

November 2012



Newtown Public Schools

Superintendent's Newsletter

Janet Robinson, Ph.D.,
Superintendent of Schools

Linda Gejda, Ed.D.,
Assistant Superintendent

A note from the Superintendent...

Board Meetings 2012

November 20
December 4
December 18

Budget Meetings

January 8
January 10
January 15
January 17
January 23
January 24
January 29
January 31

Board Members

Debbie Leidlein, Chair
Laura Roche, Vice Chair
Cody McCubbin, Secretary
William Hart
Richard Gaines
Keith Alexander
John Vouros



Come visit us at
Fairfield Hills Campus or
on the web at
www.newtown.k12.ct.us

Greetings to our Newtown community,

Just as we were all emerging from our hurricane Sandy trials, I thought we could be enjoying getting back to some normalcy, but a nor'easter just had to blow in and test our patience again. With 5 days of school missed due to Sandy, we are fortunate that we were able to have school with a delay.

Janet Robinson, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

This newsletter will focus on some of the work that our conscientious staff does during their summer to continue to grow as effective teachers to the benefit of our students. As our focus continues on literacy, you might note that K - 8 teachers are attending Columbia University courses on Readers' Workshop. Additional training will be ongoing throughout the year on these strategies and you can expect to see this reflected in your child reading a great variety of books, with increased emphasis on nonfiction.

Our designated early release days will be focused on developing performance based assessments which require students to apply their skills and knowledge to real life situations and to using thoughtful problem solving strategies. This is an important part of acquiring 21st Century skills. It is exciting watching students engaged in this type of work as they are researching, using previously learned material, collaborating, and stretching their imaginations. This will serve them well as they go through life.

Our work on concept based curriculum and best practices for instructional strategies is being validated as our CMT and CAPT scores have gone up steadily every year for the last 4 years, and this year our students' performance ranked in the top 5 in our district reference group (DRG) in 14 subtests. At the Middle School we ranked #1 in reading and math.

We are entering an era of change in education that is unprecedented. We will be introducing the new Common Core State Standards at all levels, and the tests replacing the CMT/CAPT will reflect these standards. The first state to make this change, Kentucky, saw a decrease in performance when students were assessed with the new tests. We will be conducting parent workshops this year to introduce the standards to parents and answer questions.

Cont. on page 2

Also, new to education is a new teacher evaluation plan that is being piloted this year. This state mandate is the first time that teacher evaluations have been standardized at the state level and it requires training for staff and an increased number of teacher observations. The implementation of the administrator evaluation will follow shortly. There is tremendous accountability for student achievement in the new plan. What this means for parents: you should expect to receive surveys to fill out as part of this evaluation process; and students will have not only standardized tests but also other tests in every content area (even P.E., art, music)

that will be linked to a teacher's evaluation.

We have been so fortunate in Newtown as we have been able to attract, develop, and keep dedicated and gifted teachers. Even with the limited resources, we see students achieving because of the quality of instruction, but we always want to improve. This mindset of continuous improvement for the sake of our students is a cornerstone of our beliefs in Newtown. We want to continue to work as partners with parents as research has shown that parents who support education tend to have successful children. We want every one of your children to reach their dreams.



NICE Partnership With France Brings Educators to Newtown

by Jennifer Davidson

The Newtown International Center for Education (NICE) expanded its global footprint in a significant way last year when it created a formal sister school alliance with Lycée Alain in Le Vésinet, France. This partnership marked NICE's first partnership with a European school. Interestingly, NICE and Lycée Alain came into contact with each other in China in 2011 through their common partnership with Upper Middle School No.3 in Liaocheng.

The France-US relationship is already moving forward quickly. Two educators from Lycée Alain, Claire Choquet and Valérie Zink, are spending a week in Newtown to work with their Newtown High School counterparts, Jennifer Davidson and Paula Greenfield, to lay the foundation for future student exchanges to and from France and explore ways to deepen the sister school partnership. Concurrently, the teachers from France will have the opportunity to learn more about the US educational system, familiarize themselves with the Newtown school district and its teachers and administrators, and expose themselves to US culture through several area excursions.



Newtown High School Principal Charles Dumais, Assistant Principal Jason Hiruo, French delegates Claire Choquet and Valerie Zink, and Newtown High School French teachers Paula Greenfield and Jennifer Davidson.

Choquet and Zink had originally planned to travel with a third colleague, Marine Scheller, until Superstorm Sandy forced a rescheduling of their trip. They are staying with host families (the Chaloux and Schwartz families) while in Newtown. On behalf of the principal of their school, Choquet and Zink have expressed deep sympathy for the losses our area suffered during the storm. They are extremely grateful that we have welcomed them just a week after the hurricane and are looking forward to getting to know Newtown and its schools.

The next step in the NICE-Lycée Alain partnership will be student exchanges. Twenty-six students from Le Vésinet will be coming to Newtown at the end of March, and twenty-three NHS students will travel to France during April recess. On both sides of the Atlantic, students will be staying with local host families while attending the high school and participating in

cultural tours of the region. Fortunately, Lycée Alain, a school of 1,100 students, is in a suburb of Paris, and an easy 20-minute train ride will bring students to the heart of the city, making for wonderful, enriching cultural opportunities for the Newtown students during their stay in France.

Jason Hiruo, Coordinator of NICE, is thrilled at the speed with which this partnership has progressed. Hiruo is confident of the success of Choquet and Zink’s visit because of the interest expressed about their visit by Newtown teachers and building administrators. As such, the teachers from France will be exposed to as much of the school district and its dedicated faculty as possible during their week in Newtown. Hiruo is anticipating that Lycée Alain will be the first of several European sister school alliances for NICE in the years to come.



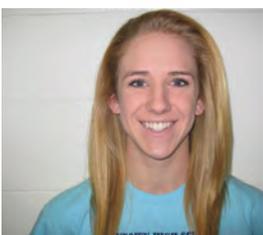
International Education Week

November 12-16, 2012

Newtown Middle School 7th & 8th graders participated in International Education Week by dressing in clothing representative of a specific country, or by sharing a message in a foreign language with the entire school during morning announcements!



Newtown High School Student is Awarded Intellectual Patent from Science Project



Zoe Eggleston, Senior
Newtown High School

by Sally Martinelli

For some students, their epiphany moment—when young adults discover their passion or talent for something—comes from taking a certain class or becoming acquainted with a specific teacher. For Newtown High School senior Zoe Eggleston, all it took was a science project.

When Eggleston was an eighth grader at the Newtown Middle School, science teacher Beverly Andracci assigned an independent create-your-own project.

“Zoe came home from class and told us that she had to do a big project, and that she chose to do a research paper,” Kathryn Mayer, Eggleston’s mom said. “I said, ‘You’re kidding. For a science project? This is going to be torture.’ We went over the list of options together, and saw there was a make an invention option.”

Four years later, that invention’s idea would be awarded U.S. Patent No. 8,299,931.

“I invented the Ice Device, which uses pulleys and other mechanisms to test the thickness of ice without having to step onto possibly dangerous grounds” Eggleston said. She partly attributed the idea to her fear of going out onto the ice and having it break underneath her feet.

“She came up with the idea of making something to test the thickness of the ice right away,” Brad Eggleston, Zoe’s father, said. “Then, she spent months messing around upstairs in her room. She would draw something, bring it downstairs and say ‘Do you think this would work?’ She got into it and really liked doing it.”

After toying with almost fourteen different sketches, Eggleston figure out the most effective model and crafted it from a child’s keyboard and PVC pipe. She went into school and handed it in. NMS moved Zoe onto the Connecticut Invention Convention, where she presented her Ice Device. “It wasn’t a big deal at all because I didn’t think much about it,” Eggleston said.

For her mom, going to the Convention itself was a fluke thing. “We almost left early to go to a travel soccer game,” Mayer admitted. “But, I texted Brad and told him how cool it was and that we were going to stay.”

After hanging around and checking out other inventions for most of the evening, mother and daughter figured they would finish out the night by watching the awards ceremony.

As it turned out, Eggleston ended up being the star of the show, receiving the McCormack, Paulding, & Huber Patent Award. This award allowed Eggleston to work with the company’s patent lawyers (who design schematics, research the market to make sure there are not similar products already out there, etc) and apply for a free application and a patent if applicable.

When they announced the Ice Device, Mayer confesses she got a little emotional. “I was absolutely floored. Looking back, I can see just how much the [Connecticut Invention Convention] changed her life. She found people that thought like she did,” Mayer said.

Winning the award gave Eggleston opportunities such as being a Student Representative for the CIC at the Connecticut Forum of Creativity, and presenting at the Connecticut Women of Innovation Award Ceremony, but, according to Eggleston, it gave her so much more.

“The [McCormack, Paulding, & Huber Patent Award] has pushed me to think about math and

sciences more and to look into technology, which I had no idea I was into before,” Eggleston said. “But now, I see that I think this way. I’m a problem solver.”

This realization kindled Zoe’s passion for science. She took PowerTech, Physics and Drafting in high school, and has applied to engineering schools. Right before she hit “Submit,” Eggleston received a letter concerning her patent.

“We really struggled with whether or not we should open the letter,” Brad Eggleston said. “When you apply to college you can say ‘patent pending,’ but if we knew her patent was denied we would have had to put that on her application. It would have been like it never happened. Zoe decided to open it, and she got it.”

Eggleston now has a press conference with a company through the CIC regarding the manufacturing and the advertisement of her product.

As of now, she has no plans to sell her idea. “I want to keep it because it is my first thing and I know there are going to be more coming,” Eggleston said. “I want to keep ownership of it.”

When asked whether or not fans would be seeing Eggleston on ABC’s reality TV show Shark Tank, Zoe laughed. “Everyone keeps asking me that,” Eggleston said. “Maybe some day. This is just the beginning.”

Sally Martinelli is the Managing Editor of The Hawkeye, Newtown High School’s Newspaper





Newtown Students Show Continuous Improvement in State Testing

by Linda Gejda, Ed.D., Assistant Superintendent

In March 2012, Newtown students in grades 3-8 took the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and students in grade 10 took the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT). In this generation of the CMT (2006-12), Newtown students' performance continued to improve. In more than half of the subtests given in Math, Reading, Writing and Science, 90% or more scored at or above the state goal. Student performance in mathematics continues to be exceptionally strong overall. The Third Generation Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) was administered to tenth grade students. Student performance has significantly improved over the past six years, with the highest performance in 2012. Vertical Scale graphs and further state assessment information can be accessed at the State Department of Education assessment website at www.ctreports.com

In addition to looking at our performance over time, residents are often interested in Newtown schools' performance compared to similar districts. The following table displays Newtown's 2012 performance compared to members of our DRG:

2012 CMT/CAPT District Reference Group (DRG) Comparison

% At/Above Goal

	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 10
Math	1	3	11	3	1	1	9
Reading	8	8	10	7	1	2*	10*
Writing	4	5	2*	5	2	2	8*
Science			13			3	5

*Tied with another District

Improved student performance on state assessments is particularly notable because Newtown schools are in the process of preparing for the administration of a new state assessment to be administered in 2015. The new assessment will focus on the standards identified by the Common Core State Standards, a document adopted by more than 45 states. As teachers implement changes in literacy and mathematics curricula, they are also maintaining a high level of performance on current state assessments. Kudos to students and teachers for a job well done!



*This year's
CMT/CAPT Testing is
March 1 - 28, 2013*



Teachers Inspired To Excel

The archetypal returning to school essay is “What did I do on my summer vacation?” Teachers spent the time between school’s closing June 21st and reopening August 23rd learning to improve their content knowledge and their teaching craft. This article provides a small sampling of what Newtown teachers were involved in and illustrates their alignment with the district mission as they are “inspired to excel.”

Technology

Technology continually evolves and offers new learning opportunities. While only one tool of 21st century learning, it is one that constantly evolves. Students are natives to technology; many teachers are immigrating. To keep up with the technology natives, some teachers use the summer to stay leaders in this area. Over the summer, **Kathleen Dye** (NMS) completed a graduate workshop on technology for educators, including web site design and development. **Kristin Violette** (NHS) participated in a seminar at MIT for App Inventor developers and teaching techniques. She also participated in a CT Computer Science Association (CTCSA) three-day seminar at Quinnipiac University. Self-disciplined, **Jen Davidson** (NHS) worked to find as many useful online resources for her world language students as possible, everything from grammar to music to culture. Her students will be using these sites throughout the year for day-to-day reference as well as for larger projects.

Travel

Teachers traveled with the specific purpose of bringing culture back to their classrooms, enhancing student global awareness. A 21st century citizen advantage. **Amy Repay, Team Project Leader for NICE and NHS** Social Studies teacher, was selected as the third representative from Newtown to participate on the national Japan Study Team. Ms. Repay spent three weeks traveling throughout Japan immersed in its culture, history and beauty. Amy



Amy Repay

visited cities and regional communities of Kyoto, Nara, Nagoya, Hiroshima, Wakayama, Tokyo and Nikko.

As one of ten educators from the United States chosen by Japan Society headquarters, Amy was part of the Japan National Educators Tour that runs every summer. This was a life changing experience that brought life and breath to what she loves to teach and now brings significant personal experience to share with her students.

Kevin Grady (NHS) spent two weeks in Turkey visiting over 30 ancient sites spanning the Hittite, Greek, Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman periods. His Latin students will definitely benefit from Mr. Grady’s exposure to these areas.

Paula Greenfield (NHS) traveled to Morocco for 2 weeks and learned firsthand about a francophone country.

Don Ramsey (NMS) attended a two-day conference entitled, “The Global Leadership Conference.” World-renowned speakers included corporate CEOs, political figures, humanitarian pioneers, and church leaders around the world such as: Condoleezza Rice, former Secretary of State; Pranitha Timothy, Director of Aftercare International Justice Mission (freeing slaves in India and promoting their recovery); William Ury, Co-Founder and Senior Fellow at Harvard University’s Program on Negotiation and author of the book, *Getting to Yes*; Patrick Lencioni, Founder and President of The Table Group, a consulting firm on “organizational health”; and Sheryl Wudunn, Pulitzer Prize winning author, business executive, and activist for gender equity. This conference provided invaluable insights into issues of leadership that translate into Mr. Ramsey’s ability to present sound leadership concepts to students for success in the 21st century society. It also provided insights into organizational health that Don says, “will render me a better staff member in the district as well as a more effective member of the community as an advocate for the students I serve.”

In addition to the above, Mr. Ramsey hiked two major mountains: the Northeast’s highest peak, Mt. Washington, in New Hampshire, and Mt. Katahdin in central Maine. He participated in a “Marine Biology” excursion in Bar Harbor, Maine. All three of these experiences provided him with a historical perspective in conjunction with Science and Technology directly

applicable to the subject he teaches at Newtown Middle School (Technology Education).

Kathy Boettner (NHS AP) and **Cathy Ostar** (NHS Guidance Dept. Chair) traveled to Phoenix, Arizona to attend the 2012 Naviance Summer Institute. This opportunity was funded through a CT Dept. of Education grant received by Peg Ragaini (NHS Career Center) to help our district move forward with implementation of student success plans.

Curriculum

An estimated 154 teachers participated in curriculum writing and curriculum training workshops during the summer. Curriculum is a staple of summer professional development. It directly links to this year's district initiative on assessment and the need to align all documents with the Common Core State Standards. A quality curriculum is second only to quality classroom teachers in its impact on student learning, according to *Visible Learning for Teachers: Maximizing Impact On Learning* by John Hattie.

On a similar note, **Kathleen Dye** (NMS) also finished a course on program evaluation for middle school curriculum and instruction.

Reading

A number of Newtown teachers have been engaged in Columbia University Teachers' College Reading Workshop Training. **Pam Kohn** (RIS) described her experience with Reading Workshop: "I attended the Columbia Reading Workshop Training in NYC this summer! It was an inspiring week-long adventure. The caliber of speakers was outstanding, and I can't wait to share some of the practices with my students and colleagues." Pam Kohn is a member of the district Professional Development Committee and frequently offers workshops based on her new learning.

Becky Virgalla (SHS) attended the K-2 Reading Workshop training offered at the Reed School for four days in July, and two weeks later, she was "privileged to attend" Reading Workshop training for grades 3-5 at Teachers' College, Columbia University for five days. She wrote, "Both were very inspirational experiences!" As a district Language Arts consultant, Becky will be working with elementary teachers in their implementation of this program.

Sandy Hook principal, Dawn Hochsprung,

summarized the work her staff has been engaged in: "For the past year, Sandy Hook teachers have been focused on increasing students' independence as learners, expanding opportunities for student discourse, and raising the level of rigor in our questioning. This summer, eighteen Sandy Hook educators participated in week-long Reading Workshop training. Most attended Newtown's Homegrown Institute in July, and several traveled to The Teachers College at Columbia University. Our faculty also read Lucy Calkins' *Pathways to the Common Core*. We are excited to implement all of our new learning in Sandy Hook classrooms and to share our growth with our colleagues!"

Lead Teacher, **Natalie Hammond** (SHS) affirmed the excitement and quality of the Reading Workshop.

AP Classes

Newtown High School has been adding to its Advanced Placement course offerings. Teachers who teach AP classes often attend summer sessions to update skills and content in their respective disciplines. This is the first year World Language is offering AP classes in addition to UConn courses.

Taft School hosts AP training and the following NHS teachers attended summer sessions: **Paula Greenfield** (AP French Language and Culture), **Liz Ward-De Leon** and **Caroline Napoli** (AP Spanish), and **Rose Mikasauskas** (AP Latin sessions). **Caroline Napoli** highlighted some specifics, "We attended a week-long... course...(which was) led by the College Board and provided high school Spanish educators from around the country the opportunity to learn about the current AP test format as well as the changes which will occur in the 2014 Exam. The sessions took place from 8:00am- 4:00pm daily and participants discussed best practices in preparing students for the exam, and reviewed and created activities to strengthen students' skills in the three types of communication tested on the exam: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and presentational." Ms. Napoli and Mrs. Ward look forward to teaching the class and to sharing what they learned at Taft with their colleagues to work towards vertically aligning the World Language curriculum. English teachers **Elizabeth Hanna** (AP Language and Composition) and **Jacob Thomas** (AP Language and Composition) also attended the week-long AP Taft Institute.

Assessment

Assessment is the 2012-13 focus of the district's Professional Learning Communities that meet on early release days. Enhancing their understanding of the value of assessment, Newtown teachers were involved in various professional development



Kris Kelso

activities. **Peter Bernson** (RIS) spent seven days involved with Formative Assessment through the CT Science Center. **Sherry Earle** (NHS), **Linda Gejda** (Asst. Superintendent), **Kris Kelso** (NHS), **Susan McConnell** (NHS), **Jaime Rivera** (NHS) attended the Quality Performance Assessment Workshop from July 16-19 in Boston, Mass.

Teachers Teaching Teachers

Important learning happens when teachers coach each other in the craft of teaching. **Kris Feda** (SHS), **Liesl Fressola** (SHS), **Leslie Regensburger** (MGs), **Tim Napolitano** (RIS), **Peter Bernson** (RIS) and **Todd Stentiford** (RIS) spent two days working with teachers in the region on instructional coaching as part of the Danbury Elementary Science Instructional Coaching Academy as STEM grant participants.

Dr. Anthony Salvatore (NMS AP) renewed his T.E.A.M. Trainer "status" and TEAM paper Reviewer with the State Dept. at ACES in Hamden. TEAM is the support program for new teachers and training renewal is required for all district personnel who engage in this program. Dr. Salvatore also mentioned "professional reading is always an ongoing and lifelong activity!"

Similar to coaching, some teachers availed themselves of opportunities to learn from others. On August 10th, **Marty Swanhall** (NHS) attended EdcampCT at the Ethel Walker School in Simsbury, CT. Edcamps are unconfederated PD Days, that is, there are no hired/paid "specialists" talking about topics but instead teachers leading teachers - almost like PLCs. See <http://edcamp.wikispaces.com/> for more information. He attended 4 workshops - "Staying Connected By Using Social Media"; "Symbaloo"; "Evernote" and "Using Skype In The Classroom".

Stephanie Ramsey (NHS) and **Karolyn Baumgartner** (NHS) participated in a three-day field experience and

workshop where they learned how to collect and use sediment cores from marshes. These techniques can be implemented in their AP Environmental Science classes. They also had an opportunity to learn from several scientists who do research in climate change, periphyton analysis, and sediment cores.

Grants

Grants are a way of supplementing the district professional development budget. Several grant-funded activities were mentioned previously. **Eric Ekman** (NHS) researched and wrote a grant to investigate the nesting/lack of nesting of Kemp's Ridley Sea Turtles on the Yucatan Peninsula. The grant was submitted through WCSU and if approved will be carried out in cooperation with the University of Guadalajara Mexico. Grant approval will be decided upon this winter. Good Luck, Eric!

Graduate School

Some teachers take to the other side of the desk: they attend graduate school.

This summer **Kathryn Buessing** (NMS) began her Masters Degree in Teaching of English at Columbia University Teachers College in the INSTEP program (Intensive Summer Education Program)! She said, "I had three wonderful classes in teaching reading, teaching writing, and bringing arts into the English classroom! I'm so excited to get back into the classroom and apply my new learning, as well as to collaborate with my colleagues on workshop methods."

Cate Brainard (NHS) was excited to share her Southern Connecticut State University summer experience that she began to become a licensed professional counselor. Cate says, "As a teacher who works primarily with students who have emotional challenges, my hope is that my graduate work will help me to more effectively address the needs of my students and result in more positive outcomes."

This summer was full of inspiring experiences for many of Newtown's teachers and administrators. Our students will benefit from their inspirations.

Article compiled by Kathy Swift & Bev Bjorklund



Early Release Days

December 7, 2012
 January 18, 2013
 February 15, 2013
 March 1, 2013
 April 12, 2013
 May 3, 2013

Conferences (early dismissal)

Elementary
 March 26, 27, 28, 2013 (March 27 night)

Reed Intermediate
 March 26, 27, 28, 2013 (March 28 night)

Middle School
 March 28, 2013 (no night)

High School
 March 28th, 2013 (no night)

Holidays

November 22-23, 2012
 December 24 - Jan 1, 2013
 January 21, 2013
 February 18-19, 2013
 March 29, 2013
 April 15 - 19, 2013
 May 27, 2013

Happy Thanksgiving



The Newtown Public School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age in its programs, activities and employment practices. The Newtown Public School District does not discriminate on the basis of a disabling condition as it applies under Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973. Contact information for coordinators of Title IX (sex discrimination), Title VI (race, creed and color) and Section 504 (disabled individuals) are found in district policies at our website.