

# Superintendent's Newsletter



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Janet Robinson, Ph.D.  
Superintendent of Schools

## News From Our Superintendent

After a rather rocky start to the school year with hurricane Irene and the October snow storm, our staff has eagerly embraced getting into the school routine. The teachers were happy to have their students beginning their learning and the students were eager to get to school where there was power and heat.

Our Strategic Plan was revised last spring bringing together the original planning team made up of community and school representatives. Some members from the team serving four years ago were unable to participate again, but their places were filled by people serving in like positions. Our revised objectives are that:

1. All students will develop and consistently demonstrate 21st Century skills such as problem solving, critical and creative thinking, collaboration, and application of technology.
2. All students will develop and consistently demonstrate the character attributes necessary for personal well-being and to be a contributing member of the community.
3. Within 5 years, all students will perform at goal or above on all standardized tests.
4. Each student will set and achieve personally challenging goals.
5. We will ensure that each student has continuous access to personal information technology in order to empower students and staff to improve teaching and learning.

The action plans to actualize these objectives are being developed now by committees who will work for several months before reporting back to the central committee and then the Board of Education. We are still in need of a volunteer to chair the Communications Action Team. So if you have some interest, please e-mail me.

As is the cycle every year, it is now time for budget discussions which will culminate in the referendum April 24th, according to Town Charter. As the district works to implement the objectives of the revised Strategic Plan, we hope that the link to our objectives is clearly apparent in the requests made in our Estimate of Expenditures. The first public presentation of the budget was January 17th. As the budget is revised during the process, it is posted on the district's website as are the tapings of the budget deliberations. Don't hesitate to contact me if you have

### Board of Education Meetings

February 7  
February 22  
March 6  
March 20  
April 3  
April 10  
May 1  
May 15  
June 5  
June 19

Meetings may be added or cancelled as needed.

Meeting agendas are posted at the Town Hall 24 hours in advance and can also be found on our district website.

[www.newtown.k12.ct.us](http://www.newtown.k12.ct.us)

### Board of Education Members

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



Newsletter continued.....

questions. Some recent changes:

Beginning with the Class of 2016, Newtown High School's graduation requirements will include a course in Personal Financial Literacy, which we all know is a necessary life skill.

A course in Greenhouse Management has been approved and will begin Fall 2012, which will provide students with college credit through Naugatuck Valley Community College.

A new Safe School Climate District Plan and Policy has been approved by the Board of Education. This policy replaces the former Bullying Policy with this more inclusive plan for prevention of "mean behaviors."

The State of Connecticut is now dedicated to implementing the Common Core State Standards by 2015, so our district is fully engaged in ensuring that our curriculum contains the new standards. This will be a work in progress over the next three years. At

that time, the CMT and CAPT tests will be replaced by new assessments that will be in alignment with the Common Core State Standards.

As the weather changes to more winter-like, let's all hope for no snow days to further lengthen the school year. Best wishes in 2012.

### ***CMT/CAPT TESTING***

The CMT Testing Window is  
**March 5 – March 30, 2012**

CAPT Testing Window is  
**March 5 - March 13, 2012**

Questions on CAPT Testing can be directed to Jason Hiruo, District CAPT Coordinator

You can contact your child's school for the complete testing schedule.

## *Newtown Continues Success With International Connections*

### **Fourth Liaocheng Delegation to Visit in February**

*by Jason Hiruo, Program Coordinator*

In early February, Newtown will welcome their fourth sister school visit from Liaocheng, China. The highly anticipated annual exchange between the two countries brings a tremendous opportunity for students, teachers, and families alike as they learn more about one another and their cultures. This year, Newtown welcomes forty Liaocheng delegates who will be guests of Reed Intermediate, Newtown Middle School, and Newtown High School. A visiting Liaocheng teacher will remain behind for an extended stay into late February to offer school-wide workshops to students and teachers in *Mandarin; Chinese Art, Culture, History; and A Day in the Life of a Liaocheng Student.*



Greeting the Arriving Delegates

The visiting student delegates will shadow Newtown students in classes, participating in a typical active school day, while educators will observe classrooms and participate in daily discussions with Newtown educators about pedagogy and instructional strategies. As part of the partnership experience, all visiting delegates will have opportunities to share their lives and professions with their American hosts.

The delegation will stay with host families and experience American culture firsthand. Home-stay offers from Newtown families have reached a record level of interest and enthusiasm. In an effort to offer cultural opportunities to the Newtown Community, *N.I.C.E.* will present the third annual ***Chinese New Year Celebration, open to the public on Saturday, February 4 in the Newtown High School Auditorium at 6:30PM. Admission is \$3.*** This colorful celebration will include Chinese dance troops, traditional instrument performances, traditional songs, and much more that highlights the Chinese culture for the Newtown community. The Liaocheng delegates will be in attendance and will present a special performance for the audience. This event promises to be an entertaining celebration available to the entire Newtown community of all ages.



Newtown's 2011 Chinese New Year Celebration

## International Connections continued.....

In its fourth year of partnership, Newtown and Liaocheng Schools will initiate further discussion about learning opportunities for students and will expand these connections through technology and real-world experience. As one of the model programs in the State of Connecticut, Newtown will begin to direct program outreach in 2012 beyond China and look toward educational connections in Europe and Japan. Newtown is currently involved in dialogue with schools in France and Japan. Newtown's nationally recognized NICE program continues to initiate bridges to the world for our students growing into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century as international citizens. If you are interested in participating in this international initiative and future Liaocheng Delegation visits, please contact the NICE Team at [nice@newtown.k12.ct.us](mailto:nice@newtown.k12.ct.us) For more information visit the N.I.C.E. website at [www.newtown.k12.ct.us](http://www.newtown.k12.ct.us).



Professional Dialogue,  
Martha Parvis

## *Preparing Students to be Ready for College and Career: The New Standards*

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

In July 2010, the Connecticut State Board of Education voted unanimously to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English/Language Arts (ELA) and Mathematics. These standards were developed collaboratively by a number of states and, as of this year, have been adopted by more than 45



states. The standards identify the skills and knowledge that students need to be successful in college and career positions. Recently,

the Connecticut State Department of Education has been referring to the CCSS as the Connecticut Standards for ELA and Mathematics because they now **are** the Connecticut standards!

For the past 18 months, there has been a great deal of “behind the scenes” work going on at the national level as well as the state and district levels. Recently, there has been a great push to get the word out about the new standards so everyone should expect to hear about this initiative frequently. Curriculum changes, professional development for educators and new assessments are all areas of focus as well as efforts to communicate what is being done and why so that all citizens will understand the many changes that will take place over the next three years.

In 2015, students will no longer take the Connecticut Mastery Test or Connecticut Academic Performance Test. However, fear not, there will be a new assessment taking the place of the CMT and CAPT! The new tests are being developed by a consortium

called the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and, although no one knows for sure what the final format will look like, potential test questions are being developed and will be piloted over the next

several years. The unique challenge for school districts is to stay prepared for the 2012, 2013, 2014 administrations of the CMT/CAPT while at the same time preparing



for the new assessment to be administered in 2015. This year's kindergarten students will take the new assessment in grade 3. Present day 8th graders will take the new assessment in grade 11. The tests will be administered to all students in grades 3-8 and grade 11. As more information becomes available from the State Department of Education and the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium, it is being communicated to districts and acted upon.

A brief summary of the shifts in English/Language Arts standards includes: emphasis on text complexity; exposure to a wide range of text types including informational texts; the use of more text-based questions (questions that students can answer only if they truly understand what they are reading); shorter, more frequent, research projects; expecting students to take a stance and use evidence from sources to support their position; and greater emphasis on academic vocabulary as well as words that add to a student's language ability (such as, “maintain”, “detest”, “consequence”, to name a few). Although teaching and learning in our schools currently includes

these activities, the shift will be toward focusing more time on developing the skills to prepare Newtown students to succeed with college studies and career demands. In mathematics, there will be fewer standards per grade level, however, students will be expected to develop problem solving and other strategies as well as to apply their learning to math tasks more often. There will be movement of some math topics from one grade level to another. For example, approximately one-half of a traditional Algebra I course is expected to be covered in grade 8. Instead of covering many math topics during the school year, students will spend more time and go into greater depth on fewer topics. Students will still be expected to know their multiplication facts so that they can work more efficiently (more fluently).

Fortunately, Newtown's content area specialists have been attending informational sessions since the summer of 2010. Meetings about the new changes have already taken place with curriculum committees




and grade level teachers, or will occur later this year. Administrators are leading the discussion about the new standards in their buildings. This year, resources and instructional strategies that will

be needed to implement the new standards are being reviewed and professional development for staff is a top priority. This work, as well as revision of the district current curriculum, will continue for the next few years. If you would like additional information about the new Connecticut standards in ELA and Mathematics, two excellent resources to consult are the Connecticut State Department of Education website <http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/cwp/view.asp?a=2618&q=322592> and the website of the National PTA [http://www.pta.org/common\\_core\\_state\\_standards.asp](http://www.pta.org/common_core_state_standards.asp).

## Kindles Attract Reluctant Readers at CT Elementary School

December 19, 2011 By Lauren Barack, as reported in "The Digital Shift"

[www.thedigitalshift.com](http://www.thedigitalshift.com)

 Yvonne Cech has recently turned two free Kindles into a flourishing ebook program, where

her 4th grade students at Connecticut's Sandy Hook Elementary read everything from *Treasure Island* to Lincoln Peirce's "Big Nate" series (HarperCollins).

"One of the reasons I put "Big Nate" on the Kindle is it's more of a graphic novel format and might draw in the reluctant reader," says Cech, a media specialist who joined the school in February. "They might read that first, but then scroll through the list and get a sampling of another story they may then read in hard cover."

Cech now has a total of eight Kindles; the first two were free gifts that came along with a book purchase order, five came from the Box Tops For Education program, and the last was paid for with a mini grant from the Parent Teacher Association.

Cech mostly uses free ebooks in the public domain and spices up her offerings with a few titles she knows her students will likely gravitate to quickly. She correctly assumed that once her students were drawn in—particularly her reluctant readers—they would come back for more.

"There's a read-aloud feature for struggling readers that gives them an advantage," Cech says. "And the added piece of the technology draws out our reluctant readers. It's closely related to video games. You have to click to turn each page, yet it's reading. It's a great positive."

Through lessons, training sessions, and tutorials that she recorded and streamed on YouTube, Cech spent weeks prepping teachers and 134 4th grade students on how to use, support, and read on the Kindles.

Still, while her Kindle program is barely a week old, Cech has already hit a few speed bumps, like when one student realized he could erase books stored on the device. To prevent kids from adding books to the Kindles and charging the school account, Cech de-registers each device before it's handed out.

Students must be in good standing without late fees or overdue titles, to be able to check out the Kindles and can keep them for two weeks. Cech also limits the devices to 4th graders, believing that they're the most responsible—and understand, for example, why the ebook readers have to be protected from potential spills in their backpacks.

"One mom asked her son where his water bottle was, and he said 'Mom, I got the Kindle today and couldn't bring my water bottle home,'" says Cech laughing.

Cech is so jazzed by the results that she's considering increasing the program for teachers to use in classroom instruction once her library of Kindles

expands. For now, she's pleased that students have the opportunity to try the ereaders, which are generating excitement about reading, while also introducing them to new useful technology that'll they'll need in the future.

"A lot of traditional textbooks will be replaced with online books," she says. "And the more we can get them exposed to this the better for them. What motivated me was I wanted them to have a comfort level with the technology when they went to the upper grades. We're just at the beginning of this."



*Kindergarten*

## Kindergarten Registration 2012-2013 School Year

Newtown Public Schools will begin registering children for Kindergarten during the month of April 2012. If your child will turn five by December 31, 2012, he or she is eligible to register. If your child is eligible for Kindergarten in September, we are asking that you contact your elementary school as soon as possible.

### *A Message From Our Board of Education Chair*



Debbie Leidlein, Chair  
Board of Education

I would like to start by introducing you to our newest Board members. Laura Roche, our Vice Chair, has actively worked in the district for the last several years, serving on PTAs and school committees. Cody McCubbin, new to Newtown, is committed to working to create a quality school system and is our new Secretary. John Vouros is a retired Newtown teacher who taught in the district for 35 years. Together with our remaining Board members, Richard Gaines, Bill Hart, Keith Alexander, and myself as Chair, we are committed to supporting academic growth in our schools.

The Board has announced its committees, which tie into both our goals and the Strategic Plan. They include Curriculum Development and Testing Improvement chaired by Bill Hart; Communication chaired by Laura Roche; CIP/Facilities and Finance chaired by Richard Gaines; Special Education chaired by Debbie Leidlein; Technology chaired by Keith Alexander and Policy chaired by Laura Roche. Committees will meet once a month and will report their progress at Board Meetings.

This Board is committed to improved communication. We welcome your comments, suggestions and concerns. Please do not hesitate to attend a meeting or contact a Board member. We will work diligently to consistently update the district website in order to share relevant information with the community.

#### SCHOOL

#### REGISTRATION DATES

Hawley

April 10, 11, 12  
(the 12<sup>th</sup> in AM only)  
Phone: 203-426-7666

Head O'Meadow

April 3, 4, 5  
Phone: 203-426-7670

Middle Gate

April 2, 3, 4, 5  
(the 5<sup>th</sup> in AM only)  
Phone: 203-426-7662

Sandy Hook

April 10, 11, 12  
Phone: 203-426-7657

### An important message from School Health staff and the Newtown Health District



#### **Remember:**

#### **Clean Hands Save Lives**

Keeping hands clean through improved hand hygiene is one of the most important steps we can take to avoid getting sick and spreading germs to others. Many diseases and conditions are spread by not washing hands with soap and clean running water. If soap and water are unavailable, use an alcohol-based hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol to clean hands.