

# From Jim Agostine

Monroe's Superintendent of Schools

March 2016



Monroe Elementary School Garden

Welcome, once again, to the Superintendent's Newsletter. It is my hope that you will find the contents of it informative. This newsletter is one aspect of our commitment to better communicate with you. If you would like to see more information on a particular topic, or if you would like to make a comment, please feel free to email me at [jagostine@monroeps.org](mailto:jagostine@monroeps.org) or visit our website at [www.monroeps.org](http://www.monroeps.org).

I am very pleased to report that Stepney Elementary School has been identified as a Connecticut School of Distinction by the State Department of Education. This honor is based upon the 2015 State Assessment. Stepney now joins Masuk High School and Monroe Elementary

School for receiving that honor. I could not be prouder of our faculty and staff for all their hard work and our students for embracing their education.

The 2016-17 budget process, which began in October for us, is well underway. The BOE adopted a \$54,861,767 budget for the 2016-17 school year. This budget is 1.96% above the current year's budget. The budget is now in the hands of the First Selectman, The Board of Finance, and the Town Council. I expect much discussion over the next month or so as we approach the referendum on April 5, 2016. To view the proposed budget, please find the link on our website at [www.monroeps.org](http://www.monroeps.org). If you have any questions,

please feel free to contact me.

As I write this, the outside air temperature is 58 degrees, and the sun is shining. You can feel the warmth of the sun as it continues to ever so slightly move higher in the sky. This annual phenomenon reminds me that although there may be more winter to come, we are beginning to round the corner to spring and warmer weather. It fills me with hope and joy that the 4:00 AM conference calls about delays and cancellations are over. It also signals an urgency to move our initiatives along and to celebrate our student's successes.

Wishing you all the best,

*Jim Agostine*

## Monroe Public Schools Dates

*BOE Meeting  
Masuk High School Library  
7:30 PM  
April 4, 2016  
April 18, 2016  
May 2, 2016  
May 16, 2016  
June 6, 2016*

*Third Annual  
da Vinci Festival  
Masuk High School  
April 1-3:00 PM -7:00 PM  
April 2-10:00 AM-2:00 PM*

*Masuk Spring Drama  
Cards on the Table  
April 1 -7:30 PM  
April 2 -2:00 PM & 7:30 PM*

*Spring Recess  
April 11-April 15*

*Musical Concerts  
May 4-JH Gr. 6 Band  
& Strings  
May 5-JH Gr. 7/8 Band  
May 10-JH Gr. 7/8 Strings  
May 12-MHS Band  
May 19-MHS Chorus  
May 24- MHS Strings  
May 25- JH Gr. Chorus  
May 26-MHS Jazz*

*Masuk Prom  
May 20-Aria, Prospect, CT*

Visit Monroe Public Schools Website  
[www.monroeps.org](http://www.monroeps.org)

**Monroe Budget Vote**  
**April 5, 2016**  
**6:00 AM to 8:00 PM**

Monroe Public Schools Presents:

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual  
da Vinci Festival  
Monroe's Grades K-12 Arts Show*

**Masuk High School**

Friday, April 1, 2016 • 3:00 PM to 7:00 PM  
Saturday, April 2, 2016 • 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM

## Minds in Motion

For the seventh straight year, the academic enrichment program Minds in Motion (MIM) returned to Monroe. This year's event was held at Masuk High School on Saturday, February 20, from 1:00 PM to 4:00 PM, and it was a huge success. Minds in Motion is an enrichment program for students in grades K-8. It is presented locally by parents and educators from Monroe, Trumbull, and Newtown, but is open to any and all families who want to spend an afternoon filled with fun and engagement.

Workshop Coordinator, Amy Primorac, explained that kids have such a great time, because the afternoon is filled with learning kids don't otherwise get during their normal school day. "Students are in-

spired and wowed by in-depth lessons on a broad range of areas of interest," she says, in classes such as Rocketry or CSI Forensics. "The excitement in their faces as they leave the classrooms that day is always full of pride and wonder. It's not something to be missed!"

Minds in Motion is an afternoon of learning for parents and educators too. As Monroe parent, Brooke Burling, who has run MIMs across Connecticut for the past decade, explains. "In addition to the kids having lots of fun, we also have a keynote address and breakout sessions for their moms and dads and teachers as well. It's a great afternoon where the whole community gets to

learn and explore... and perhaps discover something new." Some of this year's sessions included: A Day at the Vet, CHOPPED for Artists, Sweet Treats, SCRATCH Your Way to Success, CSI Monroe, and Spoken Word, SLAM Poetry. Many Monroe teachers presented, and students enjoyed seeing some of their favorite teachers outside the classroom.

Next year, will be our eighth year hosting, and the Minds in Motion Committee is looking forward to it being the most successful yet!

## MS Students Shine at the Project Lead The Way Conference

The annual Connecticut Project Lead The Way (PLTW) Conference took place Tuesday, October 20, at the University of New Haven. A select group of Jockey Hollow STEM Academy students presented to fellow students, teachers, administrators, and PLTW officials. Students spoke about the design engineering process as it related to projects from each of the PLTW units of study: CSI Medical De-

fectives, Energy and the Environment, Magic of Electrons, Science of Technology, Automation and Robotics, Flight and Space, and Design and Modeling. Project Lead the Way teacher Nick Natalino comments that, "Students are challenged through a project-based curriculum that requires effective group work skills and problem-solving skills to be successful." Jockey

Hollow School has offered PLTW courses since 2011.



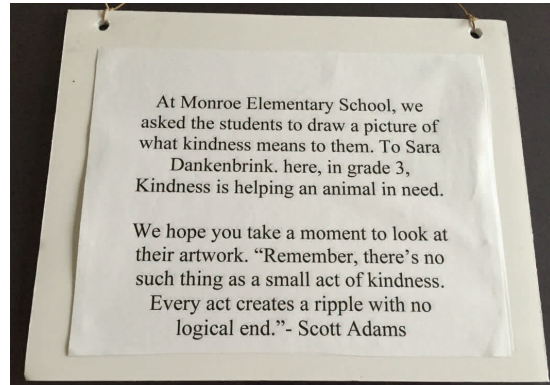


# Monroe El. Spreads the Meaning of Kindness.

Last year, Monroe Elementary was inspired to recognize their students for kind acts after finding a Ben’s Bell on a tree outside of their school. The Ben’s Bell Project was started by a woman in Tucson, Arizona, after tragically losing her son at a very young age. She began to make bells to hang on trees with a note attached stating, “You have found a Ben’s Bell - Take it home and hang it, and remember to spread the kindness throughout our world.” Shortly after the Sandy Hook incident, a Ben’s

Bell shop was established in the Newtown area.

This year, Monroe Elementary is extending their kindness project outside of their school. Each student was asked to draw a picture of “what kindness means to them.” With the help of their PTO, this artwork has been displayed throughout the greater Monroe area, with the hope that others will see their work and be reminded how simple acts of kindness do make a difference, one act at a time.

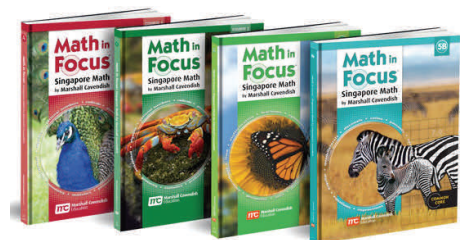


## Math in Focus

On March 21-23, 2016, teachers in grades 1, 3, and 5 will be participating in the third round of our year-long Math in Focus teacher training. Previous sessions were held for teachers in grades Kindergarten, 2, and 4. This professional development will be pro-

vided by experienced Math in Focus Staff Developers. Teachers will observe a classroom demonstration lesson, as well as attend before and after debriefings with the Staff Developer. In addition, on March 24, all teachers K-5 will attend a three

hour professional development session with these Math in Focus Staff Developers.



## Google Sends Jockey Hollow Students Around the World in One Day.

*Students travel to ancient ruins and modern cities with new Google Expeditions.*

If you are wondering when Jockey Hollow Middle School students had the time to travel to the sites of the Aztec and Mayan Empires, the streets of Barcelona, and the African Savannah--the answer is Thursday--during class. No Board of Education funds or permissions were necessary. Thanks to the newest technology from Google, teachers at Jockey Hollow acted as tour guides through ancient ruins and temples in Social Studies, biomes in



Sci-

ence, and Barcelona in their Spanish classes.

The technology makes use of special panoramic photography used by Google Earth, linking a student viewfinder to a teacher tablet. Students simply look through their cardboard into a smart phone attached to the front. When the student turns they see the entire landscape around them. Teachers use touch controls on the tablet to point out items that show up as arrows on student screens guiding them to see specific sites--like the Temple of the Sun or Barcelona Cathedral. Embedded into existing lessons, students are able to travel the world to these locations as they are learning about them to provide a richer experience.

Jockey Hollow Middle School is one of first schools in the nation to pilot the program. While new expeditions

are being created every day, Google is launching the application in selected schools only. The student response in Monroe was enthusiastic. Student engagement was evident throughout the lessons. Not wanting to put down their viewfinders, kids had streams of questions about the locations they were seeing as well as the technology behind the experience. Director of Information Technology, Jack Zamary, was onsite to help students and get in on the fun (on left). Masuk High School and STEM will be going on their own expeditions at the end of October, and Google hopes the app will be available to all schools and the public by 2016.

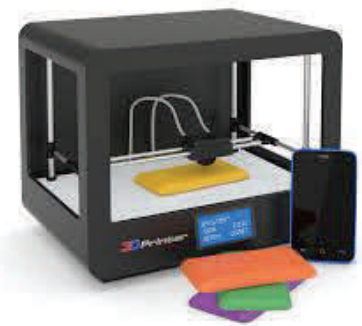


## What is a Learning Commons?

Library teachers and staff have been participating in a project, titled "Re-Imagining the School Library," at the Cooperative Education Services, in Trumbull. The Monroe Library staff have been working for the past two years on this project with library teachers from districts across Fairfield County. The focus of this work has been to redefine the role and function of libraries to best serve students, as we prepare them for a world where technology, innovation, and collaboration are essential tools for success in college and careers.

Historically, school libraries were referred to as "library media centers." That name came about, because media centers were a place that teachers and students went to get media such as film strips, movies, and later, videos. The term "media center" really isn't relevant in 2016 with the availability of media through the internet. In contrast, the new work in school libraries promotes collaboration through flexible spaces and promotes innovation through access to a range of print and digital resources. As a compliment to these efforts, a 3-D printer was just donated to the Fawn Hollow Library, and it will serve as one of the digital resources available to teachers and students. All of the District's library staff will receive training on the 3D printer and how best to use this new technology as a teaching tool.

You will see more changes to our libraries over time as we further develop the concept of Learning Commons.



# Jockey Hollow Community Service

The Jockey Hollow Student Council and its advisors, Eve Lashar, Jacqueline DelVecchio, and Kathleen Foley, organized and executed an international outreach community service project on behalf of la Escuela Primaria Sayulita Nayarit, an elementary school in Sayulita, Mexico. The Student Council used Skype and Facetime to communicate with Juan Ramon Flores, Director, and his students to learn what was

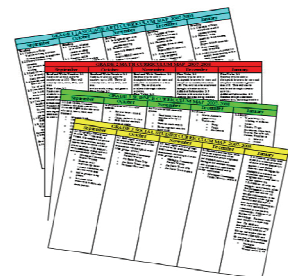
needed for the school. Students then organized a fundraiser dance and used the proceeds to purchase the necessary supplies. The students were excited to meet peers in a different country and ask questions about their education. World language teachers helped translate and Spanish students were able to use what they've learned in class. After the Council shipped

supplies to the school, Principal, Jack Ceccolini, and Spanish teachers from Jockey Hollow and Masuk joined the Student Council for a group Skype event. Jockey Hollow students increased their global awareness and have communicated a great sense of pride in helping others as a result of this successful event!



## Monroe Public Schools Curriculum Maps are Available.

The District is proud to offer access to its curriculum maps for all courses and grade levels through the District website. To access the main link, visit the District homepage ([www.monroeps.org](http://www.monroeps.org)), choose Departments, then Curriculum and Instruction. The first option under Curriculum Links, on the left of the page, is Curriculum Maps K-12. The maps contain useful information about all courses offered in Monroe.





# Turf Coming to Masuk High School

Last spring, the Monroe Board of Education authorized forming a committee to analyze the facility needs of Masuk High School's stadium track and field. Knowing that the track had reached its lifespan, the Committee was tasked with presenting a new track, an all-purpose turf playing field, and several other upgrades, including sound and lighting.

The stadium Renovation Committee first met on June 8, 2015, to begin the initial work of securing a company to help prepare the design work for an upgraded facility. After carefully reviewing several requests for proposals, the Renovation Committee chose the firm of Milone and MacBroom as their design architects. The Renovation Committee, in close consultation with Milone and MacBroom, originally presented a \$2.2 mil-

lion project to the Board of Education and Town Council. After input from Town Council and the Board of Finance, the project was reduced to \$1.7 million. It was determined that the school system and the Masuk All Sports Booster Club would fundraise for the balance. In order to mitigate the \$500,000 difference, the Renovation Committee agreed that the lighting, sound, and security upgrades would fall to the fundraising efforts.

After presentations to the Town Council and the Board of Finance, the choice was left to the voters, via a town referendum. The track and field renovation project received overwhelming support by those voters who came out on March 8. Of the 1726 voters, 1231 approved the bond to renovate the track and field.

We are very excited about the improvements that will accompany our new facility. The

track will be resurfaced and an additional two sprint lanes will be created to accommodate league track meets. The turf field will grant near full access and use to the field regardless of weather conditions. This will create a safe, uniform playing surface and allow for games to be played and/or made up on a timely basis. From the outset, the track and field Renovation Committee was charged with researching the safest products for our student athletes. Although the effects of crumb rubber have not fully been detailed, the Committee was resolute in presenting an organic infill to protect the safety and well-being of our student athletes.

We are hoping to break ground right after graduation with the goal of playing our first game in early to mid-October. The Committee wants to thank the Town of Monroe for their support on this great endeavor.

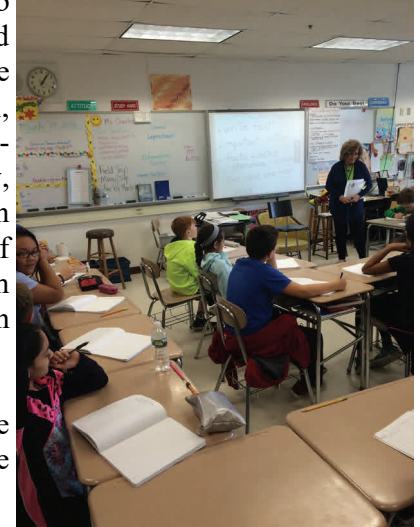


# Columbia University Writing Workshop Reaches Jockey Hollow.

This year, sixth graders have continued their use of the Writing Workshop protocol that they encountered throughout their elementary schools. With the help of Columbia Teachers College (TC) staff member, Heather Burns, the sixth grade language arts teachers have been trained in the three units of study: Narrative, Opinion, and Informational Writing. They have engaged in classroom lab experiences with our TC trainer, watching her lead the students through a lesson and then executing the instruction themselves. With the Columbia model, students learn the importance of planning, free writing, organizing, and publishing. Along the way, they work independently, in small groups, and in one-to-one conferences. Students find the subject of these units interesting and accessible, allowing them to develop their written communication skills in an engaging environment.



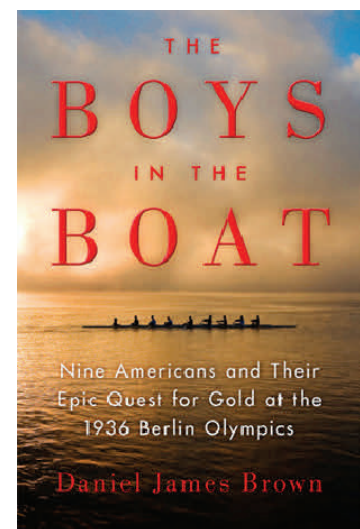
This training will continue with our seventh grade language arts teachers this spring and throughout the 2016-17 school year.



## Monroe Reads Together 2016

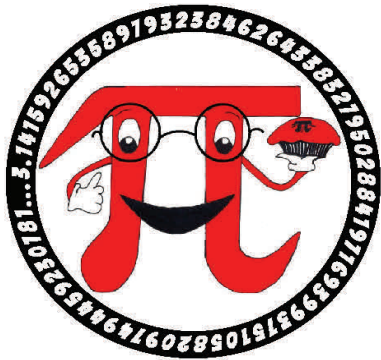
Monroe Reads Together is leading an annual town-wide reading for 2016. The book chosen this year is The Boys in the Boat which is about the U.S. Olympic Men's Crew in the 1936 Berlin Olympics. The book is a New York Times Bestseller and well worth your time. The Boys in the Boat is also available in a "young readers adaptation" which is geared to upper elementary and middle school students. Copies of both editions are available at Edith Wheeler Memorial Library, school libraries, and Linda's Story Time. This year's culminating event will be a panel discussion featuring na-

tional figures with direct knowledge about this book. Included on the panel are an Olympian, a historian, and a coach from the U.S. Coast Guard Academy. The panel moderator is Jim Agostine, Superintendent of Schools. The panel discussion is free to the public and will be held on March 29, at 7:00 PM, in the Jockey Hollow Auditorium. To learn more, please see our YouTube playlist by searching "Monroe Reads 2016" or by going to this link: [https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCQkhxyZb6AQAACMBG41eEpIXmMamO\\_ft](https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLCQkhxyZb6AQAACMBG41eEpIXmMamO_ft).





# PI DAY 5K



**MARCH 13, 2016**

The Second Annual Pi Day 5k took place on Sunday, March 13. Masuk math teachers, Mary Ahlers and Mari O'Rourke, coordinated this community wide run and celebration of the number pi (3.14159...). The weather was beautiful, and over 250 runners completed the race. Runners and walkers were treated to pie and refreshments afterwards. Senior, Samantha Roma, created the winning design for this year's race t-shirt.

The Pi Day 5k is the sole fundraiser for the Kathy Kuhl Memorial Scholarship. Each year, we honor Kathy by giving a scholarship to a graduating Masuk High School student who intends to pursue a math related degree in college. Last year, we were able to award a total of over \$4,000 in scholarship money to four graduating seniors, and we hope to be able to do the same this year. Seniors interested in applying for the scholarship should see Miss Ahlers, Masuk room J106, for an application and more information, or email her at [mahlers@monroeps.org](mailto:mahlers@monroeps.org).

Save the date for next year's Pi Day 5k, which will be held on Sunday, March 12, 2017. Information about the race can be found on our website: [www.piday5k.org](http://www.piday5k.org).

## Guys and Dolls Revived at Jockey Hollow



A new revival of the Broadway hit, *Guys and Dolls*, opened at Jockey Hollow Auditorium, on March 10 and continued for four sold out performances through March 12. Over 65 students were cast in the famous story of Broadway performers and gamblers from the 30s. The story of Nathan Detroit and his long suffering fiancé, Adelaide, and Sarah Brown's romance with gambler, Sky Masterson, was directed by Drama Director, David Halliwell,

and produced by Susan Halliwell. Musical direction was provided by Mike Martone, and sets were designed and built by Mike Demchak and Matt Curry, with the colorful and abundant period perfect costumes by Susan Russell. Playing in the orchestra were many former students from Masuk and, if you peeked, you would have seen Principal, Jack Ceccolini, on bass guitar. Truly an all school production, the show featured students from all three grades at the Middle School, had stage managers

from Masuk, spotlight operators and crew members from Masuk and Jockey Hollow crew. Audience members applauded a job well done and a lasting performance created by the cast and crew.



# Calculus, the Musical



On April 25, the Calculus students at Masuk will be treated to a presentation of *Calculus: the Musical!* in the High School Auditorium. This is a

traveling "comic review of the concepts and history of Calculus." Their performance is a blend of sketch comedy, musical theatre, and classroom lecture that uses musical parodies as a way of pre-

sending such concepts as limits, integration, and differentiation. For more information about this performance and to hear samples of their songs, you can go to <http://matheatre.com>.

## Fawn Hollow is Building a Bridge.

A number of fifth grade students at Fawn Hollow are dedicated to finding ways to improve the lives of others. At the beginning of the school year they met with Kids With A Cause advisors (fifth grade teacher, Katie Rzasa, and fourth grade teacher, Mary Ellen Mysogland) to research and plan activities for the year. They started the year with an all-school Food Drive for the Monroe Food Pantry, collecting nearly 300 pounds of food. As the year progressed, they assisted with the Fawn Hollow Penny Wars, collecting \$497 for a local charity. In February, they collected items for soldiers overseas and donated them to Project from the Heart. They made pinwheels for Syria to raise funds for refugees. Recently, they assisted the school's PBIS team in hanging a CARE quilt in the school's all purpose room. If you visited Fawn Hollow today, you would see posters for the St. Jude's math-a-thon displayed around the school. Club members are designing one-of-a-kind chairs to donate to the Parents' Night Out auction for the new school playground. Soon members will be introducing a Pet Photo Contest, with proceeds targeted for the Catherine Violet Hubbard Animal Sanctuary.

Membership in this organization has many benefits. Kids With A Cause gives students the opportunity to develop strong planning and organization skills. They discuss ways to publicize their events, write persuasive morning announcements, and create informative posters to display around the school. Members learn what it means to give back to our community, have fun with each other, and have opportunities to demonstrate compassion. They develop a sense of community and of belonging to a larger community which helps them become well-rounded individuals with a great sense of service.



## Monroe Public Schools Award Winning School District



Over the past few years, the schools in Monroe have achieved many awards and accolades. These include:

- Masuk High School is named a National Blue Ribbon School by the US Department of Education.
- Monroe School District was identified as an Excelling School District by the State Department of Education.
- Masuk High School, Monroe Elementary School, and Stepney named as Schools of Distinction by the State Department of Education. Only 123 out of 820 schools received this designation.
- Fawn Hollow was identified as a Progressing School by the State Department of Education, which places it in the top 40% of the schools in the State of Connecticut.
- Jockey Hollow Middle School was identified as an Excelling School by State Department of Education.
- Masuk High School was ranked 33 out of 193 public schools in Connecticut by US News and World Report Education Rankings in 2015.



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