Superintendent’s message

Dear Families, Students, Teachers, Staff and Community,

This school year has been a long one and, as a community, we have all had to struggle with an intense season of storms and school cancellations. Our administrative team worked hard to assure the safety of our students, which is our primary concern, while making certain that our students are not short-changed in their education.

Despite an erratic schedule of delays and cancellations, there is much to celebrate over the past several months: We have a great bunch of students in our community of schools. Despite the personal disruptions because of weather and emergencies and the school delays and cancellations, our students have managed to persevere and focus on their goals. As you will see in the newsletter, they do succeed and we have much of which to be proud. Our teachers and faculty are always there -- working long hours and putting in time on the weekends -- to help our students. It really is a community of schools. Two of our schools received top awards this year for their long and consistent efforts that go above and beyond the job of the schools. They too make us proud and are an example of everything we have to offer here in Danbury. The budgets have been very tight, but that doesn't stop the dedication and commitment of our staff and faculty, and it certainly does not effect the determination of our students.

I know this school year is a long one, but please support our students as they finish up. It is important that they get the most of the rest of the school year to prepare for the years ahead. We have much to be proud of -- and we need them to finish strong!

In this final edition of our quarterly newsletter for this past school year, we look back on some of the best moments and look forward to a healthy, safe and relaxing summer.

Dr. Sal Pascarella

Rogers Park Career Day inspires students to dream for tomorrow
From podiatrists to paramedics, professionals from the area shared their experience with students in March.
Center photo: some of the school counselors and staff who make it all possible
The Academy of International Studies was named today as a 2018 U.S. Department of Education Green Ribbon School for its commitment to sustainable practices.

“We commend your school for its leadership in facilities, health, and environmental education,” the U.S. DOE stated in its letter to AIS principal Christopher Roche. “Your school is representative of promising practices to improve achievement and equity, not only for aspiring green schools, but for all schools.”

AIS was one of two magnets schools chosen nationwide; selected schools included 40 public schools including two magnet and two charter schools, and six nonpublic schools. Each state is permitted to nominate five pre-K-12 school or district nominations and one college or university.

“We are so proud of the efforts being made at AIS to be a ‘green’ school and each our students about sustainability,” said Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella. “Since the school opened more than a decade ago, sustainability has been one of its top priorities, with the past and present leadership incorporating recycling efforts, gardening and other environmental commitments into the curriculum.”

AIS is a kindergarten through fifth-grade magnet school located on Danbury’s Westside and is open to all Danbury students as well as students from area towns through a lottery system. Opening its doors 12 years ago, the school has a theme of International and Global Studies with the school’s 400-plus students taught a foreign language beginning in kindergarten.

In 2014, AIS was selected by the Connecticut Association of Schools as “Elementary School of the Year.” The school has a mission of developing socially responsible global citizens who use technology to access the world.

The school’s international studies theme centers on the concept of peace and the role of peacekeepers in the world. Students start the day reciting AIS Peace Pledge in both English and Spanish.

An award ceremony for all honorees will be held Sept. 19 at the U.S. Department of Commerce in Washington, D.C.
King Street student qualifies for National Geographic Bee

Aditya Jay Singh, a fourth-grade student at King Street Intermediate School, qualified for one of 100 spots at the state competition of the National Geographic Bee.

The state competition was held April 6 at Central Connecticut State University in New Britain. Aditya qualified after winning his school’s contest and then passing an online test administered in January. The competition is open to students in grades four through eight; 10,000 schools across the country will compete in the 2018 National Geographic Bee for a chance to win a $50,000 scholarship.

To prepare for the competition, Aditya said he and his father go to the public library and take out books – lots of books.

“I’m really interested in learning about the world and Earth,” the nine-year-old student said. “Geography is basically about geology and the world combined. I read books over and over so it sticks in my mind. I make stories about things so I remember.”

In the first round of the school competition, Aditya said he got one wrong of seven questions and fared the same in the final round. He plans to study hard for the state competition.

“I will try to read a book on every single country and U.S. state,” he said, adding that his dad quizzes him because he shares the same interest in learning about the world. “I can notice on older map what’s changed – and sometimes those changes lead to political disputes.”

Although Aditya did not make it to the national level, he loved the experience.

The final championship is May 21-23 at the National Geographic Society headquarters in Washington, D.C.

Broadview math students qualify for state competition

Ten Broadview students competed in the 2018 Northwest MATHCOUNTS regional competition held at Naugatuck Valley Community College in February and four were selected for the state competition. The four students who moved on are eighth graders Jessica Walia, Afrah Rafi, Vatsal Bandaru and John Caceres. The state competition was held March 10 at the University of Hartford.

The Danbury middle schoolers competed against nine other teams from public and private middle schools in western Connecticut. Broadview and Brookfield middle schools were the only teams to qualify for the state competition.

“This is a significant accomplishment, as this was a highly competitive meet,” said Broadview principal Edie Thomas.

The six other Broadview students who competed in the regionals are eighth-grade students Shayenne Tomsik, Kaylee Basurto and Lasya Priya Vadlamani; and seventh-grade students Norah Bekkali, Aleia Bischof and Sahil Dand.

“We are very proud of our students who are able to take their math skills to the next level. Competing in regional and state competitions helps students build not only their academic abilities, but their confidence as well,” said Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella. “The teachers who stand behind our students helping them prepare for these events and spending free time attending competitions should also be recognized. It’s a team effort on many levels.”
WS Middle School students take top prizes at CT Science and Engineering Fair

Eight students from the Westside Middle School Academy STEM program took home prizes at the CT Science & Engineering Fair held March 11 at Quinnipiac University in Hamden. For the past three years, WMSMA, led by science teacher and theme coach Jon Neuhausel, has been one of the top three middle school in the state in terms of winning entries. The WSMSA students were among the 647 students from 120 middle and high schools from Connecticut, Fishers Island and New York competing in the 70th annual fair for more than $200,000 in prizes.

The following eighth-grade students at Westside and their prizes:

**TIMOTHY CHEN, “EFFECT OF SPIRAL SPACING ON CONVERSION EFFICIENCY OF HORIZONTAL AXIS SPIRAL WIND TURBINE”**:
- Lockheed Martin Physical Sciences Awards - 2nd Place - Physical Sciences 8th Grade Ind. - $200 & trophy, invite to compete Broadcom MASTERS
- UTC Aerospace Systems Engineering Awards --- 1st Place- Engineering Middle School- $400 & trophy and Invitation

**PALOMA LENZ, “STORMWATER POLLUTION: THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ZEOLITES IN DECREASING LEVELS OF NITRATES IN RUNOFF”**
- Lockheed Martin Physical Sciences Awards --- 3rd Place- Physical Sciences 8th Grade Ind, - $100 & trophy, invite to compete Broadcom MASTERS
- Petit Family Foundation Women in Science & Engineering Awards --- Middle School Finalist - Medallion
- CASE • PepsiCo Urban School Challenge Awards with IBM --- 2nd Place Middle School - $200 and Trophy, Medallion
- Environmental Sciences Awards with CACIWC --- 2nd Place MS- $200, Trophy, CACIWC gifts
- UTC Aerospace Systems Engineering Awards --- 2nd Place- Engineering MS- $200 & trophy and Invitation Compete in Broadcom MASTERS
- Alexion Biotechnology Awards --- 1st Place- Biotechnology 8th grade- $500 & trophy and Invitation Compete in Broadcom MASTERS
- Association for Women Geoscientists --- Certificate, $25 gift card to Amazon given by CSEF, possible advance to further competition 2525

**MATHEW MATHEW, “IMPACT OF NATURAL AND CHEMICAL PRESERVATIVES TO EXTEND THE SHELF LIFE OF APPLE CIDER”**
- Pfizer Life Sciences Awards
- 4th Place- Life Sciences 8th grade- trophy and Invitation Compete in Broadcom MASTERS * Institute of Food Technologists, Nutmeg Section --- $100 award + invitation to dinner
- Maplesoft Awards for Applied Mathematics and Modeling --- Maple software - For Excellence in Mathematics

**VINCENT TROMBETTO, “A STUDY ON ANGIOSPERM XYLEM BASED SUCROSE FILTRATION SYSTEMS”**
- CASE • PepsiCo Urban School Challenge Awards with IBM --- 5th Place Middle School - Trophy, Medallion
- Environmental Sciences Awards with CACIWC --- MS Finalist - CACIWC gifts, CSF Medallion
- Alexion Biotechnology Awards --- Finalist - Biotechnology 8th grade - CSF Medallion

(List of winners continued on page 7)
Paying it forward: DSABC annual breakfast celebrates mentors

Many of the volunteers who mentor for Danbury Schools and Business Collaborative (DSABC) remember having an influential adult who helped them while they were growing up. Being a mentor for DSABC is their way of paying it forward. This year’s 28th annual DSABC breakfast was a way to thank members for their service. At the breakfast, held May 29 at the Amber Room Colonnade, it was clear that the program not only gives personal satisfaction to the mentors but also offers students support to succeed in ways they never thought possible.

"A young gentleman recently approached me at a luncheon, excited to share that he had a mentor years ago while he was attending Mill Ridge Elementary School. He is now volunteering his time to mentor a Danbury student," DSABC Director Ellen Meyst told the group of volunteers and students. "This is just one example demonstrating that the time you are spending in a one-on-one relationship with students today can have significant and long-lasting effects well into the future."

For nearly three decades, the non-profit organization has matched students in the Danbury Public Schools and Henry Abbott Regional Technical School with mentors. Many area employers were represented at the breakfast, including breakfast sponsors Branson Ultrasonics, Cartus, NEA Danbury, Praxair, Savings Bank of Danbury and UTC Aerospace Systems. Sixteen mentors were honored for their longevity in the program from five to 15 years. There are currently 230 DSABC mentors who volunteer to meet students on a weekly basis during the school year.

Seven graduating senior students were awarded scholarships, presented by DSABC Board chair Michael Ferguson and Danbury Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella.

“We see the potential in all of our students. We invest in our students because they represent the future,” Ferguson said.

The following Danbury students received scholarships: Alternative Center for Excellence’s Gianni Alessandro and India Lovito; Danbury High School’s Ke'Shown Brown, Leandro Pena, Wendy Rios and Cassandra Turner; and Benjamin Ritchie from Henry Abbott Technical School.

Sanaa Almarayati, who has mentored Ke'Shown for the past 13 years, said Ke'Shown, who will attend Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) in the fall, recently told her that because of her guidance throughout the years, he learned to make better choices, such as not hanging out with the wrong people.

“It was so rewarding to hear that,” Almarayati said. “Mentors always hope their efforts have changed their lives, but it is the students who change our lives. Thank you Ke'Shown.”

Cassandra, who plans to attend Central Connecticut State University in the fall, has been with her mentor, Deolina Moniz, for five years. “My mentor impacted my life in a very positive way,” Cassandra said. “She helped me to find ways to handle all the drama in my life. I couldn’t have asked for a better person to be my support system.”

Meyst shared that during the past year, DSABC has explored how to make an even greater impact and connect more volunteers with Danbury students. One way DSABC has been able to expand is through its partnership with the Danbury Early College Opportunity (DECO) program, in which students work toward an Associate Degree from NVCC while attending Danbury High. DSABC has recruited Workplace Learning e-mentors and identified internship positions for students in the program.

DECO Director Dr. Sarah Roy, a speaker at the breakfast, said the program is now in its third year, with many of its first cohort graduating this month. She said some of the students are completing internships at CT Dream Realty, United Way, Ingersoll Auto and Oak Branch. She explained how students learn valuable skills from their mentors and then apply what they learned during their internships.

“It is because of people like you they are able to do this,” Roy said.

“Together, through the passion of our volunteers, the incredible support from our corporate and community partners, the dedication of the Danbury Public School staff as well as the commitment of our Board of Directors, we will continue to build connections that help Danbury Public School students achieve personal and academic success while in school and beyond,” said Meyst.
DHS athletics: spring season wrap-up

* Girls Track: FCIAC Western Division Champion, FCIAC Champion, State LL Champion, 3rd place finish State Open Championships. Coach Nick Fraticelli.

* Boys Track: FCIAC Western Division Champion, FCIAC Champion, State LL Champion, State Open Champions. Coach Rob Murray

* Baseball: FCIAC and CIAC Tournaments, Coach Shaun Ratchford.

* Boys Volleyball: FCIAC and CIAC Tournaments, Coach Daylon Wilkins

* Softball: FCIAC and CIAC Tournaments, Coach Shawn O’Brien

* B Tennis: CIAC Tournament, Coach James Ascone

* B Lacrosse: CIAC Tournament, Coach Bill Kersten. Bill was named 2018 WCLOA Coach of the year. “The WCLOA has selected Bill Kersten as our 2018 WCLOA Coach of the Year. Bill has exemplified excellent coaching skills and leadership for Danbury High School Lacrosse. His leadership skills has lead the boys lacrosse team to a turn around season in the most competitive league in the country.”

DHS Golfer qualifies for regionals

Senior golfer Payton Dorsch will compete in the New England golf championships in Keene, New Hampshire on June 20.

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SPORTS NEWS -- DANBURY HATTERS

Senior Golfer Payton Dorsch has qualified and will be participating in the New England Outdoor Track Championships in Durham, N.H.

* Junior Lauren Moore won the 1600m gold medal in the New England Outdoor Track Championships in Durham, N.H.

* Also at the New Englands:
  * 2nd in boys 4x100 relay: Philip Melo, Glenroy Ford, Malcolm Going, Sean-Michael Parkinson;
  * 4th in boys pole vault: Nathaniel Llanos
  * 6th in boys 400m: Glenroy Ford

*DHS varsity baseball team won the Western CT Baseball Umpires Association 2018 Sportsmanship Award - the team’s head coach is Shaun Ratchford.

DHS boys’ track team coach wins multiple ‘Coach of the Year’ titles

DHS boys' track coach Rob Murray was named FCIAC Boys Outdoor Track Coach of the Year and was also named 2018 Connecticut/United State Track & Field/ Cross Country Coaches Association Coach of the Year.

DHS Golfer qualifies for regionals

Senior golfer Payton Dorsch will compete in the New England golf championships in Keene, New Hampshire on June 20.

Danbury High School: Third best athletics program in state, says CT Sports Now

Click here to see why Danbury was “the most successful school in the state this winter with 483 points.....”
Danbury principal one of 50 advocates chosen for STEM grant

Dr. Frank LaBanca, principal of Westside Middle School, was chosen as a Society for Science & The Public Advocate and received a grant to continue his promotion of STEM education. The Society for Science & The Public, headquartered in Washington, D.C., publishes Science News and sponsors the International Science and Engineering Fair. This year the society selected 50 advocates from 28 states to work with underrepresented students and create opportunities to participate in science research competitions in the STEM fields.

For the past several years, students at Westside have excelled at the Connecticut Science Fair and Connecticut Invention Convention. According to the Society for Science, each advocate will mentor a cohort of at least three underrepresented students and help them navigate the complicated process involved in entering science research competitions, supporting the students as they complete science research projects and apply to compete in science competitions.

Westside student, Khushi Parikh, is another example of how the school encourages students to explore STEM fields beyond the classroom. Khushi’s project, which involved a Lyme disease detection process that is 90 percent effective, received so many awards from the Connecticut Science Fair, including first place in physical sciences, mathematics and urban school challenge awards (to name a few), that she has been invited to participate in the International Genuis Olympiad to be held in New York this June. She will also be recognized by the Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering at its annual meeting this month.

“Our STEM students have had incredible accomplishments under the direction of Dr. LaBanca and his dedicated faculty,” said Dr. Sal Pascarella. “Some of these students have been noticed by veteran scientists and researchers and it has given these students an opportunity to consider their projects as a stepping stone toward a future career. This award will only make it possible for more of our students to discover their passion and become part of a science community that has a positive impact for everyone.”

WS students winners at Science Fair (Continued from page 3)

KHUSHI PARIKH, “IMAGE RECOGNITION TO DIAGNOSE LYME DISEASE”
* Lockheed Martin Physical Sciences Awards --- 1st Place- Physical Sciences 8th Grade Ind. - $300 & trophy, invite to compete Broadcom MASTERS * People’s United Bank Mathematics Awards - with ATOMIC --- 1st Place Middle School- $150 from ATOMIC, and Trophy, $300 from People’s United Bank
* Petit Family Foundation Women in Science & Engineering Awards - -- 1st Place- Middle School $300 / trophy
* CASE • PepsiCo Urban School Challenge Awards with IBM --- 1st Place Middle School - $300 and Trophy, Medallion
* Computer Science Awards --- 2nd Place Middle School - $200, Trophy and Medallion
* United Technologies Corporation Awards --- $500 in UTC Common Stock, Plaque, Backpack, and Annual Report
* Connecticut Academy of Science and Engineering Middle School Urban School Challenge Award --- Urban School Challenge 1st MS- $250 Cash Award, Invite to attend CASE’s Annual Meeting
* Connecticut Science Teachers Association’s Marty Tafel Student Research Award --- Physical Sciences 8th Grade - $500 and invite to CSTA Award Banquet
* Urban School Challenge 1st Place Middle School Awards --- Highest Placing 8th grader- GENIUS-Olympiad Competition -$500 travel stipend * GENIUS Olympiad --- GENIUS Olympiad Competition for Highest Placing USC 8th grade Project
* Maplesoft Awards for Applied Mathematics and Modeling --- Maple software - For Excellence in Mathematics

STELLA WALKER, “THE EFFECT OF BAROMETRIC PRESSURE ON THE SPEED OF WIFI”
* J.A. Augustine Award --- $100 for excellence in physical sciences

STEPHANIE QUEIROZ, “HOW DOES BACTERIOPHAGE PHI X 174 AFFECT WITH E. COLI DIFFERENTLY THAN BACTERIOPHAGE MS2?”
* Alexion Biotechnology Awards --- Finalist - Biotechnology 8th grade - CSF Medallion

ALEX MORQUECHO, “HOW CAN FOREST FIRES HELP SOIL REGAIN NUTRITION AND LET THE PLANTS GROW TALLER?”
* American Meteorological Society --- Certificate & $25 Amazon gift card given by CSEF
* Connecticut Nurseymen’s Foundation, Inc. --- $200 Cash Award & paid registration to the CT Nursery and Landscape Summer Meeting
Danbury students make it to National Invention Convention

Two students were chosen to present their science inventions at this year’s National Invention Convention and Entrepreneurship Expo (NICEE).

Ellis Solimine of King Street Intermediate and Jeffrey Trigueros, Westside Middle School, were two of 500 students in grades three through 12 chosen to compete in the May 31-June 2 expo.

Jeffrey, inventor of the “Drill Blower,” watched his dad spend too much time sweeping sawdust away during construction jobs. So he came up with a telescope-like attachment to the drill that takes in air and then blows the sawdust away from the surface. Ellis, who is in the third grade, invented the “Keep Away Dog Cat Collar Clip.”

The Invention Convention is part of the science curriculum. For three weeks students engage in coming up with ideas and putting them into motion. One of the crucial learning curves for students is to figure out how to solve problems with their inventions and tweak them to perfection. The invention convention fosters interest in STEM learning for students from kindergarten through eighth grade.

DHS students teach STEAM to middle schoolers

Three Danbury High School peer leaders spent an hour a day for a week in March teaching middle schoolers about science, technology, engineering and math – but added the element of art to the activities to make STEAM.

Seniors Kevin Lapaix, Yacodou Johnson and Naomi Thomas planned lessons for every day of the after-school program. The science portion involved making “elephant” toothpaste that taught exothermic reaction through combining hydrogen peroxide, soap, yeast, water and food color. For technology, students created an animation program that involved coding and art elements.

“Students will literally be able to code their own animation on a computer now,” Naomi said. For engineering, the students built hurricane-safe buildings using pipe cleaners and straws that were to withstand the winds of a blow dryer. This project also encouraged team building and assessment, and students had to problem solve together, like real engineers, Naomi said. Yacodou said that the activities were also centered on career pathways and gave students a taste of what a career in any of these areas would be like.

“If you can do these projects as a middle school student, imagine what you can do in high school,” said Naomi. “They might become more interested later, in college, to major in STEM, if they are exposed to these projects now.”
Broadview Middle School dedicated its “Schoolyard Habitat” garden on June 6, after being chosen last fall as one of two schools in Connecticut for the Audubon Society Schoolyard Habitat Program. The school was awarded a $3,000 grant for the project.

Guest speakers at the ribbon cutting ceremony outside the school included Mayor Mark Boughton, Deputy Superintendent Dr. William Glass, Principal Edie Thomas, Jillian Bell from Audubon Connecticut and Cynthia Coursair of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

For the past three years, students and teachers at Broadview have dedicated two areas around the school to gardens that grow native plants and vegetables and encourage good environmental practice for the community.

According to its website, the Audubon Connecticut’s Schoolyard Habitat Program is a partnership with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service that develops healthy schoolyard habitats for children and wildlife, integrates place-based environmental education into the school curriculum, and promotes environmentally friendly practice. The grant is from Audubon Connecticut, U.S. Fish and Wildlife and Yale Peabody.

The school was selected for the grant because it took the initiative to establish the gardens as a grassroots effort without any resources. The raised beds were built by students from the Alternative Center for Excellence and teacher John Webber. Moore said another reason Broadview was selected was its proximity to the local hospital, which attracts migratory birds with its lighting.

Broadview has two garden areas: a Peace Garden in the front of the school that is home to native species and 13 raised beds on the side of the school that are used to grow herbs and vegetables, such as cucumbers and peppers.

Science teacher Dallas Moore and reading teacher Sue Mills led the project with help from school social worker Christine Miller and ESL teacher Val Anderson.

The gardens serve as part of the curriculum two ways. Students involved in the school’s Roots & Shoots afterschool program, which currently meets twice a month and has 40 members in sixth through eighth grade, participate in caring for the gardens. Also, the entire sixth grade has used the gardens to learn ecology, starting with a nature walk as a unit introduction.
New principal chosen for Danbury’s alternative high school

Danbury teacher John Webber has been selected as the new principal for the Alternative Center for Excellence (ACE) beginning July 1. Webber began his 14-year teaching career as a biology teacher at ACE, earning the District’s Teacher of the Year award for 2016-17. “John has made enormous contributions to the success and readiness of our ACE students year after year because he cares so passionately about them,” said Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella. “He makes deep connections with students, with members of our community and with his colleagues, creating the solid foundation upon which ACE continues to grow and thrive. We are confident that, with John’s leadership, ACE will continue to provide exactly what our students need to be successful in their next chapters.”

A Danbury High School graduate, Webber earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Forest Conservation from the University of Massachusetts Amherst, a master’s degree in Secondary Science Education from the University of Bridgeport, and a sixth-year degree in Education Administration from Sacred Heart University.

New principal chosen to lead Rogers Park Middle School

Dr. Kristy Zaleta has been selected as the next principal of Rogers Park Middle School beginning July 1.

Following a career as a research scientist in private industry, Zaleta began her career as an earth science teacher at Rogers Park. Twice, she was recognized as a “Teacher of the Year,” both by the Connecticut Science Teacher’s Association and the Danbury Public Schools.

For the past five years, Zaleta has served as the associate principal for instruction at the district’s three middle schools.

“We are excited to watch Dr. Zaleta take on this new administrative role, particularly after her many exceptional years as one of Danbury’s leading educators of middle school students,” said Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella. “She brings not only a wealth of instructional knowledge, but a history of educational successes and a commitment to our Danbury community as both an administrator leader and a parent of Danbury students.”

Zaleta earned a Bachelor of Science from Montclair State University, and both a master’s degree in Instructional Technology and a doctorate in Instructional Leadership from Western Connecticut State University, where she currently teaches as an adjunct professor.

District names new assistant principal at DHS

John LaRosa has been named to the position of assistant principal at Danbury High School beginning July 1. LaRosa began his teaching career as a biology teacher in the Danbury Public Schools in 2005. Since 2011, LaRosa has served as head of the Science Department for grades six through 12.

“John has been an effective, hands-on leader of our science faculty for several years, bringing positive changes to the way we teach our students in this fast-moving area of study. As an assistant principal, he will be very effective in continuing his work with his colleagues at DHS, and he will be a continued positive force to the students he cares about so deeply. We are happy to bring John aboard in this new administrative role,” said Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella.

La Rosa earned a bachelor’s degree in wildlife biology from the University of Connecticut and both his master’s degree in secondary science education and educational leadership certificate from the University of Bridgeport.

Assistant principal chosen for Rogers Park

Dana Perez is the new assistant principal at Rogers Park Middle School starting July 1. Perez began her career as a school counselor at Roger Park for five years before joining Westside Middle School as a school counselor.

“The selection of Ms. Perez for this position reflects our continuing commitment to the social and emotional development of our students,” said Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella. “Our students grow and thrive as learners when we provide support in this essential component of their development from adolescents to adults. Dana’s work with these students has made a difference in our middle school students, so I am excited to see her bring these skills to her new role as an administrator.”

Perez, who is fluent in Spanish, is an active participant in a variety of activities in the Danbury area where she resides, connecting with parents and community leaders to bring volunteer, educational and career opportunities to her students. Perez earned a Bachelor of Arts from Manhattanville College, a master’s in school counseling from Mercy College, and a sixth-year degree in education administration from Sacred Heart University.
Danbury students winners in poetry contest

Four Danbury High students were named winners and four students received honorable mention at the Danbury Cultural Commission’s 47th annual poetry contest in April.

The winners are senior Kevin Patino for “This Country,” senior Ilona Ludanyi for “A Daughter Chased by the Red Reaper,” freshman Kazi Begum for “A Train Fare is only $2.75,” and junior Jasmine Gotch, for “Being …”

Honorable mentions were awarded to: junior Jake Smalls for “Heartbeat,” senior Jose Augel Machodo for “Why?,” senior Tulio Lemon Machado Pires for “Alzheimer,” and junior Coleen Ingrid Rondael for “Daddy Issues.”

Stacey Brugnolo, head of the DHS ESL department, said that four of the winners are ESL students, and she is very proud of their hard work to achieve such a goal.

“I am so proud of these ESL students who have captured the essence of poetic writing and shared their poems with us. These pieces of poetry definitely deserve to be winners,” said Brugnolo.

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This Country

I was born in this country that tastes like roses and sugarcane
That illuminate before the sun comes out.

I was born in this country, of poor children of starch, muddied with corruption.
I was born in this country, a country full of history with iron men and women full of courage and tenderness,

Women who protect their children with their lives.
I was born in this country full of happiness and pain at the same time And with scoundrels who steal our illusion.

I was born in this country
I was born in Ecuador

by Kevin Patino
Danbury schools to start 2018-19 school year Aug. 31

Board of Education approves additional make-up days

The first day of the 2018-19 school year will be Aug. 31 following the Danbury Board of Education's approval of the new calendar at its June 13 meeting.

Aug. 31 is an addition to the calendar and will be shortened as a weather/emergency dismissal. This addition allows the district to make up the one day the schools fell short in 2017-18 due to the May 15 tornadoes and macrobursts that devastated the Danbury area. The remainder of the day will be pre-opening for faculty and staff.

The State of Board of Education on June 6 granted the Danbury Public Schools' request to end the 2017-18 school year on June 29. Superintendent Dr. Sal Pascarella spoke on behalf of the schools and explained the severity of the storm and the necessity of closing schools for several days to ensure students' safety.

However, because the schools will fall short of the required 180 days per academic year by one day -- and three schools fall short by two days -- the state did not waive the required 180 days despite ending the school year on June 29 and required the missing time to be made up the following school year.

As set in the calendar, all Danbury schools will complete 181 days for the 2018-19 school year to make up for the missed school time. Broadview Middle School and Pembroke and Hayestown Avenue elementary schools will go 182 days next year due to other closures due to a city water main break and an October power outage. The extra day for these three schools is Oct. 8, when schools are closed to students for staff professional development, and is scheduled as a weather/emergency dismissal. The remainder of the day, faculty and staff will join planned professional development activities.

Click HERE for 2018-19 calendar.

DECO program receives $30K grant

The Danbury Early College Opportunity (DECO) program has received a $30,000 grant from the Fairfield County's Community Foundation (FCCF). The grant will give students in the program access to course programming that will help them in their pursuit of an Associate Degree in Computer Information Sciences.

DECO, under the direction of coordinator Dr. Sarah Roy, gives students an opportunity to earn an Associate Degree simultaneously with their high school diploma. The degree program is offered by Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) at the high school as part of the program's curriculum. Students begin accelerating their high school requirements so that by sophomore or junior year they can begin incorporating college-level courses. They can expect to complete the Associate Degree in four, five or six years. Some courses may take place at NVCC's Danbury campus. DHS is the second high school in Connecticut to offer such a program.

“Support from the community for this program comes in many forms, from the families and students who spend after-school and summer break time to either transport or work on their studies, from local businesses and organizations that donate money or host interns, from the Board of Education and Danbury Public Schools that support the overall development and growth of the program,” said Roy. “This is truly an exemplar of the old adage, 'It takes a village.'

FCCF promotes philanthropy as a means to create change in Fairfield County, focusing on innovative and collaborative solutions to critical issues impacting the community. Individuals, families, corporations and organizations can establish charitable funds or contribute to existing funds. The Community Foundation is in compliance with the Council on Foundations’ national standards and has awarded over $220 million in grants to nonprofits in Fairfield County and beyond. As a trusted nonprofit partner and thought leader, FCCF brings together community organizers, business experts and philanthropists to solve the region’s challenges.

“Contributions like the one from the Fairfield County Community Foundation are crucial to the continuation and success of DECO,” Roy said. “With all that the community does for our DECO students, the internship is one way that the students can give back. Students work in local businesses to apply what they have been learning and contribute to Danbury’s economic growth.”

There are 77 students in the first cohort, 61 in the second and 65 freshmen students who started the third cohort last September. A new cohort of freshmen will start the program in the fall.
Danbury High School senior Olivia Alessandro doesn’t like to label her younger brother as “different,” but says sometimes she doesn’t know what he needs from her. Olivia’s brother, Luke, now 10, was diagnosed with Down syndrome at birth, and he is a bright spot in his family, but his needs can sometimes differ from those of the family’s other children.

While there is help available for parents from a variety of agencies, including the Down Syndrome Association of Connecticut (DS ACT), there is little support available for brothers and sisters who could use just a little insight. Olivia said she learned the ropes mostly on her own with her brother, but as a school Peer Leadership project, she wondered how she could use her experience to help other siblings.

All that wondering finally gave birth to “Siblings’ First Call,” a program sponsored by DS ACT. The project was launched on March 21, World Down Syndrome Day. According to the organization, the hotline provides support and guidance for those who have a family member with Down syndrome. The hotline number is (888) 486-8573 and general questions can be emailed to siblingsfirst-call@mydsact.org.

“I think it is important to share the experience of having a sibling with Down syndrome and show that their diagnosis will not define them,” Olivia said. “They, too, can excel in school, be social and important community members. These are the expectations that my family has for my brother. Hearing how families work with their children may lessen any fears and feelings of the unknown they may have for their new siblings.”

Olivia’s new responsibility is to take phone calls and answer questions, offer support and link experienced siblings with siblings who have a new brother or sister with Down syndrome. She explained that her brother does the same things as everyone else, but he sometimes just needs more time and, therefore, more patience and understanding from his sister. Olivia said that parents new to DS are often bombarded with issues regarding their child, such as heart or thyroid problems, and they may not have time to help their other children adjust. That’s why having the support of someone who can relate to the experience is so important.

“Within the first day of launching the support program, I received an email from a local family with a new baby with Down syndrome who wanted support for the older siblings in the family,” Olivia said. “This shows the need for the program was immediate. I am very excited that this project is beginning to make an influence on my statewide community.”
DECO program celebrates student success

By gaining workplace knowledge through internships and acing college-level courses, students in the Danbury Early College Opportunity program at Danbury High School are making the most of their experiences.

On June 13, DECO held its Internship Exposition and Celebration at DHS. Several students from the program's first cohort, now in their third year, shared their internship projects. Other students received awards for their exceptional academic performance in the program.

DHS junior Maria DeSouza interned this semester with Dream House Realty, handling its monthly mailings.

"I learned business etiquette through DECO and how to apply that in a work setting," Maria said. "I'm glad that I gained this experience -- it opened doors to opportunities I would not have had."

Britta Pedersen, owner of Dream House Realty in Danbury, said Maria surpassed her expectations during her internship.

"Maria really stepped up to the plate," Pedersen said. "She went above her tasks understanding the business beyond busywork. Maria brought a different attitude. Her expectation was to learn and find out what the business was about."

Sebastian Arreola, also a junior, got firsthand experience as a one-on-one experience in customer service at Ingersoll Auto in Danbury.

"I got to see how they work and how to communicate," Sebastian said. "I learned how to approach someone and how to do a good job on what you're working on. Without this, I would just try to get the work done. It makes me focus instead of rushing."

Jerfrey Martinez interned for AcquireWeb in Newtown and will continue working there over the summer, creating ads and marketing campaigns.

"I look forward to continuing this," Jerfrey said. "I learned a lot about the workplace that has helped me."

Jenna Coladarci, a junior, worked in the marketing department at United Way of Western Connecticut for an hour a week from February through May making a promotional video.

"I learned that I want to go into marketing or communication," Jenna said. "DECO gave me exposure to companies and taking college courses. It'll help me in the future."

At the exposition, five students were recognized for earning a nearly perfect average for the semester in their computer courses: Storm Jacobs, Gabriela Galarza, Luke Lefllbine, Hannah Hodgdon and Adriana Salazar.

Six students were recognized for earning more than 15 college credits while maintaining a 3.5 GPA or better: Katherine Naulaguari, Gabriel Campos, Endy Macancela, Lucio Bellantoni, Teddy Hodgdon and Jerfrey Martinez.

Two students have earned more than 30 credits from NVCC with a 3.0 GPA or better: Francis Sanchez and Tyler Vittorini.

DECO, under the direction of coordinator Dr. Sarah Roy, gives students an opportunity to earn an Associate Degree simultaneously with their high school diploma. The degree program is offered by Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) at the high school as part of the program's curriculum. Students begin accelerating their high school requirements so that by sophomore or junior year they can begin incorporating college-level courses. They can expect to complete the Associate Degree in four, five or six years. Some courses may take place at NVCC's Danbury campus. DHS is the second high school in Connecticut to offer such a program.
When corporate retiree Charles Schott started volunteering eight years ago at Morris Street School, little did he know that he would create a lasting bond with students that would not only change his life, but also change the lives of the students who respect and admire him.

With tears and hugs, the children at Morris Street said goodbye to their favorite mentor as he officially retired from his volunteering position to move across the state with his wife. Students, helped by teacher Melissa Gabriel who helped organize the event, read aloud letters they had written to “Mr. Charlie” before the students all sang together.

"Mr. Charlie we love you. You made us feel so joyful. For all the things that you have done, we are so very grateful," sang some 350 Morris Street students who gathered in the school’s gymnasium.

"Words cannot say enough for what you and Lori have done," said principal William Santarsiero.

After becoming a volunteer in 2011, Schott expanded his efforts by initiating the KIDS (Kids in Danbury schools) volunteer mentor program at Morris Street. Over the past five years, the program has grown to 77 volunteers in five Danbury schools.

Volunteers help more than 450 students a year with reading and math skills under the direction of a teacher. Karrem McClendon was a student of Schott’s during his years at Morris Street. He returned on Thursday to read a letter of appreciation to his mentor.

"He made my life a great improvement," said Karrem, who plans to visit Schott over the summer.

Schott was visibly taken aback by the kind words, the singing and the parting gifts bestowed upon him. But he was most moved by the children who acknowledged that their lives are better for the program and his dedication.

"Every volunteer will tell you it’s one of the best things they do all week. There are a couple things that give me great hope for the future. There are so many lovely children working and playing together that come in so many shades and so many backgrounds," said Schott.

"I do believe as our younger generations are showing us that the arc of history does bend toward social justice. You are my local grandchildren," Schott told the students. "I am blessed to have you. It’s been an incredible journey, and I thank you all for the opportunity."

Deputy Superintendent Dr. William Glass

Pembroke seeks playground to accommodate every need

For a child with special needs or disabilities, playing on playground equipment can be a daunting experience, especially when the equipment is older and needs a little TLC.

That’s why the administrators and teachers at Pembroke Elementary School are campaigning for a new playground with a special concern for students who are challenged navigating the older equipment. Pembroke has been selected to serve a number of special needs students in the district and, therefore, has six classrooms, one at each grade level (kindergarten through fifth grade) devoted to children with special needs.

Because the playground has an aged playset and a yard that fills with water to the point that the teachers set out cones and yellow caution tape to keep students away, recess is becoming out of reach for many of the school’s students, especially those who already face challenges.

“We need a playground that all of our children can use. We are doing this all together,” said principal Dr. Sharon Epple.

Leigh Viviano, a fifth-grade self-contained classroom teacher, has spearheaded the project to rebuild the playground at a cost of $150,000. To date, the project has raised $1800 and the school is applying for grants, in addition to soliciting parents and the community.

While there is one playscape suitable for children ages two to five that’s in good condition and a few usable swings, Viviano and her special education colleagues have mapped out a playground with Childscapes in Massachusetts that will include a sensory garden (similar to an existing model at Rogers Park playground), a safety rock-climbing wall and spinners, in addition to newer playscapes. The project is spearheaded by Pembroke’s School Governance Council (SGC) and Viviano, a SGC member, is in charge of fundraising.

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Pembroke seeks playground  (cont'd from page 15)

One of her concerns is that children with disabilities can't negotiate the equipment that is too high or steep. Some students may be prone to seizures, so the anxiety of tackling a dangerous incline can lead to serious medical issues. Children in wheelchairs must also be considered. The new playground design includes platforms that are wheelchair-accessible.

Right now, Viviano says, children who can't access the equipment just mill around the play yard because that's all they can do. She said a new playground would add volumes to their confidence and skills.

"Some students are very weary out there," Viviano said. "They aren't comfortable with the equipment, so they don't know what to do and it breaks my heart. Being able to play with other children outside pushes them to have more peer interaction independently."

"We were going to fix what we have," Epple added, "but why not make a playground that champions all of our needs here?"

The estimates for the new playground include $65,000 for equipment, $60,000 for removal of old equipment, grading, drainage and installation of new equipment. An additional $20,000 is figured in for hidden costs.

The school has set up a website: www.pembrokeplayground.com where individuals can send tax-deductible donations and the school also started a GoFundMe page.

Because there is no other accessible playground in the district – the closest are one in Ridgefield's Ballard Park and another in the town of Brookfield – the playground would be open to anyone after school and on the weekends.

For more information on the playground, contact Leigh Viviano at vivial@danbury.k12.ct.us.