hard work pays off and I am pleased the State has recognized our achievements.”



Board president Melony Spock presents CHS principal John Thorsen with the Reward School award from NYS.

Autism Speaker Sheds Light on Differences

Motivational speaker, advocate for people with autism, and best-selling author Jesse A. Saperstein paid a visit to Chatham Middle School this February to talk with students about misunderstood disabilities, the psychological consequences of bullying, and the positive power of celebrating differences within yourself and in others.

Mr. Saperstein himself was diagnosed with a form of autism called Asperger’s syndrome at age fourteen, and he explained how he is impaired by a lack of social skills, common sense, and resistance to change in his routine. He spoke with honesty and humor about some of his misadventures and his attempts to fit in. He shared his challenges with being viewed as different, and how he was often made fun of, bullied, or worse yet, treated as a social pariah and ignored.

“I see Asperger’s as a character trait more than a disability. The true disablers are the unnecessary failures created by a society that



does not understand,” he told the students. “When you take another look, you will find beauty and treasures in those who are different.”

He also shared how his “disability” has been a source of strength, particularly in his advocacy efforts for people with autism and other afflictions. From March to October in 2005, he hiked the entire Appalachian Trail and raised \$19,000 to benefit children with AIDS. If it were not for one of his most dogged traits, his difficulty letting go of ideas and moving on, he said he would not have been able to finish the nearly 2,200 mile hike.

“But this presentation is not about my Asperger’s, it’s about what makes you so incredible,” he told the students, bringing out a mirror. “Everyone is unique in their own special way. Look at yourself and understand that weird and unique can equal awesomeness.”

Saperstein’s shameless honesty and willingness to laugh at his own quirks, like the fact that he still goes trick-or-treating despite being in his thirties, was disarming and the students were very receptive to his message of acceptance and understanding. By the time he asked the students if anyone would be interested in sharing something about themselves that others may think of as “weird,” he had no shortage of children who felt safe enough to talk about themselves in front of all their peers. He also asked students to share something about themselves that they are proud of.

“Let’s redefine the misconception about misunderstood disabilities and people,” he concluded. “We are all really, really weird, and that’s just incredible.”

The positive energy that had built up in the room was evident by the end of the hour-long program and students showed their respect by giving Saperstein a standing ovation.

Saperstein is the author of “Atypical: Life with Asperger’s in 20 1/3 Chapters,” his popular personal memoir, first published in 2010. He has a second book due out in April. His presentation was part of Chatham Middle School’s ongoing character education and bullying prevention initiative, and coincided with the February theme of overcoming adversity.

Strengthening Teacher and Leader Effectiveness

Having a great teacher in every classroom is one of the best ways to improve student achievement. But times have been tough for schools as of late, and financial resources to build upon our teachers' successes and best practices have been slim. With this in mind, Chatham applied for and received a \$153,000 Strengthening Teacher and Leader Effectiveness (STLE) grant from the New York State Education Department. Chatham was one of only a handful of schools in the state to receive this competitive grant and, as a result, our school has been able to introduce several new staff development programs that encourage continuous improvement and support teacher leadership.

"The main idea of the grant is to spread the influence of our most effective teachers over more than just the students in their particular classroom," explained Dr. Jean Scheriff, Director of Data, Assessment and Special Programs.



Patricia Smith working with students at the middle school.

This school year, the District used the STLE grant to create two in-house teacher leader coach positions and filled them with two of Chatham's most experienced and well respected faculty members; high school math teacher Judi Matthews and Middle School reading teacher Patricia Smith.

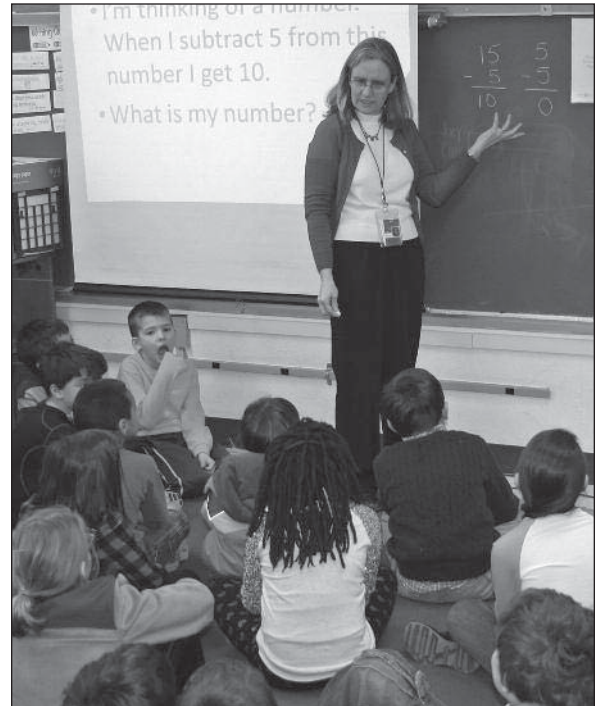
"I'm now in all three buildings doing different projects to continue the curriculum and infuse new ideas into the curriculum," explained Matthews. "I spend time observing classes, meeting with teachers, researching or finding materials, or going to conferences and bringing back what I learn there to share with teachers across the district."

As teacher coaches, Matthews and Smith help their peers translate new teaching methods and curriculum changes, such as those brought about by the Common Core Standards, into increased student success. The teacher leader coaches are available to offer professional one-on-one support and mentorship to new teachers learning the ropes of Chatham's educational program, as well as seasoned educators looking to incorporate innovative ideas, reach a struggling student, or introduce new technology into the classroom.

"Having it right within your district is a huge asset for teachers," said Smith about her position. "I have a background in how we do things in Chatham, and I am constantly reading, constantly researching different instructional methods and sharing these ideas with teachers, or being asked to go into classrooms to demonstrate a teaching method or model a lesson."

The STLE grant has also helped Chatham introduce new web-based education software that allows our educators to better assess, track, and guide instruction. Known as EDoctrina, the program provides teachers with a readily available data platform with which they can create standards-based lesson plans and assessments, quickly scan assessment results using a simple photocopier, easily identify skills their students are having trouble with or excelling in, and track the progress of student-centered goals.

Every student benefits from targeted instruction, and the grant has also paid for focused professional development on the effective use of data to guide classroom instruction. This school year, on a quarterly basis, the District has brought in an educational data consultant from the Rens-



Judy Matthews modeling a lesson at the elementary school.

selearville Institute to lead training workshops with Chatham's Instructional Study Team Leaders. The training has focused on teachers developing skills in the use and management of assessment data to set, track and achieve educational benchmarks set by the District. The team leaders are charged with bringing what they learn at the workshops back to their respective departments to share with their colleagues and implement at the departmental or grade level.

The STLE grants are supported by federal Race to the Top funds through the New York State Education Department.



Les Loomis of the Rensselaerville Institute leading a professional development session with Instructional Study Team Leaders at CCSD.

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ADMINISTRATORS

Cheryl Nuciforo <i>Superintendent</i>	392-1501
Michael Chudy <i>School Business Administrator</i>	392-1534
Jean Scheriff <i>Director of Data, Assessment & Special Programs</i>	392-2417
Tamara Thorpe-Odom <i>Director of Special Education</i>	392-1540
Kristen Reno <i>Mary E. Dardess Elementary School Principal</i>	392-2255
Amy Potter <i>Chatham Middle School Interim Principal</i>	392-1560
John Thorsen <i>Chatham High School Principal</i>	392-4142
Terry Bordell <i>Chatham HS Interim Assistant Principal</i>	392-4142

BOARD MEMBERS

	<i>Term Expires</i>
Melony Spock <i>President</i>	2016
James Toteno <i>Vice President</i>	2014
Michael Clark	2015
Gail Behrens Day	2014
Muriel Faxon	2016
Edward Knight	2014
Jennifer Lindberg	2015
James Marks	2014
Craig Simmons	2016
Collin Anderson <i>Student Representative</i>	2014

Laptops in Every Classroom

A visit to a second grade classroom in MED found students hard at work independently researching the Earth's solar system, but with words like "cool" and "awesome" floating around the room, and with phrases like "whoa, check this out," one might ask whether the students really saw their assignment as "work." Children enjoying a lesson on space is nothing new, but what was different were the tools they had at hand to assist them with their research; every child in the class had a wireless laptop at their workstation with which they were eagerly exploring planets, moons, comets and asteroids using online text, animation, interactive maps, and videos.

"Through technology it's very engaging. It's hands on, and it allows them to see things that they would never be able to see otherwise," said second grade teacher Maria Hogencamp, giving an example of how flexible access to computers in her classroom has enhanced the lessons she teaches. "When they click on a planet like the Earth, they can see how fast it is spinning compared to other

planets. That is something that you can't get from a book. Being able to see it makes it much more real."

For Mrs. Hogencamp to have led this sort of lesson before, she and her students would have had to head down the hallway to MED's desktop computer room. Now, teachers have far more flexibility in how they integrate computer and Internet based learning into their lessons, because that kind of technology can now be dropped into their students laps, literally.

What is happening in Mrs. Hogencamp's class is indicative of what is happening in classrooms all over Chatham Central Schools. Thanks to 300 new laptops and twelve portable laptop labs the District put into service at the beginning of this school year, increased access to computers is enhancing classroom learning in grades one through eight and in every department at the High School.

These "labs" are really high-tech carts that can house, charge and program a set of twenty-five laptops each. The labs are easily wheeled into any room and the laptops distributed to students for everyday classroom exercises or a special project. Every classroom is now also equipped with wireless internet, meaning students don't even need to worry about plugging in, they can grab-and-go and work from any desk, seat, or workstation in the room.

"The response from the kids has been overwhelmingly positive," said Hogencamp, whose students even ask her if they can use the laptops during recess to access their school's online math practice program, IXL. "Now that's saying something," she said.

Increasing students' access and use of technology in the classroom is an important part of Chatham's 21st Century learning model.

