



DANBURY DIGEST

District News & Highlights Fall 2014



What's Inside:

- Middle schools take the lead in progressive learning
- Elementary school girls rule by building confidence skills
- Lego® robotics gets boost from scholarship

Superintendent's Message

Dear Danbury Staff, Parents and Supporters,

The Danbury schools are off to a great start this year. From international peace projects to the state finals in sports to academic successes, we are continuing to build on our great progress as a growing and successful school district.

Our magnet elementary school, Western Connecticut Academy of International Studies, was named "Elementary School of the Year" for 2014-15 by the Connecticut Association of Schools. AIS was chosen from a number of Connecticut elementary schools and has clearly distinguished itself as a consummate elementary school. Since 2006, AIS has been a great addition to our wonderful elementary schools.

Also this fall we opened the doors at the new Westside Middle School Academy to 400 students. They have already been involved in an "International Peace Poster" contest and will soon become immersed in Lego robotics. We are bringing that same intensity of hands-on learning to Rogers Park and Broadview middle schools. New initiatives that involve exploration, discovery and collaboration are set in motion, and we are looking forward to the growing enthusiasm at the middle-school level.

At the high school level, our boys' cross-country team reigned in the state while the boys' soccer team made it to the CIAC state semi-finals. At press time, the Hatters football team was 7-3 and has had a stand-out season.

Our district continues to offer more opportunities and educational choices for our students than ever. As always, we appreciate your contributions to our school family because your support is what helps us and our students continue on a path of successful growth.

We look forward to continuing our great momentum as the school year continues to unfold and will be there helping all of our students reach their goals and live up to their potentials.

Dr. Sal V. Pascarella

AIS magnet school 'Elementary School of the Year'

Western Connecticut Academy of International Studies, Danbury's magnet elementary school, was selected by the Connecticut Association of Schools as 'Elementary School of the Year' 2014-15.

After a rigorous application process, the school was recognized for its exemplary programs in meeting the needs of elementary school children.

"We are all thrilled that our magnet school has received this award," said Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella. "The school's principal, Dr. Helena Nitowski, has been at the helm of this school since it

opened in 2006. Her leadership skills and acumen have taken the school into this positive and progressive direction.

Together with staff, the international and global studies theme has been incorporated into the core curriculum and has been supported by parents and the community. This recognition is a representation of the hard work of administration and faculty, the rigor of the Danbury Core Curriculum, and the focus on international studies." CAS is a non-profit, tax-exempt educational organization. An informed leader in

Connecticut's education system, CAS provides services to the state's k-12 schools in areas ranging from academics to athletics. The association has grown to represent more than 800 of Connecticut's public and parochial schools. The AIS magnet school, located on Danbury's Westside, is open to all Danbury students through a lottery system and is also open to students from several area towns. The focus of AIS is global studies; students in kindergarten through fifth grade are exposed to foreign language.



District goes extra mile to ensure buses are rolling along

The school district is tasked with making sure that more than 9,000 students get to school on time and back home every day. This means coordinating 100 buses with 300 runs at three different start times.

With the addition of a new middle school and an overall enrollment increase, this school year has proved extra challenging.

To ensure that students aren't riding the bus all over Danbury and to keep the rides as short as possible, the district made adjustments to a number

of routes and has added buses and drivers.

Director of Finance Joseph Martino said the re-districting to accommodate the new Westside Middle School Academy, which pulls students from all over Danbury from the New York border to the Redding border, was an additional challenge. The district originally planned for eight buses, but soon discovered that it needed 11 buses in order to make sure that the bus rides are not too long. The longer routes mean that the elementary

school runs, which follow, are delayed.

To alleviate these issues, seven additional buses were put on the road this year. Each bus costs the district \$60,000 to operate during the school year.

This year the district also has the challenge of increased enrollment, not only making bus rides longer, but also resulting in the addition of two more buses this year.

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DHS boys' sports in top five in state says USA TODAYHSS

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"USA TODAY High School Sports" named the boys' sports program at Danbury High School one of the top five in the state.

In the August online "Best Boys Sports Competition," DHS was pitted against Amity Regional High School in Woodbridge, Madison's Daniel Hand High School, St. Joseph High School in Trumbull and Fairfield College Preparatory School. "It is quite an honor for us," said DHS Athletic Director Chip Salvestrini. "It is very tough to compete and operate a high-performing athletic program with limited resources. To be included

with those four other schools says quite a bit about our student athletes, coaches, administration and Board of Education and their commitment to what we do."

Once the five schools per state were selected by USA TODAY HSS for their outstanding programs, the competition began on Aug. 18 with 255 schools, five per state and Washington, D.C. Online voting qualified schools for the regional round. The contest has moved onto the regional round.

Since 2000, the Danbury Hatters have won 38 LL

and Open championships in baseball, wrestling, cross country and indoor and outdoor track. They also boast two of New England's top coaches, Ricky Shook in wrestling and Rob Murray in cross country and track. DHS social studies teacher Nick Fraticelli was also named as the 2014 Connecticut Coaches Association Indoor Track Assistant Coach of the Year.

Boys' cross-country team outpaces the competition

The Danbury High School boys' cross-country team was named Boys' Cross Country Team of the Year by the Connecticut Coaches Association. The runners captured the FCIAC Western Division championship and were named FCIAC League champions. The team was second in Class LL CIAC championships and State Open CIAC champions. It also finished second in New England Championships and was the number one ranked team in Connecticut in the final state poll. The team is headed by 2013 National Coach of the Year finalist Rob Murray.

Danbury school receives 'scholarship' for Lego® robotics

The Westside Middle School Academy has been awarded \$2,000 to fund its Lego® robotics "Mars Landing Rover" project. Voya Financial™, formerly known as ING, awarded the money as part of its "Unsung Heroes" program. The financial institution has awarded nearly \$4 million over the past 15 years, inspiring success in the classroom and in students. Voya presented the check to the WSMSA at its Sept. 30 staff meeting. Each year, 100 educators are selected to receive \$2,000 to help fund innovative class projects. Three of those recipients are chosen to receive top awards of an additional \$5,000, \$10,000 and \$25,000.

WSMSA Principal Dr. Frank LaBanca applied for the scholarship with the Mars Rover Landing

Module project in mind. The project increases student knowledge about Mars through structured inquiry activities and digital media production, and helps develop engineering practices skills through the design process involved in creating a functional model of a rover.

"Research indicates that there are greater gains in student achievement and engagement when they participate in project-based learning. The project also engages students in higher-order thinking" said LaBanca. "We expect to see gains in science and math achievement."

The STEM-interdisciplinary project involves 100 sixth-grade students in the WSMSA's STEM academy. Students learn about the geological and chemical factors associated

with Mars to develop an understanding about the project. Students will be responsible for both construction and programming of their devices using Lego Mindstorm kits. The project is a collection of interdisciplinary inquiry-based activities. At the end of the project, students will present what they've learned in a digital media project. Their designs will be tested and their successes documented with notes for areas of improvement.



Girls rule at Shelter Rock Elementary School

At Shelter Rock Elementary School, Girlz R.U.L.E. ® is helping to build leadership and social skills. Girlz R.U.L.E. ® (Respect, Understand, Lead, Empower) is a program sponsored and led by Girls Scouts of America, a non-profit organization that benefits and promotes girls. This fall, girls in third-through fifth-grade at the school spend 45 minutes a week in the program at their school. This is the program's second year at the school. Several other district schools also participate in the program. Some 35 third-graders on an October morning learned about "Respect" and "Words to Live By," before breaking into groups for an ice-breaker exercise where they learned what they have in common.

"Does anyone have a dog?" asked a GSA leader.

Students with dogs ran to the leader, looked at each other and laughed before moving on to the next ice breaker. The next exercise involved tossing around a ball with the goal of keeping it off the ground. This promoted working together, listening and compromising. "We give them rules, not directions," said Michelle Crespo of GSA. "We allow them to get the wheels in motion so they can make their own decisions."

As a result of the program, each student's circle of friends grows and incidents of negative behavior go down, said Donna Lellis, also of GSA.

Finally the girls gathered to sit in circles and select Chiji cards – picture cards used

by educators. Students used the cards to reflect on their activities through metaphor.

Third-grader Deborah Frois said the activities help her feel like she's not alone, and she is making friends more easily.

"It helps me not be shy," said student Lexi Barton. "It helps me to just be more comfortable at school."

Lellis said the goals are to help the girls appreciate each other's differences and cut down on negative behavior by learning to respect each other. She said the teachers have reported that exclusion is down and students are learning to become friends with students they didn't think they had anything in common with prior to the program.



Westside Middle School Academy spreads peace, love, understanding

Some were adorned with hearts and some with doves; others had images of globes and flags of the world. But the posters that lined a hallway at Westside Middle School Academy all had the same purpose: to share ideas about peace, love and understanding.

One hundred six-grade students in the magnet middle school's Global Studies Exploration program participated in the "International Peace Poster" contest sponsored by the Danbury Lion's Club. The contest runs through January with the final tier of the contest at a United Nations conference. Each year, Lions clubs around the world sponsor the Lions International Peace Poster Contest in local schools and youth groups. This art contest for middle-school students encourages young people worldwide to express their visions of peace. For more than 25 years, millions of children from nearly 100 countries have participated in the contest.

"The purpose for our involvement is that this project fits into our Global Studies Exploration curriculum by tying in our themes of communication, diplomacy, understanding and forming an appreciation of cultural diversity, problem solving, critical thinking, and creativity," said Dawn Bartz, WSMSA Global Studies theme coach. "This project has allowed our students to learn about ways to communicate using visual images only to explore the assigned theme 'Peace, Love, and Understanding' and respond to it through their own individual lenses, to make connections that are meaningful and relate to the world at large, and to create a piece for an outside audience."

Students were also asked to write a reflective piece on the process.

WSMSA English teacher Kenny Pierresaint said the students

found the project a little challenging, because they couldn't use words; but once they got into it, they really enjoyed it. "They liked that they were communicating on a global level," he said.

Sixth-grader Greg drew his poster with a cow and peace sign because the animal represents calm and understanding.

"I wanted to represent that the world should be like a cow. It should wander around, get smarter and not hurt anyone," he said.

Student Daniel designed his poster of two cranes holding up pieces of a peace sign against the backdrop of a cityscape.

"Peace is a puzzle we need to solve, but we need to do it as a team," Daniel said. "I thought it was interesting because I never tried to represent something without words, and it was challenging to do."

Lindsey's poster was of the sky with a dove and clouds that were flags of different nations.

"I learned there are so many ways to represent peace, love and understanding and you just want to keep going," she said. "I wanted to say that peace is a hard thing to master because of global conflict and wars."

All students will receive recognition from the Lion's Club for participation and at the school through the Gallery Walk and display over the next week. Five Danbury non-secular schools and organizations participated in the contest. One poster from each institution will be selected to move onto the district level. The winner of the United Nations tier will be announced in late January or early February.



Additional buses ensure smooth ride (from p. 2)

“All of those issues create challenges. It takes the better part of September to get those runs in,” Martino said. “And we always have to readjust stops.”

The Academy of International Studies, the district’s magnet elementary school, experienced similar redistricting issues as the new middle school. With 11 buses, AIS has successfully maintained the same bus runs for a long time with minimal adjustments. Martino said that many students this year registered for school

after registration closed and the bus routes had been established. In some cases, a bus route with 35 stops jumped to 55 stops with the additional registrations.

“We designed new runs and we made changes to make the system more efficient,” Martino said. “In less than a month’s time, we have most of the issues worked out, and we will continue to make adjustments when we need to with our students’ best interests in mind.”

Board of Education meetings

Every second and fourth Wednesday at 7 p.m. (except as noted)

Nov. 12 and 25 (Tuesday)

Dec. 3 - Annual Meeting

Jan. 14 and 28

Schools update regulations to eliminate food allergies



The Danbury school district has recently updated its policies for the 2014-15 school year to further reduce the risk of students having an allergic reaction to food products while in school. Last spring the Board of Education approved new regulations in its continuing effort to make the schools a safe environment for all students.

In keeping with Danbury Public Schools Food

Allergy Policy, management will continue to focus on prevention, education, and emergency response. The following are the most recent changes to the Food Allergy Regulations for 2014-15:

- *No food may be brought into the school for classroom celebrations.
- *No known food allergen may be used for curriculum activities. If food is being used for a curriculum activity, the

the teacher is responsible for sending home a permission slip to any children in the class with a food allergy. This procedure is necessary due to the possibility of hidden ingredients and cross-contamination.

*Only the parent of a child with food allergies will determine if a food is safe for their child. Nurses, per state recommendations, will not be asked to check the safety of any food used in a curriculum activity.

Danbury middle schools take learning to the next level

From the Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) program that originated at Rogers Park Middle School to the Media Club and Mathletes that began at Broadview Middle School, the Danbury school district has made it a priority to challenge all students at a high level that involves critical thinking and project involvement.

With the addition of its third middle school this year, Westside Middle School Academy, the district is now engaging students on a level that involves exploration, discovery and

collaboration. They are working with robotics, conducting experiments and exploring global issues in two academies: global studies and STEM. With WSMSA in full operation, students are reporting that they love learning because of the increased opportunity for hands-on learning. Now these exploration, discovery and collaboration initiatives are being set in motion at Rogers Park and Broadview middle schools. "The more excited students get, the more engaged they get," said Deputy Superintendent Dr. William Glass, as he

presented these initiatives at a Nov. 12 Board of Education meeting. "We represent the next evolutionary level of middle schools." Glass said studies indicate that students' learning retention rates jump to 75 percent when students are involved in projects where they are "doing" and 90 percent when they are called on to "teach" others. This sharply contrasts with the 5 percent rate of retention from a lecture class or 10 percent from independent reading. "The hardwiring of students is different than it used to be," Glass

said. Therefore, working in collaborative groups on hands-on projects that involve research and interaction will be put into place at all of the district middle schools. "This is the future of Danbury schools. This is less about (traditional) teaching and more about learning. Learning by doing." "The students are talking about being excited about school at Broadview and Rogers Park and that's what we want to build on," Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella said.

Danbury Board of
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