Mission Statement

The mission of this newsletter is to inspire teachers, students, parents and administrators to achieve their highest potential.

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Editor’s Message, Macdonough Family Resource Center, Bielefield Community Nights, Kick Start, Beautification at WWMS, MHS VoAg, MHS Link Crew, MHS Graduates, MHS Band, and School Governance Councils.
Editor’s Message

I thought of this newsletter after watching “Waiting For Superman”. It is about how the education system in America is in trouble. With smaller budgets, less funding from government and more requirements of our teachers, the system is at a breaking point. How do we keep our students, our teachers, administrators and parents striving for success? I thought about this and came up with a newsletter that will highlight the wonderful programs and people in our city. There is so much that we can be proud of here in Middletown.

As a parent in the Middletown Schools for 15 years, I have seen many successes and many challenges. I have been an active and involved parent thanks to the support of my husband. I have been a PTA president, room mother, event chairperson and child advocate over the years. I learned many important lessons by being active in the schools. Most importantly, I need to participate in my child’s education. I have asked parents in the past to volunteer for one event during a school year. Just 3 hours a year can make a difference. There are many ways to help from being a box top Mom or Dad, to attending PTA meetings, reporting on the BOE meetings or just checking in with the teacher on the progress of your student. We need to work as a team with our schools and administration in order to achieve the highest success for all of our students.

Make sure you contact me with all inspiring stories this year. I would love to hear about a project to help the community, great success in clubs, athletics or programs such as VoAg. I will do my best to attend and report on the activities so that they can be shared throughout the district. I can be reached at inspiratuseditor@gmail.com.

Kim Kennedy

On the front cover the students taking advantage of the program Ready, Set, Learn. This is a free summer tutoring program offered by the teachers and staff at Macdonough. There is one paid teacher, but many staff members at Macdonough volunteer a morning or two during the month to support the program. The students in grades 2 through 5 focus on reading, math and technology. The goal is to maintain the progress made through the school year. The students are in class in the morning from 9:00 to 11:30 AM. They are offered breakfast and lunch and then many of the students head to the Oddfellows Circus program. What a great way for the students to spend the month of July. Thank you to the volunteers in this program. It highlights the wonderful teachers and staff that are in our schools. Admiration was apparent while talking with one of the teen staff members during my visit to the program. He was so impressed with the level of commitment by all of the staff members.
Kindergarten Kick Start

This program ran the month of July for a full day. The program was run by Dr. Shusterman from Wesleyan and was staffed by students and teachers. The program helps to develop routines, socialization and literacy to those students entering Kindergarten in the fall. The students are given breakfast and lunch and treated to field trips such as the Russell Library, the firehouse and Kid City. It also has a component to engage parent involvement. A special thank you to Liberty Bank for their generous donation of $30,000 to fund the program. During my visit to the program, I talked with one of the parents, Barbara, mother of an incoming Kindergarten student. Barbara talked about how wonderfully they handled social issues that arose during the month as children adjusted to new friends and new experiences. She also expressed her appreciation that her daughter was able to retain her skills during the long summer break so that she can be ready to start in the fall. Her daughter was so excited to start school in the fall and due to the program, she will be comfortable in her new classroom due to the familiarity that was established during her time in Kindergarten Kick Start.

The important thing is not so much that every child should be taught, as that every child should be given the wish to learn.

John Lubbock

The Macdonough School Family Resource Center is busy in the summer and all school year. The program is run by Nikki Belton. The Raising Readers program involves fostering literacy at the lunch program at Holy Trinity Church. They teach reading strategies and the students are given free books to take home.

A play and learn group was offered through July and part of August which provides children from birth to five years old the opportunity to learn to socialize with other children and start to learn the basic tools needed to start their school years. It also offers screening for the Birth to Three program and those eligible for Early Headstart or the Middletown preschool program.

The month of July offered parents a book club of their own. Once a week, parents met to discuss an agreed upon book selection. It gave parents a chance to expand their reading repertoire, talk with other parents and learn some new skills. The program meets during the school year as well. There is a Laundry and Literature program also that allows parents to do laundry and learn literacy skills with their younger children. This takes place on a year-round basis.

The Family Resource Center offers much more during the school year. If you would like to contact Nikki, please call the Macdonough School or call 860-638-3742.
Bielefield Community Nights

There was excitement in the air the night I visited the Bielefield Community Night. I could hear children shouting to each other to come to the community center at Woodbury Circle. There were students already in the common room when I arrived at 4:45 PM; the program ran from 5 PM to 6 PM. In all, there were 6 community nights scheduled for the summer. The topics ranged from summer safety to tech safety to a cultural celebration. The program is run by Melissa Robinson, Program Supervisor, and Colleen Alleyne, Katy Getman and Michel Gomez, who are part of Family School Connection at Bielefield School. On average there were 15 students and about 5 parents in attendance throughout the summer at the various events. The goal is to provide information and build relationships with the families in the district. The program is run from a grant from the Department of Social Services within the Children’s Trust.

During the school year, Family School Connection puts on many events. There is a parent group that meets to discuss many items facing parents today. The goal is to help your child succeed in school by helping parents access a variety of services and overcome obstacles. The group can assist with job search, teach parents how to help with homework, household budgeting and more. To become involved in this program, contact Melissa Robinson at robinsonm@mpsct.org at Bielefield School. Check your local school to see if there is a program at your child’s school.

Beautification Project At WWMS

The Woodrow Wilson Annual Back to School Campus Clean-up and beautification took place August 22nd and 23rd. About 40 students and 16 parents assembled to rake, shovel mulch, dig out the weeds, and plant flowers around the front of the school building. After the front was completed, the group then started work on the interior courtyard of the building. The courtyard is used as an outdoor classroom by the staff and hosts dances and get-togethers. It also serves as a reward during lunches for students that have achieved “Citizen of the Month” status. The courtyard is already a beautiful setting due to the Garden Club at WWMS and advisors Mr. Geary and Mr. Munoz. The students each year raise money through events to purchase perennial flowers and shrubs. The group has also purchased benches, picnic tables, umbrellas and dedicated a gazebo in honor of Mr. Dexter Locke; teacher and colleague that passed away in April of 2010. The club is open to all students and meets April, May and June each Tuesday for 1 hour after school.
Summer At VoAg Center

Upon visiting the Vocational Agriculture Center at MHS, I was greeted by smiling and enthusiastic staff. I was introduced to the GAIT (Growing Agricultural Interest Together) mentoring program for incoming students. The new agriculture students were in small groups learning about plant identification, goat or dairy goat milking, animal showing, tractor driving, and the tools of farming. There are four disciplines that all VoAg students learn about: animal science, plant science, natural resources and agricultural mechanics. The group was run by student mentors that have participated in leadership training. A few weeks prior, student mentors were asked to show teachers the lessons plans and talk about the materials that would be used to lead workshops. Planning was done every two weeks, for 3 hours at a time. That day, students arrived at 8:30 AM and ended their day at 1:30 PM with a hayride. Approximately, 24 students participated in the day’s activities. The mentors were chosen from grades 10, 11 and 12. The GAIT chair and FFA President, Stephanie Vopelak, presided over the day. She made each participant a special gift that could be opened throughout the day as they mastered tasks. There are approximately 130 students in the VoAg program from 13 districts around Middletown. In order to be accepted into the program, any 8th grade student must fill out an application, write an essay and obtain recommendations. Once enrolled in the program, the students meet for 1 or 2 periods per day during the school year. The freshmen rotate throughout the 4 disciplines and then must declare their choice for study by sophomore year.

For Agriculture students, learning does not stop at the end of the school year. Each student must continue learning over the summer months. It is called SAE (Supervised Agricultural Experience). There is classroom instruction and then supervised work on a project. Some students volunteered on therapeutic horse farms, some worked at Fidelco to train guide dogs or even worked on garden projects at home. There are many choices for students to explore for their project. Staff visited the students, and students submitted a written summary of the goals and give a report when they return to school in September. The National FFA recently announced that Middletown has a National Proficiency Award Finalist (only 4 are chosen in the country). In addition, 14 other students are preparing to compete at the National FFA Convention this fall. There are great things happening at MHS.

If you would like more information on the VoAg Ed program, you can call (860) 704-4599 or go to middletownschools.org, go to “Our Schools” then “Middletown High School” and scroll down to the Agricultural Science link.
Our 2013 Graduating Class

The graduating class of MHS went on to higher pursuits. 56% of the students went on to four year universities such as Clark University, Ithaca College, Tufts, Quinnipiac, UConn, and Wesleyan to name a few of the 319 schools that received applications. 29% percent of the students are attending 2-year colleges, 4% went to a trade school and 1% joined one of the branches of the armed forces. The students filled out 1,198 college applications. The staff and administration are very proud of our graduates. Erica White and the Guidance Department help the students stay on top of all deadlines for SAT testing, college applications and FAFSA forms. They are there to help all students and families to navigate the college application process. Erica White can be reached at whitee@mpsct.org

MHS Link Crew

In August, I was able to pay a visit to the Link Crew program at MHS. This is a great program to help freshmen get oriented to the new high school environment. There are about 300 incoming freshmen this year to MHS. They will face countless challenges in changing to high school. The Link Crew leaders provides structure for freshmen to receive support and guidance from juniors and seniors who have been through the challenges that high school pose, and understand that the transition to a larger school can sometimes be overwhelming. About 75-80% of the incoming freshmen participated in this year’s program. There are about 60 leaders that receive 2 days of training. The students apply for this honor prior to the end of the previous school year. The hope is that there are a great many students from all backgrounds who apply but there is always a need for more male mentors. The day begins at 8 AM and ends at 12 PM. The students tackle low risk discussions and then progressively move on to more challenging topics. They interweave games into the discussion groups. One game is taking a few paper balls and trying to juggle them, eventually leading to what the paper balls symbolize: grades, sports, friends, family. The group discusses how to juggle all of the elements into the student’s life. Link Crew leaders wore their t-shirts throughout the first few days of school so that they could be easily identified to help anyone in need. Lisa Geary and Chris Briggs, advisors for the Link Crew, hope to eventually make a change to the Pride periods, so that the Link leaders will be able to meet with and continue their relationships with their freshmen throughout the year and to make them more friendly to

Link Crew continued:

to the Link Crew format.

If you want to get involved in Link Crew, contact Lisa Geary at gearyl@mpsct.org.
The Middletown High School Band is in full swing. All 180 students were required to practice one week during the summer. During the week of August 19th the band rehearsed from 2 PM–9 PM. Each section focused on both marching fundamentals and basic musicianship within sections and as a whole ensemble. After an hour dinner break, the band returned for more rehearsal. This dedicated group is run by student leaders who were chosen through a voting system at the conclusion of the previous academic year. In addition to peer voting, candidates composed an essay on leadership qualities, demonstration of these skills, and their plan to make the upcoming marching season successful. At the conclusion of this process, the leaders are selected and announced at the annual Music Awards Banquet in June. Over the summer months, section leaders are given leadership training. Section Leaders meet with their groups to discuss expectations, attendance, and drill to ensure the Middletown Marching Band (MMB) preseason is a complete success.

Once the school year begins, the students have band each day. The marching band rehearses as a group on Sunday evenings from 6 PM to 9 PM during the months of September, October and November. The band will perform eight halftime shows at football games or holiday events, and will compete in five marching band competitions in the state. All students strive to perform their best at their craft in order to achieve high standards and work as a team. The directors of MMB are Kimberly Everson and Anthony Pandolfe. They are looking for parent support for games, competitions and fundraising. Please consider helping out in any way possible. There will be monthly music booster meetings throughout the school year. This helps not only the band, but also the choir (directed by Michael Gosselin) and the orchestra (directed by Pinar Gosterisli). Your help and input is greatly valued and appreciated. If you wish to get more info, please visit www.middletownschools.org, select Middletown High School and the music link on the left.
Schools Gearing up for New Governance Councils
By Donna Marino

School Governance Councils represent the many interests of families and staff that make up a school’s community. This is important because research has shown that:

- Partnerships among families, school and community members make a powerful contribution to greater student success. No matter what their income or background, students with involved families tend to have higher grades and test scores, better attendance, and higher rates of homework completion.

The School Governance Council serves as an important role to the school administrator by:

- Bringing together parents, staff and community leaders to work together to improve student achievement and
- Assisting the school administration in decisions impacting students’ education in areas such as: Analyzing school data as it relates to the School Improvement Plan, reviewing the school’s resources and advising the principal in making programmatic and operational changes.

Currently Bielefield and Woodrow Wilson Middle School are gearing up for their third year with a Governance Council and we are excited to announce the formation of Governance Councils at Farm Hill, Macdonough, Lawrence and Middletown High School Schools.

What does it require to be on the School Governance Council? Serving as a council member will require time, energy and a willingness to listen. Members should: put children first, be a team player, and be willing to learn.

Are you interested in being a member of your School Governance Council or want to nominate someone? Contact your school principal or Donna Marino at 860 638-1462 or marinod@mpsct.org.

Please look for more information on nominating and voting for the 7 parents needed at each school to serve on the councils. Also visit the Bielefield and Woodrow Wilson Middle school’s website at www.middletownschools.org and look up “Governance” for their past work and accomplishments.

Learn more about School Governance Councils! Visit www.ct.gov/sde/SGC

All parents are encouraged to vote for the governance council nominees at your school.