

May 2012



Newtown Public Schools



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# Superintendent's Newsletter

**Janet Robinson, Ph.D.,  
Superintendent of Schools**

**Linda Gejda, Ed.D.,  
Assistant Superintendent**

## **Board of Education Members**

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

## **Board of Education Meetings**

June 5  
June 19  
July 10  
August 14  
September 4  
September 18  
October 2  
October 16  
November 8  
November 20  
December 4  
December 18

## News from our Superintendent

What do you think of when you hear the word “spring” – sounds of birds, sunny weather, trees and flowers blooming, working in your garden, baseball, and just being outside? For those of us in education, we also think of CMT and CAPT testing, AP exams, final school activities, concerts, and graduation. The ongoing cycle of school has some wonderful moments when we celebrate our students’ passage from one level to the next. For some of you, your child will soon be transitioning to the next upper school and for some of you, your child will be graduating this June and a huge transition is about to take place.

There will probably never be a graduation that I don’t feel emotional about, as I always look out at the faces of the graduates and wonder what the future holds for our students. Which ones will contribute to discoveries that help mankind? Which ones will become citizens who impact policy on a state or national level? Have we done everything we could to prepare them to be literate and thoughtful citizens? So many questions! We have begun surveying our alums to learn from them how prepared they were for their work or college experiences after graduating from Newtown. We hope that they will continue to give this school district their feedback so we can continue to improve our education system.

In any curriculum and instruction planning, we always start with the end in mind. What does the Newtown High School graduate need to know and be able to do to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century? From there, we work backwards to assure that the knowledge and problem-solving skills are learned in a logical sequence through instruction that challenges their thinking. Our administrators and lead teachers are in classrooms frequently and meeting with teachers to help them reflect on their instructional practices and enhance those strategies that provoke more student engagement in their own learning. It’s an exciting time in education as we are constantly learning more about how students learn and applying this new knowledge to a new and enhanced curriculum.

This is not your grandmother’s classroom. Gone are the days of chairs lined up in rows with the teacher at the front of the class imparting knowledge and rapping students’ knuckles with a ruler if they were inattentive. In today’s classrooms, students are moving about in collaborative groups and easily using technology to research and add to their understanding. Tasks students are asked to do should be challenging and require them to think, not just regurgitate memorized facts. This does not mean that some recall of facts is not necessary, but students are now bombarded with information and it is important that they know how to discern the validity of information before accepting it as factual. When you hear educators referring to the “new literacy”, this is part of what they are referring to.

So, when we talk about the challenges of learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, it is so multi-faceted that there is no one simple solution. However, we are committed to always examining what we do to get even better at this important work – Educating our children!



Janet Robinson, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

## Newtown Returns From 2012 Study Tour Marking Progress Success

Twenty-nine students, educators, and town representatives returned from the 2012 Study Tour on April 22. This trip marked tremendous historical success for the district and the NICE program as one Science



Delegation outside of Liaocheng School

teacher (Tim DeJulio) and two 12th grade students (Kyra Middleer, David Swigart) remained behind in Liaocheng for a month-long extended teaching and study experience; the madam first selectman and town's economic manager bridged a collaborative friendship with the city of Liaocheng and its leadership; and NICE solidified a new partnership with France. The school in France will now be connected through both Newtown and Liaocheng as all three schools connect on a triangular cooperation that strengthens collaboration amongst the three countries. While the partnership with France is in its infancy, Program Director Jason Hiruo



Learning on the bus

is enthusiastic that this project will open up opportunities for international classroom discourse online, collegial collaboration, student study abroad, and enhanced cultural awareness in the district. NICE records its third country partnership in only two years with schools now in China, Japan, and France.

The 2012 Study Tour brought tears to the eyes of participants from both Newtown and Liaocheng as the hosting school said their goodbyes and Newtown

boarded their tour bus to head back to Beijing. The emotion evoked this year was as a result of Newtown and Liaocheng continuing their hosting experiences spanning four years. Both partner schools base their friendships on existing correspondence, that for some, stretch a total of four years as many Newtown seniors reunited with Liaocheng students that they had developed friendships with as freshmen. Many of these friendships have thrived and represent the bond and strength of cross-cultural collaboration between schools.



Climbing Mount Tai

While in Liaocheng, friendships developed even further as both Liaocheng and Newtown visited classrooms, conducted instruction, and participated in classes. Leadership of NICE and town representatives participated in discussions about the future of partnership and friendship. In a culminating experience, Newtown and Liaocheng together climbed Mount Tai. Relying on team work, communication, and motivational support, students and teachers climbed to the Jade Emperor Peak, 5,069 feet above sea level. The mountain covers an area of 164 sq. miles at its base. Mount Tai is located just north of the city of Tai'an and to the south of the provincial capital Jinan.

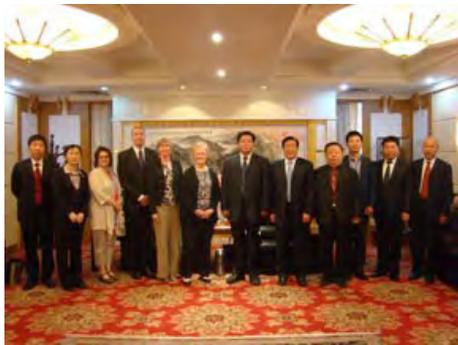
While in Beijing, the group experienced complete immersion into the culture surrounded by cuisine, history, language, art, and the bustle of the city. Delegates visited many historical sites including the Forbidden City, Tiananmen Square, the Summer Palace, the Hutongs, the 798 Art Zone, and concluded their visit by climbing the Great Wall.

Applications and Student Scholarships are now available for the 2013 Study Tour. Information on Japan and France Projects will soon be available. Inquiries can be directed to nice@newtown.k12.ct.us. Applications can be completed online or obtained at Newtown High School. Look for NICE community activities throughout the school year as current offerings include Japanese Workshops on calligraphy, origami, and language as well as the new Hindi Language and Cultural classes. NICE promotes global citizenry, international perspectives and cultural awareness through real world learning experiences.

# A Government Connection in China

By Pat Llodra, First Selectman

On April 22, the Newtown delegation, Community and Economic Development Director, Elizabeth Stocker and I departed for China. For the first time in the five-year relationship with the sister schools in Liaocheng, the government of the two municipalities was to make a connection. Liaocheng is a very interesting city, emerging as a thriving economic entity with a strong commercial/industrial focus. It is a large city of 6.5 million persons, clearly not at all the same as our mid-sized town of 28,000. Interestingly, our discussions with our government counterparts for the



Newtown Delegation meeting with Mayor Lin and Chinese Government

city of Liaocheng revealed a striking similarity in the issues and challenges faced by municipal leaders and economic developers. The large city of Liaocheng is struggling to grow its economy, improve the environment, develop parks and streetscapes, improve the quality of life of its residents, and vastly improve education. Mayor Lin spoke passionately about those challenges and the hopes and dreams he has for the future of that large city. Clearly, all those issues resonated with me. I found I was able to set aside, at least in that personal connection between leaders, the differences in our government practices and concerns for human rights. Later, I was struck by my conversation with the city's vice-mayor to learn that he was recently elected and that he felt a commitment to improving financial support for farmers, one of his campaign pledges! A study in contrasts.

While in Liaocheng, Liz and I toured three factories, each of which is a substantial economic driver in the area. The first of the three factories has a history from many, many generations ago. It produces a nutritional enhancement and dermatological aid originating in ancient Chinese medicine. The product is made from donkey hide and has that trade name in Mandarin. It is extremely popular with the Chinese people, is heavily marketed in all of Asia, in parts of Europe and Canada. The second tour was at the Shinfeng factory which produces agricultural equipment, power tools, and

automobiles. The Shinfeng Group has a large presence in all of Asia with a very large market share. The Group has 30,000 employees and occupies an area as large as a small town. Finally, we visited the Tralin paper factory. This high-end



Tralin Factory

factory produces a large and diverse array of paper-based items based on pulp from agricultural products. The factory leaders are most proud of their commitment to sustainability.

Several highlights punctuate the trip experience. First among these is the meeting with a woman named Eunice Brock.

Ms. Brock is 94, lives in a village on the outskirts of the city, and has returned to Liaocheng since the death of her husband ten years ago because she



Eunice Brock

“wants to work to improve the quality of life of the Chinese villagers”. Eunice was the child of missionaries, was born in China where she remained until the age of 13. After decades of family life and career in the US, Eunice has returned to her native country. She is greatly loved and is respected by the government officials for her advocacy and persistence on behalf of the villagers. Another highlight of the trip is the formal meeting and discussion I was privileged to experience with the mayor of Liaocheng, Mr. Lin. The setting was very formal indeed, much like a visiting dignitary reception. Our conversation, through interpreters, was televised locally and covered in print media. Each of us talked a bit – he much more than I! – about leadership challenges and the struggles of our communities. Interesting! I do have a DVD of that event to treasure and am happy to share it with anyone who would like a viewing.

Finally, a constant highlight of the trip was our Newtown students. I knew from the outset that our students would be appropriate guests, would revel in the opportunity to learn and grow, and would be respectful and considerate of cultural differences. I was confident of all that. I was impressed way beyond my expectations! These young girls and boys, soon to be men and women, are the promise of our future.

# Literature Week at Hawley Elementary School

by Doris Papp, Library Media Specialist



Author David Adler

Suddenly, David Adler paused and looked at one of the students in the audience. He began speaking, looked long at the student, and again paused. This happened again. Everyone was starting to feel a little uncomfortable when he paused yet again. Adults and students alike were wondering what was happening. It was day four of Literature Week at Hawley and Mr. Adler was showing, not telling, how authors get their ideas. He went on to explain that Nick, a student in the audience, caught his eye. Right in the middle of his presentation, Nick gave him an idea for a future story. He continued to explain the good news and the bad for Nick. In the story, there would be lots of true facts about Nick and he would have a wonderful adventure. The bad news was that the story would not come true. It would be a work of fiction. Mr. Adler had launched his mission to recruit everyone in the room to join his league of writers.

Last spring, Lynn Holcomb, Language Arts Specialist, began talking about having a Literature Week at Hawley. She soon had Chris Breyan, Lead Teacher; Doris Papp, Library Media Specialist; and Sharon Longo, PTA Chairman of Cultural Arts working as a team to make this a meaningful experience for Hawley students. Financially and logistically, arranging one author visit is a challenging endeavor. The sights of these individuals were set on something much bigger. Literature Week at Hawley did not disappoint. That is due to the efforts of our Literature Week Committee, parents and teachers who joined the committee and worked outside the school day to plan events for students.

Every morning during the week, a mystery reader read a beginning passage from a favorite children's book over the loud speaker. In every classroom, students paused to listen. Teachers throughout the building asked their students the same three questions—Who is reading? What is the book? Who is the author? Parents, who happened to be in the building, students, and all adults were on a mission to solve the mystery. A mystery reader also ended each day at Hawley reading the ending of a famous children's book. Everyone was talking about who the mystery reader was and what they read.



Author David Adler

To begin the week, each student received a bookmark designed by Vincent Albano and printed by the graphics department at the high school. Len Cabral, a storyteller, told stories of Anansi and Gunnwolf. His tales inspired empathy and assertion, two of the core attributes of Hawley CARES. The week was off to a good start. In



Storyteller Len Cabral

the words of Maddie, "This is one of the best days of my life!" The following day, magnifying glasses, in honor of David Adler's Cam Jansen mysteries, travelled around the building. When a magnifying glass arrived in a classroom, everyone had to "Drop Everything and Read!" On Wednesday "guest readers" visited classrooms reading to students and donating a book to the classroom library. Second graders squealed with delight when Mrs. Annett, Hawley's nurse, arrived to read in Mrs. Fries' classroom. Thursday was David Adler day. He spoke to students in two separate assemblies. He finished the day speaking to teachers about writing in an after school workshop. As a commemoration of David Adler's visit, Vincent Albano presented an original painting which will hang alongside his One School One Read paintings of *The World According to Humphrey* and *The Trumpet of the Swan*. Mr. Albano, local artist, is the husband of kindergarten teacher, Donna Albano. On Friday Hawley's students were transformed. King Bidgood was now ruling Mrs. Albano's kindergarten class in Ryan's place. Karsen, Genevieve, and Abby as "The Three Blind Mice" helped each other through the fourth grade halls. Horton sat in Quinlyn's chair guarding a little nest in Mrs. Qualey's room.

*Cont next page.....*

## Literature Week cont.....

As Hawley School celebrated Literature Week, the focus was on books and reading, but it was also on writing. When David Adler spoke, he reminded students and adults that everyone is a writer. He challenged all of us to write our own stories. It is inevitable that celebrating literature leads to enthusiasm for writing. Celebrating and creating enthusiasm is an important aspect of teaching students how to read and write. Those learning a craft need practitioners in the field who inspire them. Literature Week was a memorable way to provide inspiration and to create enthusiasm for reading and writing.

Note: The following individuals helped to make Literature Week a success: Lea Attanasio, Vincent Albano, Donna Albano, Marilyn Aylward, Carolyn Faxon, Sharon Longo, Lynn Holcomb, Chris Breyan, Doris Papp, Donna Norling, Lisa Petrovich, Literature Week Committee members, PTA members, and the Hawley staff.



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## Newtown Middle School Student Recognition



**School of the Future Design:** Haley Williams, Julia Prezler, Clare Boyle, and Sophie Kennen won third place in the national competition.

**Science Horizons:** Lydia Field and Caitlin Moss were winners of the Western Connecticut State University trip to Space Camp, and were state finalists. Conrad Reilly was also a finalist in this competition.

**Siemens “We Can Change the World”:** Daniel Toby and Adam Robertson won the state competition and are bound for the national competition.

**Young Naturalist:** Andrew Pirner tied for first in the nation.

**Chemistry Challenge:** Caelan Ritter won second place in the state competition. Scott Alexander, Gemma Hyeon, Noah Burhance and Caelan Ritter were regional finalists.

**Future Problem Solvers:** Rachel Crosby placed second in the state.

**Odyssey of the Mind:** The NHS team, of which 8th grader Owen Gray is part of, came in third at the state level.

**Invention Convention:** Amanda Glaser was a semifinalist.



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## Teacher Recognition

*Congratulations!*



Middle School Language Arts teacher **Danelle Egan**, was selected to receive the 2012 Joseph Zola Holocaust Educator Award for her proposal, “*How could the Holocaust Happen? A Critical Analysis*”, given by the University of Hartford.

# *Middle School 8th Grade Visits Washington D.C.*

By Catie Ingersoll, Student

Washington D.C. is the United States of America's capital. Here is where decisions are made that will impact our nation, our children and ourselves. It is important to have an understanding of this place where freedom rings. As we all know the older you are, the wiser you get and as the school year comes to a close, the 8<sup>th</sup> graders of this year are supposed to have gained some wisdom as they are about to step onto the road where they will meet high school. Only four years and your son/daughter is off to college. But before the school year even comes to a close, the students of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade were able to have the privilege of travel to our nation's capital. The annual Washington trip. Yes, a bunch of 8<sup>th</sup> graders who are grouchy and sometimes immature going on a six hour bus ride to Washington. Sounds fun, right? Well it seemed to be worth it. During this trip, students were transformed.

When visiting the Holocaust museum, there was not a sound coming out of anyone's mouth. The happiness and joy of being in Washington simmered out of each student's eyes as they walked, heads slightly cocked, mouths ajar watching video after video looking at picture after picture of the horrible mistreatment and suffering people had endured. Each student's mind was enveloped with sorrow and sadness. Not a sound was heard until they were out of the museum and even then it was oddly still. The stillness had settled down as the students traveled to the many other memorials. Some of them consisted of the Vietnam Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, and the 9/11 Pentagon Memorial. Mirrored emotions started building on student's faces. They were somewhere in between joyful and melancholy. Seeing the words spoken by people like Martin Luther King, Jr. and Franklin Delano Roosevelt shows how much of a difference one person can make in the world. And to read all the names of the people who gave up their lives

for our freedom will make anyone's heart wretch with grief. Even then there was so much more to discover and that's exactly what the students did.

During the day long events, the students eventually made their way to the Capitol building where they were given a tour. The tour guide was bubbling over with information, broadening each student's horizons with facts of what our country has and still is going through to get to where we are now. Also, museums like the National Air and Space Museum, the new Newseum and the National Museum of American History quenched the students' thirst for information. They were able to learn about our exploration of space, our development of writing and broadcasting and of course our good old American artifacts and stories. Washington was truly the place to go. Eventually all of the touring took its toll on the students. Soon the rumbling of stomachs growled in harmony. Food was calling everyone's name. The dining that was offered during the duration of the trip satisfied even the hungriest of all the students. They were offered buffets, "authentic" American breakfasts in deluxe restaurants. But of course after the long days of walking, talking and learning, the students, teachers and chaperones enjoyed the comfort of unraveling from the day at the hotel. Nice clean sheets, a TV, a hot shower and light humming of the air conditioning made it a good night's rest. Then came the wake up call at 6:00 am sharp. The moans and groans of sleepy teenagers echoed throughout the hotel, but another day had come and with it more adventures. As the sun hung happily in the sky students were able to visit the Arlington National Cemetery where they witnessed the intricate and precise Changing of the Guard. Following that, students climbed many stairs to see the Custis E. Lee Mansion. As the day progressed, memorials and museums were seen, but everyone was excited to see the Kennedy Center of Performing Arts where the students experienced "Shear Madness" the interactive play. Students seemed to have had a great time contributing to the story line. In only three days, Washington had already seemed to give the 8<sup>th</sup> graders a better understanding of who they are as people and especially what it means to be an American citizen.

On behalf of all the 8<sup>th</sup> graders a special thanks is in order to the teachers and chaperones who got up the courage to take the students on this amazing trip. I know that it has given them great memories and stories to tell, but most importantly it has shown them just part of the great place where freedom rings. America. Our home.



Mark  
your  
Calendar

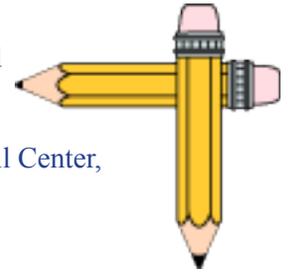
June 18th - Middle School Moving Up Ceremony will be held at the O'Neill Center, Western CT State University

June 20th - High School Graduation will be held at the O'Neill Center, Western CT State University

June 21st - Last day of school

August 23rd - Teachers report back to school

August 28th - Students report back to school



New England Association of Schools and Colleges

Commission on Public Secondary Schools (CPSS)

## *Newtown Preparing for NEASC Visit in 2015*

The Commission on Public Schools is the accrediting agency of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). Newtown High School is accredited by NEASC. NHS was last visited by a NEASC committee in 2005 and is preparing for its next visit in 2015. Typically, accreditation visits occur every ten years, however, schools seeking to attain or retain accreditation must work from one visit to the next in order to show continuous improvement in teaching and learning.

In the years leading up to a visit, schools write and submit several interim reports, a pre-self study and a final self-study that outlines their programs and practices. The visiting team, composed of educators from other districts, evaluates the school against the Commission's seven standards. The goal of the accreditation process is to ensure high standards for teaching and learning in the high school, however, the entire Newtown community is affected and can benefit from this process [http://cpss.neasc.org/about\\_accreditation/benefits/](http://cpss.neasc.org/about_accreditation/benefits/).

NHS staff recently submitted their pre-self study to NEASC. The Committee on Public Secondary Schools has responded to the NHS pre-self study (see NHS blog <http://dumais.us/newtown/blog/wp-content/uploads/2012/05/neasc.pdf>). They have also been attending information sessions, workshops and serving on visiting teams as part of the preparation process.

Next, a final self study will be written and submitted. When the NEASC team arrives in 2015, they will spend three days collecting evidence for each standard. This evidence takes many forms: student work; interviews with staff, students, parents and members of the community; curriculum and other documents; facility tours, etc. Based upon the evidence, the visiting committee will write a report summarizing its findings. For more information about NEASC and the accreditation process, please visit the NEASC web site [http://cpss.neasc.org/about\\_us/frequently\\_asked\\_questions](http://cpss.neasc.org/about_us/frequently_asked_questions)

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