



Wild Spaces: Outdoor Learning Pilot Launched at Mansfield Middle School

Why are the wild places in my community important and how can I take care of wild spaces in Mansfield, Connecticut? This is the driving question for Mansfield Middle School grade 5 student teams who are piloting a research program about their world.

Over three weeks, students spent two to three hours each day outdoors focusing on different aspects of the project. Teachers Brenda Moulton, Melissa



Grade 5 students explore the Nipmuck Trail, identifying trees as part of their research study outdoors.

Batulevitz, and Martha Davis collaborated with Andrea Petrullo from the State Department of Energy and Environmental Protection to motivate students to study the outdoors like scientists.

For example, one group worked with local specialists to learn how invasive species such as Asiatic Bittersweet impact native fauna and

flora in Mansfield. Another group of researchers studied birds and habitats to align with the Connecticut Audubon Society's annual Christmas Bird Count. The third group used resource material to identify trees in the forest area of the Nipmuck Trail, and studied how forests change.

Producing and sharing information beyond the school is a critical part of these projects. After a pilot experience with a subgroup of grade 5 students, the larger team hopes to engage in a full grade level experience that expands this work this spring.

New Mansfield Elementary School Plans Progress; Groundbreaking in the Spring



The site plan for the new Mansfield elementary school at the existing Southeast School. The project to build the state's first net zero public school is poised to go into the bidding process, and construction starts early this spring.

The planning phase for the new Mansfield Elementary School project is coming to a close, and the project will progress into Phase I construction later this spring.

After months of intensive refinements between architectural firm TSKP Studio, the Town of Mansfield's School Building Committee and the Board of Education, the project has reached its final stage of review. All plans have now been submitted to Connecticut's Office of School Construction Grants & Review which oversees proposed architectural plans before the project goes out for bids on construction.

(See *NEW SCHOOL* on pg. 2)



This is the entrance of the new elementary school, as it will appear from Warrenville Road. The site takes advantage of access to Mansfield Hollow Park’s hiking trails, the public library, ball fields and the existing ROPES course. Geothermal test wells were dug in the fall, a first step in preparation for the system to support a net zero school—the first in the state. The public will have an opportunity to view plans in late April.

The school is being designed to accommodate Pre-kindergarten to grade 4 students throughout Mansfield who presently attend Southeast Elementary, Vinton Elementary and Goodwin Elementary Schools. The 18-month construction schedule targets moving into the new building for the start of the 2022-23 school year.

Reflecting the values of the Mansfield community, this will be the first public school that does not rely on fossil fuels for energy production, a term known as net zero energy. The goal is to reduce energy use and minimize energy loss through the use of geothermal heating systems, use of natural light and optimizing the systems so the solar panels are generating all the energy needed to operate the school. A building science and net zero construction engineering firm, CMTA, is advising the team on this aspect of the project. Study of the energy output and consumption of the school could be a learning opportunity for students.

The pandemic influenced design considerations, too, with special attention given to how to optimize air quality and humidity, and ensuring maximum ventilation air without compromising indoor thermal comfort for the learning environment. Touchless fixtures and touchless water stations are examples of other details incorporated into the specifications to minimize potential spread of germs.

Special care will also be taken in creating flexible spaces for individual and group work, plus allowing for spaces for teacher collaboration. For example, the cafeteria at the core of the school provides a bright, open environment for students to enjoy meals, but also serves as a swing-space for instruction plus a resource for the community after hours.

A full presentation of the project for the community is planned for late April.



Designed for flexible configuration, classrooms have warm wooden ceilings and are flooded by natural light. Final furniture selections, color ways and finishes are still being finalized.

Mansfield Students Think About Others as 2020 Rolls Over to 2021

Students across Mansfield Public Schools find creative ways to bring joy to others through classroom and service projects.

Baking Bread for the Covenant Soup Kitchen



The Covenant Soup Kitchen in Willimantic received 45 loaves of hand-crafted whole wheat bread thanks to Mansfield Middle School seventh graders. Under the guidance of Life & Consumer Science Teacher Nora Dickinson, students learned about whole wheat nutrition and yeast this fall. The project culminated in producing tasty gifts to enjoy with others! (Each student also took a loaf home.)

Southeast CARES Team Creates Food Pantry



The Southeast School CARES team, a group of staff members looking out for families' needs, recruited five grade four student teammates interested in making a difference in their community. The students decided their first priority was to launch a food drive to support families who might need a little help with groceries. They created

posters, produced a video to share, and wrote daily announcements (complete with food jokes) to engage their school community. The effort yielded boxes full of non-perishable food donations, and expanded to the establishment of a food pantry which has now become an added service to Southeast School families.

Record Funds Raised for PJ Day for the Kids

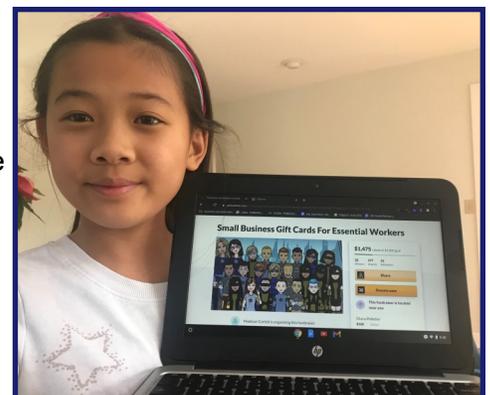
All four Mansfield schools participated in raising funds for children with cancer through Connecticut Children's Medical Center Foundation's PJ Day for the Kids. Students and staff pay for the privilege to wear pajamas to school for a day, and as a result of their efforts, the schools are contributing \$3,457 to the cause, exceeding last year's total by \$1,204! Coordinated by Southeast School Teacher Erika Labelle, the fun event is enthusiastically supported by staff who work hard to generate excitement for this effort in their classrooms.

Passion Projects Focus on Caring for Others

What is your passion? Grade 4 remote learning students have collaborated on a single idea of following their passion to care for others. One group chose to collect donations of items for the Mansfield Animal Shelter and Our Companions Animal Sanctuary in Ashford. Another project included inspiring peers to create 229 holiday cards to bring cheer to local nursing and healthcare centers.

These students also decided to raise funds through a GoFundMe page to buy gift cards from local businesses which will be gifted to frontline workers at Windham Hospital. The students interviewed Cynthia van Zelm, Executive Director of the Mansfield Downtown Partnership, to learn how they could best support businesses, and have raised more than \$3,000 toward their project. Thank you to teacher Madison Corlett who has worked to provide this student-centered learning experience.

When passion turns to action, our community benefits from the big hearts of these young citizens.



Southeast Principal Named Outstanding Administrator by UCONN's Neag School

The University of Connecticut's Neag School of Education has named Southeast Elementary School Principal Lauren Rodriguez as Outstanding School Administrator of the Year for 2021. Principal Rodriguez will be honored along with other education leaders at a virtual ceremony on March 13.

Ms Rodriguez has served as principal at Southeast



In her early years at Southeast Elementary School, Principal Lauren Rodriguez proudly congratulates a young art student.

since 2013. The award announcement honors her achievements as the leader at the PreK to Grade 4 elementary school saying, " her compassionate leadership and supportive approach to engaging with all members of the school community has fostered an inclusive environ-

ment that has ultimately earned the school recognition numerous times as a Connecticut School of Distinction. From implementing enrichment clusters for students to integrating positive behavior supports to allow for healthy social and emotional development, Rodriguez is known for having built strong and positive relationships with teachers as well as parents."

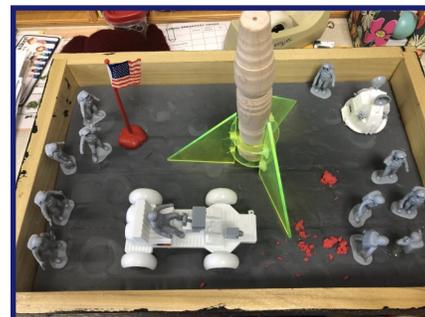
In response to the news, Mansfield Superintendent Kelly Lyman acknowledged the leadership role Ms Rodriguez has taken on within the district. "Lauren has led several initiatives for us including defining performance expectations for our Portrait of the Graduate, and leading our math curriculum work. She absolutely deserves this recognition, and our entire staff and Board of Education is proud to have her on our team."

The Neag School of Education at UCONN also acknowledges Ms Rodriguez's role contributing to the development of the school's conferences, and as a mentor for other emerging educator leaders.

Play Boxes Collaboration Builds Literacy and Creativity

Mansfield Public Schools seeks to build creativity in learners, leading staff and students to collaborate on an inventive way to engage young learners.

In an effort to inspire Kindergarten student writing at Southeast School, Grade 8 students at Mansfield Middle School custom-



The moon landing is the theme of this play box by Grade 8 student Cooper Page.

designed play boxes. They asked the Kinder students what they enjoyed, then planned and built portable play boxes to bring the worlds of outer space, castle kingdoms, sandy beaches and dinosaurs, plus others scenes, to life.

Southeast teachers Erika LaBella and Rebecca Robichaud and district literacy consultant Kaye Jakan brought the idea of the play boxes to the middle school. Under the guidance of technology instructor Bob Burrington, the Grade 8 students executed the project over their nine-week course, and even designed a storage crate to carefully transport the finished projects to Southeast.



Grade 8 student Maritza Rivera uses a glue gun to secure trees in her play box creation.

A virtual meeting between the classrooms revealed the boxes to the Kindergarteners, allowing the Grade 8 students to see the excitement of their young friends. After playing in the boxes, the Kindergarteners are prompted to

write a story about their play. This collaboration will provide joyful learning for many months to come.



A Message from the Board of Education

As the district pushes toward spring of a school year like no other, we marvel at what is being accomplished in Mansfield's schools. First, we are proud that our schools have remained safe to open for all students who choose to attend in person, and that our students, families and staff have practiced the mitigation strategies to make that possible. For the 22% of students who are learning from home exclusively, teachers have found amazing ways to engage and inspire students in their virtual classrooms. At Convocation in August, Superintendent Kelly Lyman encouraged staff to "bring joy to learning," and in this year when everyone is learning new approaches to education, our entire school community has taken this to heart.

Our two important building projects are moving forward. Very soon the town expects to receive final state authorization to open bids on construction of the new elementary school. We also anticipate our middle school roof replacement and photovoltaic panels installation will begin when school ends in June.

Our Board of Education has made great progress on reviewing and updating our district's mission and core beliefs. Along with Superintendent Lyman, principals, and other leadership team members, we have invested time to wrestle with what our guiding principles should be over the next five years as we unite our elementary school students into one building, and prepare all our students for successful futures.

We are eager to share this progress with our community in the coming months, along with the progress the Town of Mansfield's School Building Committee has made in final preparations for our new school facility. Yes, in Mansfield the school year 2020-21 is shaping up to be like no other!

It is the mission of the Mansfield Board of Education, in partnership with the Mansfield community, to ensure that all children acquire the knowledge, skills and attributes essential for personal excellence in learning, life and work within our global community.

Grade 7 Student Kayla Lin is Named a Winner in Senator Murphy's Essay Contest

Kayla Lin, a student at Mansfield Middle School, earned a winning spot in U.S. Senator Chris Murphy's 'Martin Luther King, Jr. Day Essay Contest'. This year, the Senator's office received close to 2,800 entries from elementary, middle, and high school students from across Connecticut reflecting on Dr. King's dream and their own aspirations. Kayla was among three students selected to represent this congressional district, with all five districts represented across Connecticut. Senator Murphy will pay a visit to Kayla's grade 7 class virtually to congratulate her.

"Dr. King was a staunch advocate for peaceful protests. His leadership and lofty dreams inspired millions to fight for their beliefs toward a less prejudiced society," writes Kayla. "The teachings of Dr. King transcends time. We are all created equal. We are all humans, regardless of race, gender, and background. We cannot change the way we look, but others can change the way they see."

In Kayla's essay, she shared her aspirations and the dreams of writing a book of her own "that encourages readers to not only fight for themselves, but for those around them as well."

"The essays submitted by students across Connecticut continue to give me hope," says Senator Murphy. "I'm certain that if these students continue to stay engaged in their community and reject the sins of our past, we'll realize Dr. King's dream sooner rather than later."



Kayla Lin, a student at Mansfield Middle School, was among 15 winners in Senator Murphy's annual essay contest.

Mansfield Board of Education
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Young students at Vinton Elementary (left) and Goodwin Elementary (right) Schools have enjoyed the opportunity to experience cross-country skiing this winter as a physical education activity when storms delivered snow to Mansfield.

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- Mansfield Middle School Students Build Play Boxes to Boost Kindergarten Literacy (page 4)
- Southeast School Principal Receives Top Award from Neag School at UCONN (page 4)

Important Dates

March 11	School Building Committee, 4 PM
March 11	Board of Education Meeting, 7 PM
March 25	School Building Committee, 4 PM
April 2	Good Friday Holiday
April 8	School Building Committee, 4 PM
April 8	Board of Education Meeting, 7 PM
April 9-23	Spring Vacation
June 17	Last Day of School for Students

Mansfield Public Schools

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