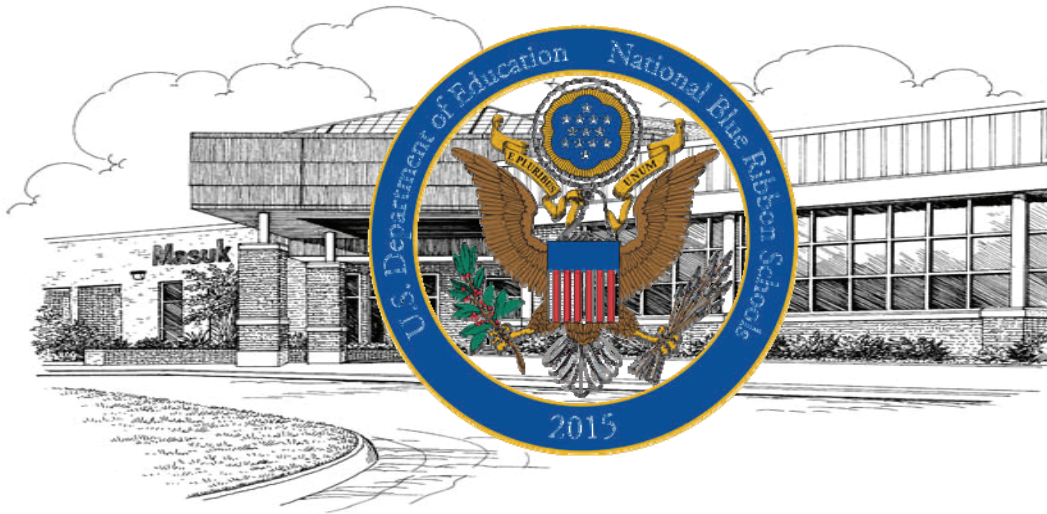


From Jim Agostine

Monroe's Superintendent of Schools

November 2015



Monroe Public Schools Dates

BOE Meetings

November 16, 2015

December 7, 2015

December 21, 2015

7:30 PM

Masuk High School Library

Professional Development

No School

November 3, 2015

Thanksgiving Recess

November 25, 26, & 27

No School

Budget Presentation Meetings

December 7, 2015

December 9, 2015

December 14, 2015

January 4, 2016

Masuk High School Library

Winter Recess

Early Release

December 23, 2015

No School

December 24— January 1

Dear Parents and Community Members,

I am pleased to report that we had a very smooth school opening on August 27, 2015. I am thrilled to have our students and faculty back. I look forward to a productive and learning filled year and the opportunity to work with you as we meet all the new challenges before us.

This year our Elementary Schools are implementing our new Math resource, Math in Focus. The program and all the support materials are being well received by students, staff, and parents. We are receiving training on the new materials periodically throughout the year to ensure we use them to their fullest potential.

In November 2014, the Board of Education voted to establish a Masuk High School Artificial Turf Building Committee to explore the possibility of a turf field in the current stadium. We budgeted funds to hire a design team to prepare feasibility studies, preliminary designs, and cost estimates for the project. Examination of the track and subsurface materials of the current field were done on October 12, and designs and cost estimates are now being prepared. During the winter of this school year, I expect to present the findings of the design team and to determine next steps with the Town.

Each new school year pre-

sents us with a new beginning and the hope of achieving new heights. This year is no different in that regard, and I am excited to reengage with all of you in the important work of educating your children. I look forward to working with all of you to make Monroe Public Schools the best school district in the State.

Sincerely,

Jim

Visit the "New" Monroe Public Schools Website

www.monroeps.org



Happy 80th Monroe Elementary

On June 4, 2015, Monroe Elementary School celebrated its 80th Birthday. In 1935, on that same day, the school's doors opened for the first time. It seems like an odd time of year to open a new school. We learned from Nancy Zorena, a former Monroe Elementary School teacher and a current Monroe Historical Society member, that it was part of the master plan. Our forefathers thought it would be best for the children to meet before the summer break, starting the next school year having already established some new friendships.

The funding for building the school was provided through a federal government program, the WPA (Work Projects Administration), that created jobs for those unemployed during the great depression.

The school is unique in its appearance, being built with local fieldstone.

The school was first named Monroe Consolidated School, gathering the students from the Town's one room school houses. To celebrate our school's milestone, the P.T.O. provided funds for a new beautiful mural, which now adorns our wall in the cafeteria. The mural, painted by Michael Kramer, depicts an historical scene with a school house, fruit and vegetable peddler, and children playing around a maypole.

We feel very fortunate to be a part of Monroe's rich history as we continue to educate the children of our commu-

nity and work together with their families to provide activities to enrich their experience at school.



*Monroe Elementary School
1935*



Math in Focus Proves Successful

Following a lengthy and thoughtful process that took place in the 2014-2015 school year, Monroe Public Schools has adopted Houghton Mifflin's Math in Focus as its primary math instructional resource for use in K-5 classrooms.

Math in Focus is being used by elementary schools across the State of Connecticut and throughout the nation. An integral part of this implementation is to provide all K-5 teachers with intensive training, which in-

cludes specific grade-level demonstration lessons in classrooms at all three elementary schools.

This professional development plan will be delivered by Math in Focus Staff Developers and is scheduled to take place in September, November, and March of this school year. Think Central, the Math in Focus online portal, offers students and parents support through its student textbooks, student workbooks, parent support videos, and virtual manipulatives.



Trainers from Columbia Teachers College Model Lessons from the Math in Focus Mathematics Resources.

Masuk Teacher Attends DC Summer Institute



Over the summer, Masuk Social Studies teacher Jamie Sherry was selected to attend the Federal Trials and Great Debates in U.S. History 2015 Summer Institute for Teachers. In this Washington D.C. summer institute, she joined 19 other teachers from around the United States and Puerto Rico. The institute's focus was exploring famous trials of history with a civil rights focus. Also included was a visit to a

Federal District court in Maryland and the United States Supreme Court. After the Supreme Court session, Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg spoke to the group of educators on current cases and historical challenges of the court. Sherry learned a lot about the courts and is excited to share with her fellow Social Studies teachers and students.

How to Sell a Book

Throughout their middle school experience, students focus on their speaking and listening skills with periodic Book Talks. These presentations require students to summarize the plot and characters of works they have read independently, highlighting the positives and (sometimes) negatives of the texts. The goal is to encourage or dissuade their peers from choosing the books for themselves in the coming months. Seventh grade teacher, Holly Lever, recognized that her students would benefit from some expert help in this area, especially in communicating their passion for reading. She contacted Linda Devlin, owner

of Monroe book store, Linda's Story Time, to conduct her own Book Talks with Lever's language arts classes. Devlin comes to Jockey Hollow with a carton of books in tow and enthusiastically explains why each work is worthy of their time. The students learn how to engage their audience with eye contact, energy, and humor. Devlin embraces the opportunity to come into the school, "I love to do book talks for middle school kids. It's fun to share my favorite books with them and get their reactions close-up. I think they enjoy my...let's call them "energetic performances"...which help convey the

exciting stories books can offer. I also get to show them how a bookseller makes a living. It is a great way to pair community with school. For me, I can see what kids their age respond to, which helps me in my profession." After Devlin's thirty minute presentation, students have a deeper understanding of the power of Book Talks and a long list of books they'll want to devour in the coming months.

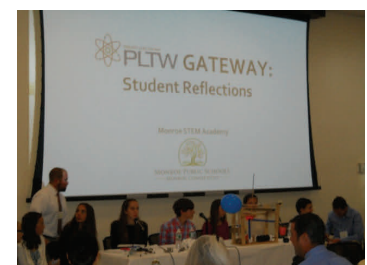


Project Lead the Way

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 Detectives, 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 prob-

lem-solving skills to be successful." Jockey Hollow School has offered PLTW courses since 2011.



“GENIUSES” at Jockey Hollow

Grade seven students are GENIUSES! This year, all seventh graders will begin to learn the research process by participating in the “Genius Hour” for four weeks during their Student Success Planning rotation. The idea of Genius Hour comes from the Google Corporate practice of giving their employees 20% of their work week to develop ideas, explore innovative projects, create new products, and explore their passions. Gmail, Google Scholar, Google News are examples of products developed by Google employees during their 20% Time.

Schools have adopted the concept with exciting results. Called by a variety of names--Passion Projects, 20% Time, Mastery Time, Wonder Time--the idea is that when given time to explore and develop ideas and topics that they are deeply interested in, students will harness their innate curiosity, creativity, and ingenuity to solve real world challenges and develop their unique talents. While still in the “development and refinement” phase, our Jockey Hollow Geniuses have explored an amazing array of topics: “Living with Dyslexia” “How is Dog Vision Different From Human Vision?” “What Happens When

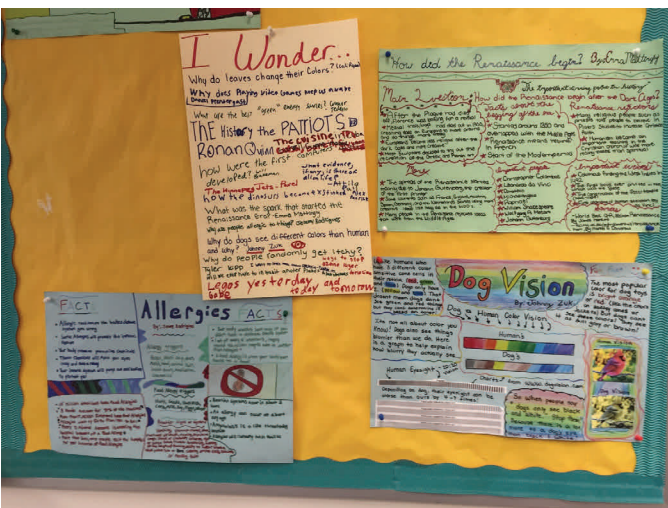
We Dream?” They now have special time to explore these “wonders” and share what they learn with their peers.

We, at Jockey Hollow, are fortunate to have blocks of time during exploratory rotations to allow all of our seventh graders to experience Genius Hour. Four weeks of our Student Success Planning rotation is dedicated to giving students at Main Campus the opportunity to explore their passions, satisfy their curiosity, and develop their creativity. The underpinning of all this creativity and exploratory excitement is the development of standards-based instruction in sound Information Literacy skills.

Students learn how to find information in a variety of sources. They learn how to construct internet searches that yield pertinent web sites. They learn to use our library catalog to find information books on their topics. Most importantly, they learn how to evaluate information they find on the Web, and they demonstrate what they've learned by creating a presentation of their choosing. Of course, they'll learn how to cite every source they use. The Genius part comes into play as they investigate a topic of their choosing what they find interesting,

what they wonder about, what issues they feel passionate about. We hope that this short project will help prepare our seventh graders for the Independent Research Projects they'll tackle in eighth grade.

Grade eight students, having learned how to become GENIUSES in seventh grade, are now expected to expand on their knowledge by exploring their interests in a school-year long, inquiry based, independent research project. Students will choose an area of study that they find intriguing; perhaps there is something that they would like to create that will benefit the community; maybe they have a career objective that they'd like to explore. Whatever it is that kids are interested in, whatever they want to explore, is fair game for a school-year long project. Because this project will take all year, students will have the luxury of time to gather information and students will create a hands-on presentation of what they've learned so that parents, teachers, and school administrators can see the fruits of their labors. Teacher facilitators for the Independent Research course are Amy Alterman, Jan Birney, Doug DeVecchio, Judy Fusti, Steve Horvath, Holly Lever, and Julie Mancini.



what they wonder about, what issues they feel passionate about. We hope that this short project will help prepare our seventh graders for the Independent Research Projects they'll tackle in eighth grade.

Grade eight students, having learned how to become GENIUSES in seventh



Monroe Educators board a bus to take part in the 88th Saturday Writers Workshop at Columbia University.



Principal Kosisko summed up the day this way, "Attending the Saturday Reunion with colleagues is enriching and inspirational. We can't wait to share and implement the strategies learned. Monroe students are stronger readers and writers because of our partnership with Teachers College."

The 88th Saturday Reunion at Columbia U

On Saturday, March 28, 2015, 20 teachers; Principal of Fawn Hollow Elementary, Rebecca Kosisko; and K-5 English Language Arts Coordinator, Debbie Walls, headed down to NYC for a Saturday field trip. The Monroe educators boarded a bus from the parking lot at Fawn Hollow Elementary School, at 6:30 a.m., to join educators from around the country to attend the 88th Saturday Reunion.

For one Saturday in both the spring and the fall, the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project opens its doors to thousands of educators. Each Saturday Reunion offers keynotes and closings by renowned authors and leaders in the field of education. The reunion included over 125 workshops on such topics as: argument writing, embedding historical fiction in nonfiction text sets, opinion writing for very young writers, managing workshop instruction, aligning instruction to the CCSS, using performance assessments and curriculum maps to ratchet up the level of teaching, phonics, guided reading and more. Senior Project staff, including Lucy Calkins and all TCRWP staff developers, present on each of these Saturdays. The day is free of charge and no registration is required.

Last year's spring event welcomed more than 4,000 participants. Patricia Polacco, award-winning author and illustrator of more than

90 picture books for children including *Pink and Say*, *In Our Mother's House*, and *The Keeping Quilt*, welcomed the crowd as the keynote speaker. Polacco often draws from her own childhood and extended immigrant family to illustrate timeless themes. Patricia's books are classroom favorites of both students and teachers in Monroe. The teachers were thrilled to hear her speak in person.

After a day full of learning, the Monroe teachers boarded their bus for the return trip to Monroe. The bus ride home was filled with chatter and excitement from the teachers about the new strategies they learned from their workshops, and how they would implement their new learning on Monday morning! First grade teacher, Jamie Crenwick, stated, "The Saturday Reunion at Columbia University was an uplifting day. It was amazing to know that each educator that attended was there to gain knowledge about being a more effective teacher of reading and writing. Author Patricia Polacco gave the convocation and said that teachers are her heroes and that we are inspiring souls and changing lives. She made me remember what I was called to do, be an advocate for the children, and try to light a spark for the love of learning in each child that I teach. I believe that novice and veteran teachers all benefit from this day of learning."



French and Spanish in Monroe

Last May, students in upper level French and Spanish courses took the AAPPL speaking proficiency assessment. The World Languages Department is proud that 85% of students showed improvement of at least one full proficiency level from the previous year. This year, the Department is pleased to offer all French and Spanish students the opportunity to participate in AAPPL, thereby enabling them to track their improvement over time in their chosen language. Details about this innovative measure of proficiency can be found at <http://aappl.actfl.org>.

Fawn Hollow is Full of Wonder



What is a rhombicosidodecahedron or a googol? Ask a Fawn Hollow student and you may get the answer! On October 8, science and math author, David Schwartz, demonstrated Math is Everywhere to Fawn Hollow students. Through stories and pictures, students explored concepts such as symmetry, large numbers, and estimation and were encouraged by David to wonder. This cultural event, brought to Fawn Hollow by their PTO, followed a September 25 Hispanic Heritage presentation, where Tere Luna and the Mariachi Emperadores de Puebla shared with students Mexican culture and music.

These cultural events extend learning for Fawn Hollow students and provide background knowledge for reading, writing, science, and math. Students have completed a narrative writing and fiction reading unit and are moving into non-fiction reading and writing. They are wondering in science, as they explore scientific models and designs and create humdingers, observe and record the decomposition of a potato, and build rafts that float and have less density than water. David Schwartz's discussions of tens through millions fit right in with our math learning of place value, mental math, and estimation.

Did you ever wonder what it's like to play an instrument? Well, eighty fifth

graders at Fawn Hollow are going to be able to answer that question this year. Fifth grade instrumental music ensembles began in October with 35 students studying a band instrument, and 45 students learning how to play a stringed instrument.

Primary students at Fawn Hollow met with Officer Mike Sweeney for a Stranger Danger program where they learned strategies to use when encountering strangers. As October is Fire Prevention Month, they were also treated to a visit by the Monroe Fire Department where they practiced stop, drop, and roll and learned a number of ways to be safe at home.



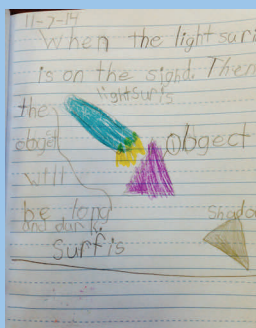
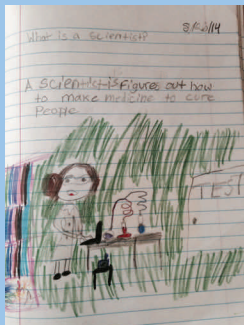
The Fawn Hollow PBIS program kicked-off the year with a new video produced by Fawn Hollow teachers, Karen Fontneau, Rebecca Coppola, and Rob Troesser, and starring Fawn Hollow fifth graders. K-5 students learned how to choose responsibility, act safely, respect others, everywhere through an entertaining series of skits and vignettes. The kick-off ended with students singing the Fawn Hollow CARE song, composed by Mr. Peterson. If you're wondering what it sounds like, you can hear students singing on the Fawn Hollow website.

A number of Fawn Hollow teachers have traveled to NYC this fall to attend workshops at Columbia Teachers College. Topics have included Transferable Small Group Work that Can Really Move Readers and Writers; Non-Fiction Text Complexity; Toolkits for Supporting Diverse Learners; Strengthening Structures to Support the Teaching of Phonics and Spelling and Launching the Writing Workshop. Most recently, teachers attended The Art of Teaching with Digital Literacies. As students move away from print reading and journey into a world of literacy that is visual, sensory, and technologically loaded in other ways, they need skills to interact with multimedia. This workshop emphasized the ever-changing skills required for accessing, researching, reading, and communicating information digitally. Teachers return from these workshops re-energized and filled with excitement for teaching using new skills and strategies.

This is only the beginning as there are many more wonderful opportunities for learning in store for the Fawn Hollow community this year.



K-5 Elementary Science



Samples of Grade Five and Grade One Notebooking in Science



It was a good day for Masuk students to speak directly to their Representative in Congress about the issues they care about.

At the Connecticut Science Supervisors Association meeting in October, educators posed a question about the future of science education in our state. They wondered what skills and knowledge were essential for students to learn in today's world that will truly prepare them for their future world. A world in which 70% of the jobs they will need to fill, do not yet exist!

Dr. Dianna Wentzell Commissioner, CT State Department of Education, helped us think through this quandary. Her first suggestion was that communication skills are a priority. Successful people will use communication strategies to share what they know with those around them in all situations, personal and professional. Science knowledge becomes useful when shared. It can bring change and solve world problems. Our students need preparation for that demand. After communication, Dr. Wentzell suggested that problem-solving skills will remain significant for success at any point in time. In Monroe, our K-5 students engage in science learning through inquiry and problem solving approaches. In effect, students are practicing

the roles of scientist and engineer. As science educators await the adoption of new Connecticut State Standards in Science, the guidance from Dr. Wentzell helps us understand that we are indeed putting our students on the path for success.

In our elementary grades, students observe and record like scientists in their science notebooks. This is one way students build strategies to communicate with others. Students use their senses and tools to make observations, record discoveries, and share. They demonstrate thinking in words, and visual representations. This is the work of scientists and our students. Students engage in problem-solving and engineering design from kindergarten through fifth grade. Whether designing shelters, electric circuits, or humdingers and instruments, our students are preparing to be creative engineers of the future. Communicating and problem-solving are priorities for science education in Monroe, and meaningful life-long skills for all students of today and tomorrow.

Congressman Jim Himes Visits Masuk High

Congressman Jim Himes, Representative for the District 4, visited Masuk High School on October 17. AP Government and Politics students met the Congressman in the library for a brief presentation followed by a question and answer period. Providing a history lesson on the founders' intent in creating multiple branches, Himes emphasized the close connection of Members of the House to their constituents. Contrasting the more distant relationship of the Senate, President, and Supreme Court, Congressman Himes told the classes, "It's fun for me. I get to live over here in the most democratic branch of our government." Presenting a positive message, Himes addressed the students about the parti-

sanship that has divided Congress. "Don't be too discouraged by that fight. It's really important. It should be more polite, but we should relish that fight. At the end of the day, you come up with a compromise that represents the ideas of everyone. It's how we settle our differences." Referencing nations like North Korea, where partisanship does not exist, Himes said, "There are lots of countries where you don't get to argue without jeopardizing your own safety." Himes ended his presentation by encouraging the students to be active and informed citizens and to vote for whichever party they support.

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Masuk High School 2015 National Blue Ribbon School



The success that Masuk High School enjoys is directly related to its human resources. Masuk benefits from a highly dedicated and collaborative staff, involved families, and a respectful and motivated student body. The teachers and support staff work closely to align curriculum and promote instructional practices that foster success. At the heart of the instructional approaches, is a commitment to student centered learning that both enables and empowers our students to take ownership in the learning process. During the 2013-14 school year, the Monroe Public Schools created

Instructional Leader positions in each academic area. The Instructional Leaders, who are responsible for curriculum and instruction in grades 6-12, have had a tremendous impact on our learning environment. They have aligned curriculum and fostered a sense of collegiality among the faculty, creating a trusting environment where our teachers collaborate regularly to implement best practice strategies. This shift in leadership combined with a dedicated and receptive staff and has resulted in a working environment characterized by mutual trust and an enduring focus on teaching and learning. In addition to the

curricular and instructional emphasis, Masuk High School has made a concerted effort to improve communication between school and home. For the last three years, the staff has embraced a communication goal. Teachers have used a variety of tools, including teacher websites, email, social media, Google Apps for Education, and the traditional phone call to offer parents and guardians many ways to be involved in their child's education. School and district surveys have reported overwhelming parental approval for this initiative.