



We **TEACH** someone you **LOVE**

A word from Superintendent Brian C. Monahan

Happy New Year to All! We are experiencing a very dynamic academic year across all five of our schools and are excited to share some highlights with you. Scheduling changes, new programs and faculty are generating innovation in teaching and enhancing learning opportunities. We are very proud of our students, faculty and staff, and indebted to our caring and supportive community.

High School:

Students and teachers welcome new courses



In the history of piracy class, eyes rove from the smart board to a classic Rand McNally's world wall map.

When senior Kaziah Black considered 15 new course choices this year, the history of piracy stood out. "That was an unexpected subject, something new and different," Kaziah said, and she couldn't be happier she signed up for the course.

Taught by Robert Hindley, the history of piracy navigates complex historic context with spirited

storytelling, and exposes students to peripheral knowledge such as geography, astronomy, the history of navigation, cartography, oceanography, and the history of trade.

"I was surprised to learn that piracy started in ancient times – 14th century BC!" said junior Christian VanBuren. "And it's amazing how piracy affected and interacted with so many aspects of history."

To Principal Ken Hauck, new courses are about more than enriching curriculum and broadening student choice. "New courses propel our teachers to share their passion in untapped areas of their expertise," Principal Hauck said. "And whether students take a course to explore college and career paths, or just because it captures their interest, they are breaking ground and being tested in the rigors of higher education."

New areas of study this year include journalism, creative writing, film studies, screenwriting, multicultural literature, speech and theater, comparative religions, and modern Europe. At the college level, in addition to two SUNY Orange courses (the age of revolutions, and philosophy), students now have access to Syracuse University courses (psychology, and public policy), for the first time.

And there's more to look forward to. As part of the capital project approved by voters in 2017, current cafeteria space will be repurposed for instruction in culinary, TV/ media production, and fitness/exercise studies.



Technology teacher Rich Budd instructs 7th graders on the steps of a problem-solving project.

Middle School:

Scheduling shifts boost instructional opportunities

Committed to expanding and creating new opportunities for all its students, this year the middle school adjusted its schedule from a seven to an eight-period day.

Innovative programs in technology and family and consumer sciences are now available to all grade levels. Both emphasize STEM-based skills and critical thinking.

The reinstatement of a two-year foreign language program will give students a deeper understanding of their language of choice, increase fluency, and build a stronger foundation to carry into high school.

"Team Time" was introduced into the extended schedule, and families can now discuss a student's progress and support needs with his/her entire team of teachers, via phone or in person.

Extra-curricular activities were also enhanced with the addition of boys and girls modified lacrosse.

"After-school activities are an opportunity to meet our students' emotional and social needs. It gives them a chance to excel in an area of strength or interest, and affirm themselves," Principal Michael Larsen said. "And with the reinstatement of the 5 o'clock bus runs, more students are seizing afterschool opportunities."

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Grades K-5:

Innovative scheduling expands personalized learning

Recognizing that learning is a personal process, the direction in education is trending toward more student-centered, personalized learning, and giving students more choice.



Targeted instruction includes reading and discussion in small groups.

This year, all students in grades K-5 are benefitting from the integration of a 30-minute block dedicated to more targeted, personalized instruction. Students receiving Academic Intervention Services (AIS) have additional time to work on reading and math skills, without missing any new, classroom instruction. Students who remain in the classroom engage in small-group learning at their ability level, or work individually to develop a skill of their own interest, like creative writing.

"We are not working on anything new. We are reviewing skills, and meeting students where their needs are," said Elizabeth Hagerty, a fifth grade teacher at Otisville Elementary. "I love having the time to work with a small group, or to conference with an individual student about his/her writing."

Mrs. Hagerty's students refer to this period as "center time." New activities are planned weekly and students rotate through them each day. They might involve multiplication games on Chromebooks; taking quizzes to improve scores and speed; group reading and discussion with Mrs. Hagerty; or working on writing skills using a prompter like a "Would you rather...?" card.

Student Charlotte Faline loves writing and was tackling the question, "Would you rather live in Alaska or in a jungle?" An animal lover, she was making her case for the jungle. "I like centers! We get to try different things every week, and we never get bored," Charlotte said.

Upcoming center-time activities in Mrs. Hagerty's class include discussing current events using Scholastic News magazine, and writing holiday cards to soldiers.



"Sounds Fun!"

New language-development program for kindergarten students

For children entering kindergarten, learning to sit and listen in spite of the auditory and visual distractions of a classroom is a challenge – one they must conquer for the development of language and literacy skills. But every child has a personal way of learning.

At Minisink Valley and Otisville Elementary Schools, speech-language pathologists are implementing "Sounds Fun!" in all kindergarten classrooms. The program emphasizes listening, phonological awareness, vocabulary, and comprehension. Strategies include Whole Body Listening with a prescribed posture that signals, "time to pay attention"; Moving Sounds or the association of sounds with physical motions; and Book Turn-Around which involves reading and repetition before book illustrations are shared.

"Phonemic awareness is a pre-reading skill. It's about developing the ability to take a sentence and breaking it down into words and sounds," said Rebecca Halpern, MVES speech-language pathologist. "'Sounds Fun!' approach of combining movement with phonemes helps children feel and picture the sound. This is especially helpful to tactile and visual learners."

MVES kindergarten teacher Shawne Demberg agrees. "Moving to the sound makes it easier for students to make that association and retain the information," Mrs. Demberg said. "I try to use a multisensory approach to all aspects of learning, so this program fits right in."

Teacher Liz McBean integrates "Sounds Fun!" into daily classroom learning and has students sing along to "Who let the letters out" (all 26 letters of it), and "Vowel bat." "The children love it, and it works as a sort of scaffolding until they master the letter-sound relationships," Mrs. McBean said.

Exemptions Reminder

STAR and Veteran's Exemption applications must be filed with your local assessor's office by March 1, 2018.

Budget Development Calendar

Finance Committee meetings are open to the public and will take place at 6:30 p.m. on the following dates: Feb. 8, 22; Mar. 8, 22.