

Education Update

November 2020

MOHS and MOMS students return *In-person instruction begins for secondary students on a weekly split schedule*

TWO groups of students in grades 7-10 will return to school in person the first week of November. These are the final grades to reenter after a seven-month hiatus due to the COVID-19 pandemic, marking the end of phase two of the district's reentry plan.

Cohort A is scheduled for its first day November 2 and cohort B is scheduled for its first day November 4. Students in all grades throughout the district will attend school on an alternating weekly A/B schedule beginning with cohort A on November 9.

"We're thrilled to have our secondary students back where they belong – in school learning, growing, and exploring with each other and their teachers," said Superintendent Robert Zywicki, Ed.D. "Our

teachers have done a phenomenal job keeping students engaged with remote instruction, and our students have responded with dedication and hard work; however, remote instruction isn't easy no matter what side of the computer screen you're on, the teaching side or the learning side."

Face coverings are required for all students and staff members, and social distancing protocols are in place.

The school day is shortened for in-school students. Mount Olive High School's hours are 7:12 a.m. – 12:02 p.m.; Mount Olive Middle School's hours are 8 a.m. – 12:46 p.m. Box lunches will be available to take home at the



Andrew Knight sanitizes a bus with an electrostatic spray gun



Health protocols are part of school life

Students and staff in masks, desks spread apart in classrooms, sanitizing stations throughout the buildings, restrictions on visitors allowed inside, and corridors split into one-way lanes... This is school life in 2020.

The delivery of instruction and essential services certainly looks different in the age of COVID-19. Behind the scenes, procedures are different, too. Extensive sanitizing protocols are in place, including the use of electrostatic guns that adhere disinfectant to surfaces.

end of the day at no charge.

Parents can still opt for all-remote instruction for their children.

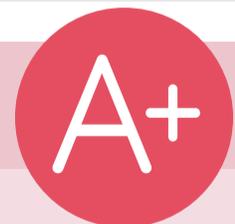
Sixth-graders, 11th-graders, and 12th-graders were welcomed back to the middle school and high school for in-person instruction in late October.

ESPN honors MOHS... Mount Olive High School was recently recognized as one of 36 Special Olympics Unified Champion Schools that made the 2020 ESPN Honor Roll for its commitment to athletic inclusion.



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The school district has earned an **A+** rating from Niche.com, a website that ranks school systems. This puts Mount Olive in the top 3% in the nation.

Towering over Times Square

MOUNT Olive High School student Gabriella “GiGi” Parisi recently towered over Times Square. Her photos, part of a video presentation, stood 20-stories tall on jumbo screens dedicated to the kickoff of National Down Syndrome Awareness Month and the National Down Syndrome Society’s annual buddy walk.

Gabriella, MOHS’ 2019 homecoming queen, is seen holding a scepter while decked out in her tiara and red homecoming sash.

“It was a great day,” she said about seeing herself larger than life and sharing a proud moment with all of New York.

Gabriella and her photos, along with others selected by NDSS for the video presentation, were intended to promote acceptance and inclusion.

The video was also streamed on social media worldwide and can be seen on the NDSS website.



Gabriella Parisi smiles over Times Square

Zywicki named a Super to Watch

Superintendent Robert Zywicki, Ed.D., was named a 2020 Superintendent to Watch by the National School Public Relations Association. Zywicki was selected for the award for “demonstrating dynamic, fast-paced leadership” that uses communication technology in innovative ways “to engage and inform the school community.”



Only 25 superintendents in the country were chosen for the honor.

Food services program recognized

The New Jersey Department of Agriculture recently recognized the school district and its food services partner, Sodexo USA, for activities and nutritional education in support of National Farm to School Month and Jersey Fresh Farm to School Week.

The use of fresh fruits and vegetables from local Morris County and New Jersey farmers is a key component of the district’s food services program.

Newsletter receives national award

The district’s newsletter, Education Update, recently received an award from the National School Public Relations Association.

Education Update was one of only two publications in the state and seven in the nation to be honored in the community Print Newsletter category of NSPRA’s annual communications competition. The award recognizes overall quality in writing, photography, and graphic design.

This is the newsletter’s ninth national award since 2011.

MOMS works to prevent child assault

Mount Olive Middle School implemented the teen version of the Child Assault Prevention (CAP) program which is designed to prevent assault against teens. Staff members, parents, and eighth-graders received the virtual training.

The student lessons combined group discussions, PowerPoint presentations, and a series of scenarios to focus on situations teens frequently encounter. Prevention strategies included self-assertion, seeking help from a trusted adult, and self-defense.

CAP is a program from the International Center for Assault Prevention.



Lilly Marques shows off her autobiographical video

Looking behind the mask

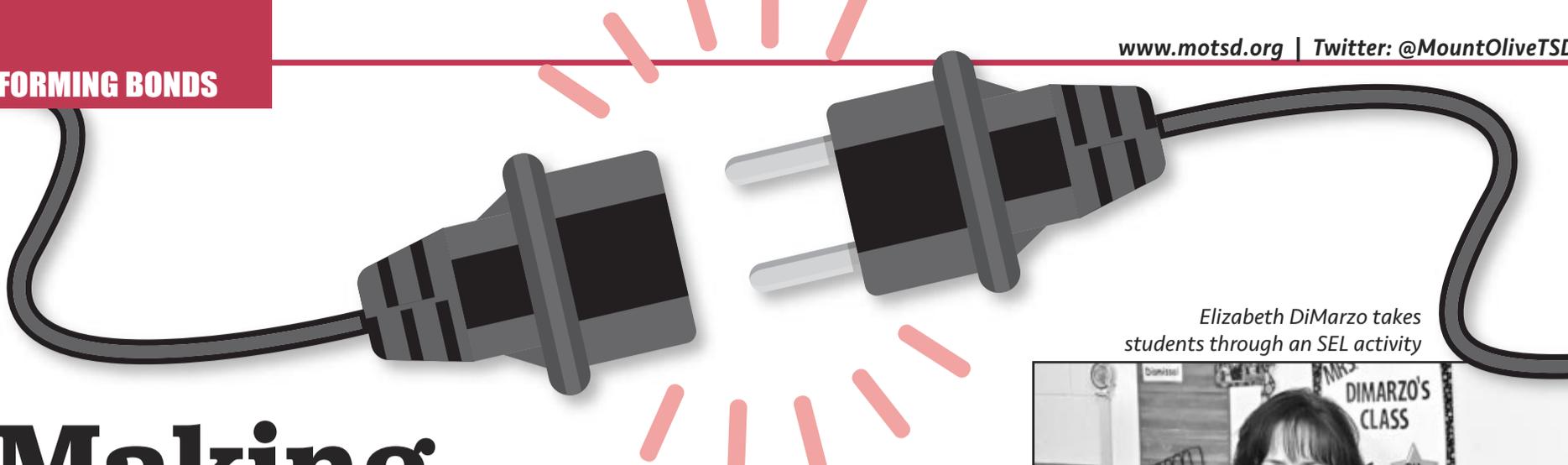
BEFORE the school year began, first-graders at Sandshore Elementary School recorded videos of themselves at home without protective masks and introduced themselves to their classmates. The videos, shared through Flipgrid, helped build community and ignite friendships, allowing students to meet their new classmates while seeing their full faces.

In their videos, the kids described themselves and spoke about topics such as their hobbies and families. Teachers also

shared videos of themselves without their facial coverings.

Our faces convey so much about who we are, what we’re thinking, and how we’re feeling. Masks hide all that non-verbal information.

“We thought this would make it easier for the kids to feel comfortable with each other and us,” said teacher Devon Marques. “We wanted them to understand that they’re still going to have friends and work and play together in school, just in different ways.”



Making connections

Collaborative and social emotional activities help students bond with their classmates

When we care about each other and our classroom, we share what we have, listen carefully, help each other learn, work hard, and have fun.

We understand that everyone makes mistakes, that we stand up for ourselves and others, and when someone asks us to stop, we stop.

This is who we are, even when no one is watching!

A poster with the above proclamation hangs prominently in Kathy Diefes' classroom at Tinc Road Elementary School. It's a testament to the district's Elementary School Rules for Success, CARES: caring, acceptance, responsibility, empathy, and sharing. The rules are part of Mount Olive's continued emphasis on social emotional learning which includes helping students develop self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, responsible decision-making, and relationship skills. (Those are the five core areas identified by the state department of education as essential for positive school climate and healthy social development.)

Diefes, like many educators who are teaching remote students or a mix of in-person and remote, has actively embraced SEL and sees it as an essential part of making her hybrid classroom function as a unit.

"We recite that pledge every day," said Diefes. "It binds us all together by establishing the rules that everyone in the class will live by, whether we're physically together or not."

Morning meetings for SEL

All elementary classroom teachers in the district hold morning meetings and end-of-the-day recaps. Emily Cali and Christine Rogoff, co-teachers of a hybrid class at Mountain View, have found that these times have

become invaluable in building a sense of community and allowing their third-graders to express their individuality and feelings.

"It's harder to connect now," said Rogoff. "It's hard to connect with remote students and get them to share. It's hard to connect when everyone's wearing a mask; no one can see your expression and you can't see theirs. You have to be very verbal. So we always give them every opportunity we can to share and socialize."

Formal SEL assignments during the morning and afternoon times are usually based on lessons from Sanford Harmony, the district's elementary SEL curriculum. They engage students in activities on topics such as active listening, appreciating diversity and differences, respect, and conflict resolution.

However, Cali and Rogoff are quick to incorporate in their planning anything that will allow students to share their thoughts and feelings.

For example, the veteran educators have begun using a digital spinning wheel loaded with questions such as "If you could

meet anyone famous who would you meet," "What is a talent you have," "What is something you like about yourself," "What is a family tradition you have," and "If you could be any animal, what would you be?" The questions serve as conversation starters that encourage kids to open up. Students will share verbally with the entire class and also spend 15 minutes journaling their responses.

The teachers also provide an opportunity during snack times for students learning in-person to chat informally with their friends at home.

"Technology can only go so far, so it's important that we plan these student interactions that help bond everyone together," Cali said. "We have to function as one class. Although we are in different places we are one class, a family."

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Emily Cali
Mt. View teacher

Elizabeth DiMarzo takes students through an SEL activity



Group projects help kids connect

From their Chester M. Stephens Elementary School classrooms, Monica Beaumont and Elizabeth DiMarzo remotely teach two classes of fourth-graders; Beaumont handles the math and science, and DiMarzo tackles language arts and social studies. The two carefully plan assignments that allow students to remotely work in pairs or small groups using Google Meet Breakout Rooms.

For example, in addition to SEL activities that require students to work collaboratively, a social studies project is underway that will have pairs of students working together on the final assignment. After researching regions of New Jersey, the students will summarize their learning by creating their choice of a video, a Google Slides presentation, a poster, a website, or a written report.

"Students miss that idle conversation that happens in the lunch room or while hanging up their backpacks or on the bus," said Beaumont. "We want to give them those moments to giggle and be a kid, and that makes them feel more at home."

Beaumont and DiMarzo were quick to establish comradery and connections. They purchased rainbow-colored rubber bracelets for their students which were distributed before the school year began when parents came to pick up books and materials for their children.

A poem accompanied each bracelet:

**A new school year / is about to begin.
And we're in it together / Through thick and thin! / I'm glad you are on my team / And I think we'll have fun, Laughing and learning / To get the job done. / Here's a little gift / Straight from the heart, / To wish you good luck / And a really good start. / Wear it as a reminder / That if the going gets rough / Just like this bracelet You are strong and tough!**

AP participation grows again

More Mount Olive students are taking and passing AP exams than ever before

DATA recently released by the College Board shows that more Mount Olive High School students are taking and passing advanced placement exams than ever before. A record 764 AP exams were completed by students in 2020, a participation rate that is 81% higher than it was just five years ago in 2016. Only 85 AP exams were administered in 2004.

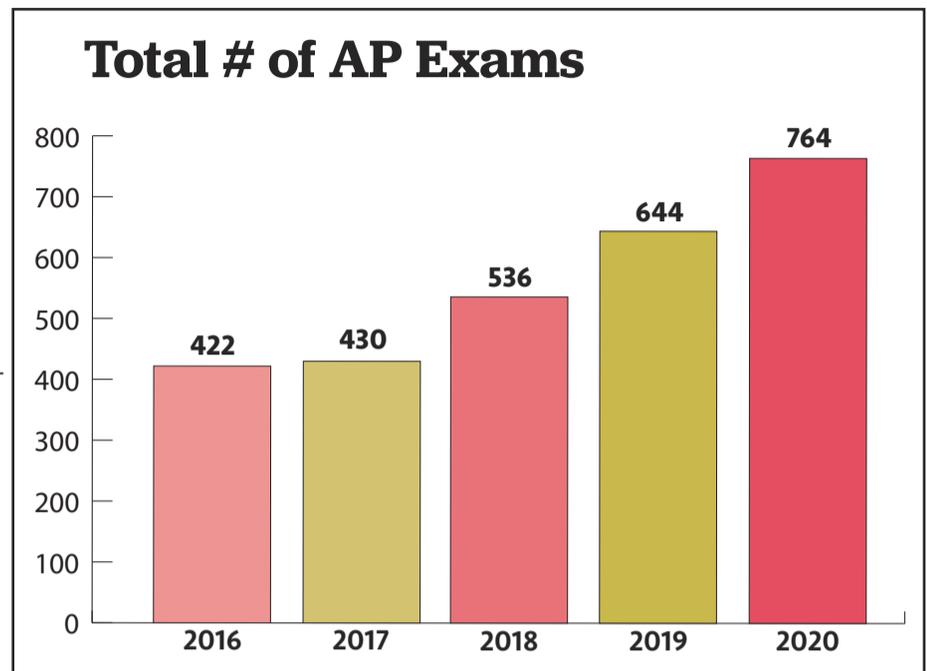
In 2020, 142 students were also named AP Scholars for taking and passing more than one AP exam. In 2019, there were 115 students so honored.

This surge in AP participation reflects a concerted effort by the board of education, central administration, and high school administration to encourage students to challenge themselves with more difficult coursework. More AP courses were added to meet student interest, bringing the total to nearly 30, and additional college-level courses are being offered through local universities.

In January, the Mount Olive Board of Education also approved an AP incentive program to encourage students to enroll in AP courses and complete exams. For students

who paid the College Board fee for one AP exam, the district paid the registration fees for all additional exams. The incentive program helped overcome any cost barriers that were dissuading students from pursuing higher-level courses. (The College Board fee for most exams is about \$95, but some can cost as much as \$142.)

The 2020 data also shows that more students from diverse demographics participated in AP exams and courses. This has long been a district and school goal. In 2019, Mount Olive was again named to the AP Honor Roll by the College Board – a distinction that recognizes the district's efforts in increasing the number of



students from underrepresented demographics who take AP courses (while also increasing or maintaining the percentage of students passing the exams). This was the third consecutive year in which the district has earned a place on the honor roll.

A look inside remote instruction

One teacher's journey to make virtual learning as powerful as she can

TINC Road Elementary School's Rebecca Hopler teaches her remote students while at her desk surrounded by several laptops. This mission control set-up allows the fourth grade teacher to quickly move in and out of small virtual workgroups engaged in different levels of coursework, while keeping her eye on everyone. It's a ballet of engagement and personalized instruction similar to what she would do with a classroom full of real-life students.

Remote instruction poses unique instructional hurdles to approximate the in-school experience; student engagement is perhaps the tallest. For Hopler, engaging her remote students with active, meaningful, and thought-pro-

voking lessons requires bringing all her 16 years of classroom experience and resourcefulness to bear.

"The planning for each day really starts a week in advance," she said. "I look at the material we need to cover, then I start researching online, taking screenshots of websites, and getting digital ideas by looking at what other teachers have done in the virtual world. Since I'm not working with a curriculum geared toward virtual learning, I have to start from the ground up for every lesson, in every subject, for every day."

Keeping students engaged

Hopler leverages technology to keep students continually interacting with subject content, usually on quick assignments throughout the day. Remote instruction in which teachers are streaming live all day is new territory that requires a new way of thinking about engagement. During the course of the day you might see the fourth-graders creating interactive multimedia bulletin boards, dragging and dropping movable icons to indicate their answers or choices, and typing in short responses on a digital worksheet – anything that will keep kids

doing, actively engaged in their own learning. And with a click of a button, the students can send their work to their teacher for review.

Through an add-on to Google Slides, Hopler presents lessons that include quick knowledge checks to gauge student understanding. The students' answers are immediately tabulated. The results can show the number of students who correctly answered a math problem, for example, or have correctly identified the main idea of a paragraph from a list of multiple choices. Hopler can then use that data to identify the students who need more personalized instruction, perhaps in a small group, or she can re-teach the material to the entire class.

To make remote learning feel even more like actually attending school in person, Hopler created a virtual classroom over the summer. This emoji view of the front of a classroom grounds students in the familiar – and even includes an emoji Hopler, too. The virtual classroom serves as a portal which provides easy access to a wealth of digital resources such as e-books, links to websites, class assignments, SEL books and websites, a monthly calendar and specials schedule, enrichment activities, and a supply list.



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Rebecca Hopler
Tinc Rd. teacher

Michael Cravotta – editor

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