



DANBURY DIGEST

District News & Highlights Fall 2013

Superintendent's Message



We are off to a great 2013-14 school year. I hope everyone has settled into the academic year and is enjoying success not only in the classroom, but in the many activities that make the Danbury school system a thriving community.

We have many successes to report as many of our recent high school graduates have begun their college careers and have returned to let us know that they are adjusting well to college because of their educational successes while students in the Danbury schools. At this year's high school Homecoming, more than 600 students and alumni, friends and parents attended a bonfire and the varsity football game. Our middle school students are busy preparing for high school with various academically challenging programs, such as with the STEM and Bridges meteorology program. Our elementary schools, some of which have undergone extensive renovations over the past year, are also busy challenging our students. In a continuing effort to promote reading, several of the elementary schools held "Spooky Reading Night" where hundreds of students spent the evening visiting reading stations to hear Halloween stories read by their teachers.

We remain committed to providing the best educational experience possible to every student. When it comes to public education, there's much to celebrate. Educators, students, parents, policymakers, and communities are working together to achieve great results. This year, educators nationwide have begun implementing the Common Core State Standards, under the auspices of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors' Association. The goal of the standards is to make sure that every child across the country learns the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed and compete with students from every part of our global community. The Common Core State Standards are a fundamental first step toward ensuring that our children receive the best possible education. Danbury educators have been working on this project for the past two years and are preparing to meet this higher standard. Curriculum development will continue to be our focus.

The commitment to improvement must be a shared goal in which the educators, students, parents, policymakers, and communities are all engaged. We encourage the public to see what is really going on in our schools and to witness the high quality, innovative work and commitment of our staff that happens every day in our classrooms. One way you can do this is to visit our newly updated website and learn more about our many successful students and programs. We invite you to learn more about how everyone can play a role in ensuring future growth and success in schools everywhere.

Please continue with your support of our schools and our students. We will keep you informed through conversations, newsletters, websites, forums, open houses, and special announcement flyers. I look forward to sharing more about our successful and rewarding school year.



NEWS FROM OUR SCHOOLS

Highlights from Shelter Rock

Students at Shelter Rock School made a hefty commitment to collect \$1,000 in their “Pennies for Patients” fundraiser. Two weeks into the endeavor, they collected more than \$2,800 to donate to the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society. School nurse Jackie Taylor initiated the “Penny Slam” contest and students were given a short lesson during the school’s daily announcements about leukemia and how kids helping kids can make a difference for someone less fortunate.

Highlights from Danbury High School

Danbury High School, with the support of the entire Danbury community, participated in “Celebrate My Drive,” a safe-driving campaign sponsored by State Farm Insurance from Oct. 18 through 26. As the event closed, Danbury had 132,000 votes and was neck-and-neck for first place. Winners will be announced in early December. Check the schools website for results.

DISTRICT PARTNERSHIPS

Danbury Public Schools has collaborated with Western Connecticut State University and Bethel Public Schools on a project called “Building a Bridge to Improve Student Success.” The partnership has helped thousands of high school seniors move successfully to college and succeed there. And now middle schoolers are benefitting from the program as well.

Once a week for an hour and a half, nearly two dozen middle school students from Rogers Park, Broadview and Bethel middle schools learn about meteorology from the professionals at Western Connecticut State University’s meteorology program and Weather Center in Danbury.

“The kids get to see what college students do and consider it as a career path in the future,” said WCSU’s Melissa Carlo, project coordinator for the Bridge program.

The students so far have learned about tracking storm systems, reading weather screens and broadcasting the weather to an audience.

The students at a recent October class were eagerly awaiting the storm team from WTNH Channel 8 in New Haven to arrive. The television meteorologists were prepared to teach students about their work in forecasting and broadcasting the weather, and how to use sophisticated meteorology equipment. The following week students were scheduled to visit the station to see the weather forecasters in action.

The 11-week program culminates with a final class in broadcasting. Students create their own mini-broadcast with their predictions for the weather.

Calendar

Nov. 27, 28, 29:

Thanksgiving Recess – schools & offices closed

Tuesday Dec. 17:

PD – Early dismissal all schools

Dec. 23-Jan. 1:

Holiday Recess – schools closed

Jan. 14, 15, 16, 17:

HS Only – Early dismissal (exams)

Monday Jan. 20:

Martin Luther King Day – schools & offices closed

Tuesday Jan. 21:

PD – Early dismissal all schools

Friday Feb. 14:

PD – Early dismissal all schools

Feb. 17, 18:

President’s Day recess – schools closed

Tuesday Feb. 25:

PD – Early dismissal all schools

Tuesday March 18

PD – Early dismissal all schools



EVENTS & HAPPENINGS

CIA chefs visit DHS

Chefs from the Culinary Institute of America in Hyde Park, N.Y., visited the high school in October to teach students what it's like to study at the country's top restaurant school. Students learned to make tiramisu, a coffee-flavored Italian dessert, and other delicacies, and the event was telecast to three high schools in the region.

Brian Turner, DHS culinary arts teacher, said 85 students are enrolled in his culinary arts program with 40 more in the baking and pastry arts. The DHS program has a staff of three teachers and a full working kitchen.

AWARDS AND RECOGNITION

Danbury's 2014 Teacher of the Year



Liz Smith, Hayestown Avenue School kindergarten teacher, wanted to be a teacher as far back as she can remember. Smith's love of teaching, her sunny disposition and her connection with parents and community are evident – they are also what helped her earn recognition as Danbury schools "Teacher of the Year 2014." The award was presented at the school

district's "Opening Day" for staff and faculty on Aug. 26. Smith has taught kindergarten at the Hayestown Avenue school since 1998 – except for one year when she switched to first grade. On Oct. 30, Sen. Michael McLachlan presented Smith with a citation from the State of Connecticut honoring her for her teaching at a school-wide assembly.

"My goal in kindergarten is to teach the whole child and help them develop as a productive member of society," she said. "The most important thing children learn in my kindergarten classroom is to read." Before teaching at Hayestown, Smith worked for five years in the city's Head Start program and ever since she started teaching kindergarten, she can't imagine being anywhere else. "This is my destiny."

Stadley Rough reading specialist spent summer on the road:

Summer fun of reading sharpens students' skills all year around

Bonnie Caton, a literacy specialist at Stadley Rough elementary school, loved watching her students step up their reading skills during the past school year. She wasn't about to let all of their hard work slip away over the summer. So Caton traveled around this summer in the Literacy Mobile – a traveling library filled with book. All 475 students at the school signed a contract that they would commit themselves to summer reading. There were eight destinations in the Stadley Rough area and in July and August, she hit the destinations once every two weeks for an hour and a half at a time.

Board of Education Meetings

- November 13 and 26
- December 4 – Annual
- December 5 - Redistricting at Broadview 7:00 pm
- December 11 - Safety Task Force
- January 8 and 22
- February 12 and 26
- March 12 and 26

Redistricting Discussion: Parents invited to participate

On Dec. 5, parents are encouraged attend a Board of Education meeting to discuss plans for redistricting at 7 p.m. at Broadview Middle School.

In keeping up with the district's continued growth and increasing student population, the district added 18 new classrooms to three of its elementary schools. In addition, the Exploration Academies middle school will accommodate an additional 600 students when it opens its doors in fall 2014.

Redistricting is necessary in areas where attendance zones have grown disproportionately to the capacity of the schools in that area. Redistricting will facilitate balanced enrollment at the schools, giving students an optimum learning environment through reduction of class size.

On Dec. 11, the Safety Task Force will meet at 7 p.m. at the Board of Education Offices at 63 Beaver Brook Road to discuss the comprehensive safety study conducted last summer.



FACTS ABOUT DANBURY SCHOOLS



Danbury High School:

- Many of our 2013 graduates are heading to college – and were accepted at Harvard, Notre Dame, Northeastern, NYU, Tufts, Cornell, Rensselaer Polytech and Pepperdine, just to name a few.
- Nearly 80 percent of graduates every year head off to college after graduation.
- DHS offers more than 230 courses – similar to the offerings of a small college
- DHS has 26 clubs, 57 athletic teams and a host of organizations including ROTC, in which students can become involved
- The wrestling, cross-country and track teams are tops in the state
- The girls’ basketball team took the FCIAC title last year
- The baseball team won the FCIAC championship in May
- DHS was named an Innovative District in 2012 by the College Board for work increasing enrollment and program improvement in Advanced Placement (college-level) courses.
- In 2011-12, 20 percent of DHS students took an AP course.
- While the nation saw a decrease in SAT reading scores, DHS students had a mean score of 512 – higher than the state and national averages.

Rogers Park and Broadview middle schools:

- Danbury has the region’s only STEM program that serves 300 middle school students by incorporating science, technology, engineering and mathematics.
- Danbury is the only district in the area that offers middle school students a chance to learn abroad: this spring 28 students taking Spanish II traveled to Puerto Rico.
- Eighth-graders excelled on the Connecticut Mastery Tests: 89 percent were proficient after five years in the Danbury schools; this figure was only 62 percent for students who were enrolled fewer than five years.
- For English Language Learners, students at the Danbury middle schools are outpacing the state in reading scores, growing an average of 47 points versus the overall state score of 34.
- In math, students also exceeded the state average with a score of 41, compared to the state’s 36.
- Danbury’s EXCEL program offers college prep to lower-income and future first-generation college students. Students then move to ConnCAP/Upward Bound at DHS – student success has been proven in the program’s high retention rate and rate of attendance at four-year colleges.



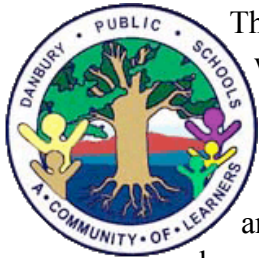
MORE FACTS ABOUT DANBURY SCHOOLS

Elementary Schools:

- Summer 2013 expansion and renovations projects added 20 new classrooms to elementary schools.
- Park Avenue School has new state-of-the-art media center/library.
- Phasing in of full-day kindergarten at every elementary school nearly complete. Universal full-day kindergarten by 2014.
- Math and reading skills at the elementary school level have made steady gains since 2006.
- AIS Magnet school “Odyssey of the Mind” team took first place at state level and competed in the world competitions.



EXPLORATION ACADEMIES



The Danbury district is looking forward to an exciting and innovative addition to our wonderful schools. The Exploration Academies at Mill Ridge is scheduled to open its doors for the 2014-15 school year.

The building on School Ridge Road formerly housed Mill Ridge Intermediate School and is currently undergoing major renovations. The site will be home to two small learning academies for middle school students and will reflect the “magnet school” approach by drawing students from all over the city.

One learning academy is the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) Academy, which is currently at Rogers Park Middle School, and the other is the Global Studies Academy, which will focus on an exploration of the world through themes that are international in nature. Mandarin Chinese will be offered in the Global Studies Academy and Spanish will be offered at both academies.

With figures projecting that approximately 100 new students will enter the Danbury school district each year over the next five years, a new magnet middle school couldn't come at a better time. The building when completed will measure nearly 80,000 square feet and will accommodate 600 Danbury students chosen through a lottery. The additions to the current building include a 7,000-square-foot cafeteria and media center, a new corridor that will link two wings, engineering labs and a new drop-off and pick-up configuration.



DSABC MENTORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE



The Mission of DSABC is to: Help Danbury Public School Students Achieve Personal and Academic Success. Our Tool: School Based Mentoring

DSABC Mentors are *Making A Difference* in the lives to the students they serve. Last school year, approximately 260

mentors volunteered as one-on-one mentors to students in need of additional positive adult attention and support, meeting weekly for one hour sessions. 90.5% of these mentors are returning this school year, with 85.1% continuing their mentoring relationship with the same student. Students graduating high school with a DSABC mentor average a 7.5 year duration of their mentor relationship!

Students participating in the DSABC mentor program are referred for a variety of reasons, including, poor self-esteem, behavior, poor social skills, attendance, academic problems, with the highest percentage referred for being in need of a positive adult role model.

DSABC mentors have resumed meeting with their students for the 2013-2014 academic year, with 20 new mentors to be matched and ongoing recruitment taking place. For more information about DSABC go to www.dsabcmentors.org or contact Director, Mary Arconti Gregory at gregom@danbury.k12.ct.us or 203-797-4845.

Of the 260 students mentored last school year, 45.9% were elementary (k-5), 25.7% middle school (6-8), and 28.4% were high school (9-12). 93.8% of elementary students and 95.9% of middle/high school students enjoyed having their mentor.

Elementary students most enjoyed having lunch with their mentors, followed by playing games, talking and reading together. Other activities the students reported they engaged in with their mentors included going outside, having a picnic, basketball, drawing, taking a field trip to her mentor's job.

Middle school and high school students reported that their mentor was a supportive friend, mentor provided encouragement, listened to problems and gave good advice, helped to set goals, and assisted with school work.

Personal qualities of their mentors that students admire are:

- Friendliness
- She's nice, has manners and respects
- She likes wrestling
- How respectful he is
- An amazing person, so kind, helpful, good listener
- She's very enthusiastic
- He inspires me to be the best
- He's really laid back and cool
- She understands my problems when I talk to her
- Kind, smart, calm, caring
- I love how she asks me what I'm doing. She puts me first then she says what she says.



FULL-DAY KINDERGARTEN

Full-day kindergarten will be offered at every one of the district’s elementary schools by fall 2014. This year, the district added three more schools to the rolls: Ellsworth Avenue, King Street Primary and South Street schools. The final three schools to add full-day kindergarten by the start of next year’s school year are Mill Ridge Primary, Shelter Rock and Stadley Rough schools.

SCHOOL READINESS HAS A NEW HOME

Their own space for learning and a big playground in which to run around. That’s what the new location for the Early Childhood Center on Cottage Street offers Danbury’s youngest students.

Over the summer months, the School Readiness classrooms moved from Mill Ridge and Morris Street schools and the preschool special education program moved from the Mill Ridge Educational Center to make way for the district’s new magnet middle school.

The new Early Childhood Center includes new office space for staff and renovated classrooms. The large playground offers a variety of gross motor activities such as climbers, sand boxes, riding toys and areas to play or sit and read under a shady tree.

“The district is excited to be able to continue the concept of an early education center where services can be shared. The downtown location enables some families to walk to school,” said Anne Mead, program administrator.

The Center, opened in August, houses speech and language therapists, occupational and physical therapists, and resources and referrals for families.

NEWS FROM CITY WIDE PTO

Danbury Public Schools City Wide PTO is a volunteer organization serving the needs of the teachers, parents, and students of The Danbury Public Schools. We encourage all Danbury Schools PTO’s to participate in the City Wide PTO. Our Goal is to:

- * Provide a platform from which all Danbury PTO’s can share and disseminate information
- *Maintain a leadership role within the community
- *Implement fundraising programs to benefit all schools.

We are pleased to announce that Danbury City Wide PTO is a Partner with Danbury Public School CODA Festival, the National Merit Award for our unique program and also a proud partner with the Danbury Adopt a School Program.

Join us for a meeting !
Meetings are held the first Monday of the month at 7 pm at Danbury Board of Education, 63 Beaver Brook Road