Curriculum Updates

MTSD Visual & Performing Arts

Welcome back to another fantastic and creative school year. We are very excited to engage with our students in another year of making and performing in the world of the arts. This month, we’d like to focus on the arts programs at UMS as there are many new and exciting things taking place. The Upper Middle School has made some significant curricular changes which have created current, relevant and engaging creative opportunities for our 7th and 8th grade students. New courses include Digital Music, Ceramics and Sculpture, Digital Animation/Design, as well as Digital Illustration/Design. These classes continue our district’s goal of blending the arts with technology in our STEAM programs (the infusion of science, technology, engineering, arts, and math). Providing students with authentic experiences in the arts that match the technology being used in industry and also prepare them for the arts courses at the high school is an important goal of these new classes. With every 7th grader taking a studio art elective, the addition of new technology based visual arts courses, and over 400 students in the music program, the arts are alive and well at UMS! The Visual and Performing Arts strive to develop students’ creative identity, educate them emotionally, and develop them into compassionate and social human beings. We welcome and encourage the community to become engaged with us. Visit our district website and find the new Visual and Performing Arts Department site to learn more about us. This site is still under construction, but there is already a huge amount of fantastic information online explaining our curricular offerings.

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MTSD has a never-ending commitment to creating and maintaining a guaranteed and viable curriculum that will ensure the academic success of our students. This newsletter is a part of this equation, helping to communicate our curricular happenings and instructional activities across grade levels and content areas to district educators, parents and students.

While all of our curriculum guides are available through an online database called Rubicon Atlas (http://www.mtsd.k12.nj.us/Page/7612), this newsletter is intended to provide a closer look at the some of the learning experiences and outcomes that our students undertake. Please feel free to browse through the curriculum updates provided by our talented team of content-area supervisors.

Mission Statement

Our mission as a forward-thinking community is to ensure that all students grow into confident, compassionate, successful, and self-directed learners a multi-cultural and socio-economically diverse society by providing engaging and challenging real world educational experiences in a student-centered environment.

Vision Statement

We envision a district on the forefront of public education. We focus on the needs of every child, dedicating ourselves to their present and future success. Success means that all students possess a passion for learning, develop a deep understanding of rigorous content, demonstrate cultural competence, and exhibit ethical conduct, while cultivating social skills and healthy habits that will empower them to achieve their goals and aspirations.

Achieving this vision requires that the district become a learning community that continually reflects and challenges itself to effect transformational teaching and learning. We prepare our students to take responsibility for their own educational accomplishments in our global society while nurturing them in a community where each student is known and valued. We believe by embracing frontier spirit, we can create a unique organization that is recognized as a forerunner in public education.
Curriculum Updates (continued)

MHS Language Arts

In an effort to make the experience of reading an Ancient Greek play more authentic, the Senior Seminar Honors English students have made masks to wear while reading Oedipus The King in class. The masks, while simple in their construction, are representative of the masks that would have been worn by performers in Ancient Greece. Masks, also known as personas, were designed to indicate age, sex, mood and rank. Some are larger and more ornate and intended to represent characters of higher stature such as a king or queen, and others are more basic and intended to represent the chorus, or the "everyman". Having been given complete creative freedom when designing their masks, the final products are as unique as the students themselves.

In June we announced many exciting additions being made to our math curriculum that bolster our ability to build a strong mathematical foundation for all K-4 students and to meet the needs of all learners. As we continue to design more resources and activities to engage students, we are also improving our assessments to capture student progress in all areas of our curriculum, not just the area of skills and concepts. As a result, you will notice that we have added to our assessment toolbox. Students will show what they know and demonstrate what they can do through problem solving tasks, performance assessments, and assessment questions that require students to communicate their thinking. Math process skills such as justifying thinking with models and explanations, using pattern and structure to help solve a problem, and critiquing arguments will become a more routine part of assessments in all grades. We will continue to use common benchmark assessments to help us to monitor student growth in grade level concepts and skills. Pre-assessments will help the students to set learning goals and the teachers to plan differentiated instruction. No matter what the assessment tool looks like, our ultimate goal is to provide students with specific, meaningful feedback that supports their learning.

MTSD World Languages & ESL

The MHS World Languages Department conducted the STAMP assessment in all its foundational living language courses from September 15-18. Students were successfully assessed in the domains of reading, writing, speaking and listening in either Chinese, Spanish, French or German. The standards-based Measurement of Proficiency obtained through STAMP is an objective, real-world, web-based and computer adaptive assessment used to determine student proficiency in multiple domains and languages at any point along the learning path. Scores correlate with the American Council of Teachers of Foreign Language (ACTFL) standards, state standards and established proficiency benchmarks. The assessment is valid and reliable based on field testing and expert panels and is widely used in the state of New Jersey and throughout the United States. The World Language Department is currently using STAMP as a pre-course proficiency assessment which requires no student preparation, but rather, engages them with computer-adaptive technology that helps them to understand their own proficiency levels. The results offer teachers data about individual student language skills - weaknesses and strengths - to help teachers better tailor differentiated instruction.
Curriculum Updates (continued)

LMS/UMS Language Arts & Social Studies

During these first few weeks of school, teachers and media specialists throughout the middle schools have worked diligently in an effort to bolster students’ desire to read, read, read. This initiative includes placing students in their just right books, conferencing with students to determine their reading interests, and implementing the practice of recording reading behaviors on reading logs in an effort to assist students in establishing an awareness of their developing reading lives. The PTO has supported the schools’ effort to strengthen the reading lives of all of our students by hosting the 2015-16 Scholastic Book Fair in our middle schools. During this reading promotion the PTO assists students in selecting books of high interest levels and at the same time supports teachers in their efforts to expand their classroom libraries with titles of interest and relevance to our current students. Be a part of this great reading initiative and enjoy a good book at home with your family.

MHS Science

As the school year begins, the MHS Science Department is continuing the work of curriculum alignment with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). The new performance expectations detailed in NGSS call for improved coherence between curricula at each grade level, focusing on the concept of learning progression K-12. The learning progressions offer students the opportunity to deepen scientific knowledge and refine science skills and engineering practices so that learning becomes increasingly sophisticated. The MHS Science Department is working collaboratively with the grades 5-8 to construct a logical and developmentally appropriate learning sequence that helps students understand core ideas and engages them in science and engineering practices that promote broader understanding and deeper levels of scientific investigations. The Monty MakerSpace is set to open officially on September 29th to MHS students and to the general public in mid to late October, while the MHS Garden Club is celebrating the addition of a beautiful pergola, providing a physical separation between the vegetable, native, and academic gardens. As always, the MHS Science Department welcomes community partnerships as we create learning environments that utilize the skills and talents of the entire community.

OHES/VES Language Arts & Social Studies

Welcome back! September is an exciting time for our K-4 readers and writers, as we jump into a new school year and the routines of Reading and Writing Workshop. At each grade level, students will experience daily reading and writing mini-lessons, which provide students with explicit instruction in a reading or writing skill and strategy. Following the mini-lesson, students will have a block of time to read or write independently every day, while teachers engage in small group lessons, individual conferences and coaching. It’s truly amazing to see the ways in which teachers are able to individualize instruction to meet the needs of all of our young learners, and it’s equally amazing to see the independence students develop as readers and writers, including our Kindergarteners! At each grade level, the school year is broken into specific units of study in both reading and writing. Your child’s teacher will be sharing information about the units of study in your child’s grade level at Back to School Night, as well as additional information about our K-4 reading and writing instructional model. As the year gets underway, it’s important to set aside a special time and place for homework each night and to encourage your child to read for enjoyment every day. I’m looking forward to a great start to the school year for K-4 Language Arts!

LMS/UMS Mathematics & Science

It’s a catastrophe or is it?

Students in Science 6 are exploring storms and catastrophic events. They will collect evidence from various sources and develop models (may be physical, drawing, or explanation) and support their models and ideas with their evidence. What questions do students have? What are possible causes of catastrophic events? Why would we want to learn more about them? The 6th grade will be taking a journey through time and across the world exploring various types of catastrophic events and the contributing factors. Meanwhile, the Ecology Club at UMS has begun their activities. Ms. Witsen is the advisor of this globally conscience club. Come along for a walk and observe. Ms. Witsen has rich experiences from around the globe she brings to the students. In other news, tryouts have begun for both the Montgomery Mathcounts team and the Science Olympiad team. If you recall, they both achieved outstanding success each year. Last year the Mathcounts team came in 4th place in the Region and the Science Olympiad team came in 2nd in the State! The Mathcounts coaches are Ms. Donovan & Ms. Yip and the Science Olympiad coaches are Mrs. Blakemore & Mrs. Sowa. The coaches do a great job inspiring and coordinating events and practices. Best success Montgomery! During the year there are other math and science contests that students may participate in. These are announced ahead of time and usually open to all at a grade level.
**Curriculum Updates** (continued)

**MHS Mathematics**

At Montgomery High School, the Pre-Calculus courses have taken a step into the world of online education. This is the second year that the students in this course have an available online textbook. Not only can the students view their book from any device, the textbook comes with many online resources such as: interactive book pages, practice tests, self-checks, calculator demonstrations, videos and more. The Pre-Calculus teachers have been working hard to create online assignments to expose their students to what they may see in their college classrooms. The teachers can assign homework problems that the students can do at home, on their computer. When the students are done taking the assignment, they can view their results. The PreCalculus teachers are excited to continue using the online resources and hope that this will provide another more efficient way for the students to master the Pre-Calculus content. Algebra II is in its initial stages of the ‘e’ world as well. More to come in that area soon.

**MHS Social Studies**

US History II classes have implemented an e-version of their textbook. All classrooms have been equipped with chrome books, so students can access the e-book during class. The teachers of US History II have been working collaboratively to incorporate the e-book into the curriculum and to create meaningful lessons for the 1:1 environment.

**MTSD Technology**

Typically our children's first interactions with technology can best be described as intake experiences. Perhaps they watch videos or played simple games on a tablet. Over time, students progress to a level of proficiency that allows them to turn the table and begin to use technology as a tool to create and organize ideas. Eventually, in order to be a truly successful individual in a digital society, our children must begin to think about the vast array of digital tools available to them in order to complete both academic and non-academic tasks. This September, a new UMS elective was launched which seeks to provide students the opportunity to think about and develop the digital literacy skills necessary for academic success. The course begins by having students identify the specific and unique skills that an online reader and writer must develop. Mrs. Sheerin values student choice as they explore tips and tools for digital annotation, note taking and composition. These foundational skills are then ratcheted up as the students explore the values of multimedia tools and then infographics. The dynamic web has changed how we find, process, and disseminate information and Computer Applications 7 is a pivotal course in our students’ digital development.