



Vertical Classrooms Encourage an Active Group Approach to Problem-Solving



Grade 6 Math Teacher Rick O’Donnell re-directs a step in problem -solving, made easier through vertical learning which helps students analyze their own work more closely with peers.

In Mansfield we consistently adapt our instructional practices and innovate to best serve the needs of students. In math classrooms we have begun to incorporate the use of vertical learning spaces to promote communication and collaboration as students work together in small groups. These oversized, vertical canvases not only facilitate creative expression but also promote active engagement and deep learning.

The use of vertical learning spaces is based on the work of Peter Liljedahl, a mathematics educator and researcher. Vertical learning spaces include the use of easels, whiteboards, and even windows on which students write with dry-erase markers to record their thinking which makes their work easily visible to the

(See Vertical Learning Spaces on pg. 2)

MMS Teacher Named as Mansfield Teacher of the Year and State Semifinalist

Melissa Batulevitz, Literacy Coach at Mansfield Middle School, was celebrated by her peers at Convocation at the start of this school year as the 2024 Mansfield Teacher of the Year. She was also recognized by the Board of Education at their meeting in October. Mrs. Batulevitz has taught for 15 years, including 12 years at Mansfield Public Schools.

Mrs. Batulevitz was selected as Mansfield’s Teacher of the Year in late spring from among 27 nominees across the district by school leaders and her peers. She is described as having “infectious enthusiasm for teaching”. In her role as Literacy Coach, she collaborates with grade 5 to 8-level teaching



Mansfield Teacher of the Year Melissa Batulevitz

teams and individual teachers across the school. As a coach to other teachers, she says, “the most exciting part is when teachers want to try something new, and they want me to be a part of it. I love the process of brainstorming together, co-teaching, witnessing student mastery, and most importantly, seeing their excitement grow as they

add a new tool to their teaching toolbox.”

Her optimism and passion led her to creating the highly successful student-led writing center at Mansfield Middle School. The goal of the center, according to her application, was “to create a space where

(See Teacher of Year on pg. 3)

Mansfield Middle School Upgrades Learning Spaces

With the completion of Mansfield Elementary School, Mansfield's youngest students are now gaining skills in a space ideally suited to 21st century teaching and learning. Now Mansfield Middle School (MMS) is the district's priority with plans in place for facilities improvements to enhance learning spaces. Originally built in 1969, MMS saw renovations in 1998-99. Through grants and a "pay-as-you-go" capital improvement plan built into the annual budget, administrators want to be sure MMS evolves to a modern school.

Mansfield Middle School is fortunate to have a spacious and comfortable auditorium for community events and performances. Families will notice the impact of this summer's upgrade to the stage and auditorium lighting when students perform at upcoming concerts and plays. During school time, the stage can be optimized as a learning space.



The MMS auditorium and stage used for community and school events, has received a lighting upgrade.

Next, MMS will take advantage of a recent security grant to improve safety measures and access to the front office. With a current search underway for a design team, the Town will oversee much-needed improvements that will keep students and staff safe while ensuring appropriate accessibility.

Next summer, the Mansfield facilities staff plans to modernize the third floor where grades 7 and 8 spend most of their class time. To support 21st century learning, classrooms will be renovated, lockers will be refurbished, and cabinetry and furniture will be updated. Flooring is another focus on the third floor. In some classrooms, partitions have already been added to provide flexibility to gain larger and smaller learning spaces as needed. The middle school is also being painted continually by staff maintainers to brighten and freshen spaces.

Recently MMS also received a new generator so systems will be powered up even in an emergency. With the completion of the roof replacement, and placement of solar panels there, MMS has already started down the path to be prepared for generations of students to come.

Vertical Learning Spaces *(cont. from page 1)*

teacher and other groups as they work on solving multi-step problems/tasks. Furthermore, the collaborative nature of vertical learning spaces promotes meaningful interaction among students. In a world that increasingly values teamwork and communication skills, this approach incorporates these crucial



Learning to solve long division problems is a lot easier when you can puzzle it out with friends.

"soft skills" as students are constantly collaborating with their peers and applying critical thinking skills in a creative manner. The end result is that students develop a richer understanding of mathematical concepts through engaging in meaningful mathematical discussions with their peers. The teacher, as a facilitator of learning, can easily navigate the classroom to highlight strategies and redirect problem-solving as needed.



Equations, graphs, geometric shapes and area models come to life on these boards, making abstract ideas more concrete and accessible. The insights we have garnered from the work of Peter Liljedahl are helping us to innovate and enhance mathematical learning as we promote active engagement, collaboration, communication and sense-making in the mathematics classroom.

Brigitta Schwartz Shines as Paraprofessional of the Year

Mansfield Public Schools has selected Brigitta Schwartz as Paraeducator of the Year for 2024. Through the application process, Brigitta's colleagues described her as a smart, compassionate person who "treats students as individuals and with respect". She is known as a great team player and collaborator first at Goodwin Elementary and now Mansfield Elementary School.



Brigitta became a paraeducator in order to have a positive impact on the lives of students when she came to the district four years ago. She grew up in Mansfield and attended schools here, graduating from E.O. Smith High School. Based on her own positive experience, she reflects often on why the focus on students' social and emotional wellbeing is at the core of her work.

Brigitta exudes genuine kindness with a belief that every child can benefit from having supportive adults in their lives. She was a strong choice, therefore, as Mansfield Elementary School's first Behavioral Technician, a newly created position this year.

She strives to build relationships with students. Brigitta makes a point of frequently praising students and continues to embed positive strategies within her daily contact with them. She is known for leaving students positive notes of encouragement and for taking the time to make meaningful connections with her students, as well as fellow staff members.

In her remarks to her peers at Convocation, Brigitta shared, "The successes with students we have seen here in Mansfield are because of all of YOU. Our flexibility, commitment and love for students shines through every day. We are people who go above and beyond to ensure our students are getting what they need and deserve. I hope we continue this trend of an ALL. IN. mindset."

Teacher of the Year (cont. from page 1)

all writers can feel safe and receive the support they need." Students "are taught to learn from their experiences and develop a growth mindset, viewing every opportunity as a chance to learn, improve, and grow." The center also works to build trusting adult and peer-to-peer relationships among the students.

For the fourth consecutive year, the Mansfield Teacher of the Year was also selected among the top ten semi-finalists in the state. Mrs. Batulevitz, like Kate Harbec in 2023, Kim King in 2022 and Ashley Rancourt in 2021, was named among the top teachers in the state's program for Teacher of the Year. She was honored as a semi-finalist by the Connecticut Department of Education at a ceremony in Hartford in November.



Members of the Mansfield Elementary Grade 4 Eco-Action Team exhibited at the Celebrate Mansfield Festival in September and shared information on sustainable practices. One student re-purposed an old bicycle into the spin-the-wheel-and-learn activity the students shared with the community. The Eco-Action Team is a special activity at MES under the leadership of Teachers Jen Zugarazo, Michelle Mather, and Sue Irvine. The Team also creates public service announcements that are broadcast at MES about earth-friendly activities.

Practicing Positive Behavior Habits

At Mansfield Schools, we are committed to our mission that every student develops the knowledge, skills, and disposition essential for civic engagement and personal excellence within our local and global community. While academic achievement is important, students must also have the social and emotional skills to ensure that they are ready to learn and can work collaboratively. Students excel when supported with clear, consistent and positive language that defines behavioral expectations and how to best demonstrate it.



Both of our schools have “respect” as a core expectation. Respect can be somewhat subjective and demonstrated in different ways. Our approach is to explicitly teach students what it

means to act respectful in various school settings that include the classroom, cafe, bus, and hallways. For example, students at the elementary school are taught to “Show Respect” on the bus by listening to the driver and giving personal space to other students.

With a few clear and actionable steps, supported with consistent language and positive reinforcements, students quickly learn how to demonstrate safe, appropriate behaviors throughout the school day. Mansfield Elementary School students will

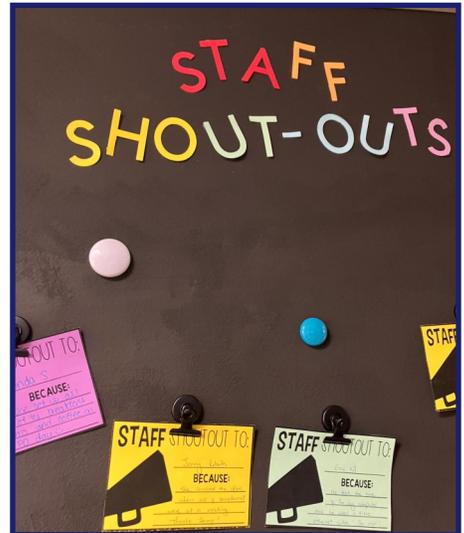


MES students are rewarded with a high-five from MES mascot Thunder at their PAWS Celebration.

recognize the acronym “PAWS” — for Practice Kindness, Act Responsibly, Work and Play Safely, and Show Respect—as a way to cue expectations. At Mansfield Middle School, students are familiar with “Habits of Character”.

This approach is known as Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support, or PBIS,

which is a framework that calls for teaching, modeling, practicing, and acknowledging positive behavior throughout the day. The expectations are simple and clear: we continually reinforce what positive behavior looks like and feels like in our schools.



Staff model positive behavior by offering public “shout-outs” to their peers.

Families can practice this same approach at home. As a group, a family can clearly set expectations for interaction at the dinner table, when hosting friends, riding in the car, or preparing for bedtime. When the rules are consistent and adults model this attitude of respect and responsibility, children know what is expected.

 MANSFIELD MIDDLE SCHOOL		
<i>MMS Roadrunners demonstrate:</i>		
KINDNESS	RESPECT	RESPONSIBILITY
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Know that your words and actions affect others • Look for the best in people • Speak up when you see unkind behavior • Look for ways you can be generous • Look for ways to be inclusive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen to understand others' perspective • Be aware of others and their needs • Be courteous in every interaction • Allow others to be heard • Leave materials and spaces better than you found them • Honor personal space and boundaries • Accept others' differences 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Prepare for tasks and events • Use time effectively • Engage with your own learning • Care for materials and spaces • Complete assignments on time and with your best effort instead • Seek help when you need it • Follow school rules

Our Mission:

It is the mission of the Mansfield Public Schools, in partnership with the Mansfield community, to ensure that each and every child develops the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential for civic engagement and personal excellence in learning, life, and work within our local and global community.



Knowing Students
Supporting the Whole Child
Ensuring Deep Learning

A Message from the Board of Education

The 2023-24 start of school is a much different year than the past few we have experienced. The focus of our year, articulated for us all at Convocation, is that our school community is **All. In.**

All, meaning every one of us—students, families, staff, and leaders—makes up the success of our school year and are critical to the success of effective learning in Mansfield. **In**, meaning committed to living our Core Beliefs, and to the mission of our district. **All. In.**—the Mansfield Public Schools community is keenly focused on students achieving the skills and dispositions known as the 5 C's: Creativity, Citizen of the World, Communication, Collaboration, and Critical Thinking.

What other ways is this year different? After a year of transition, students and staff are in one school at Mansfield Elementary School. MES leaders characterize this long-awaited achievement as **All. In. All One.** This will be the first full year of establishing best practices in a 21st century building. Additionally, this year there are dedicated professionals in our schools whose sole job is to assist students with learning positive behaviors, providing intense social-emotional support, and assisting students whose first language is not English. Teachers will feel more supported, and so will our children.



The district's key strategies of Knowing Students, Supporting the Whole Child, and Ensuring Deep Learning are at work every day in Mansfield Public Schools, and leaders bring evidence of these key drivers to the Board of Education. This great work of teaching students cannot succeed without system coherence. Coherence is provided by the information technology, finance, food services, time, talent, facilities, and communications that wrap around a space for excellent teaching and learning.

Achieving personal excellence in learning, life, and work within our local and global communities takes work. And in Mansfield, we're **All. In.**



The courtyard space at Mansfield Elementary School made an ideal classroom when members of the Mansfield Fire Department visited to teach fire safety over two days in mid-October. The firefighters also toured students around the firetruck apparatus, and conducted a scavenger hunt in the meadow, all part of the outdoor learning spaces.

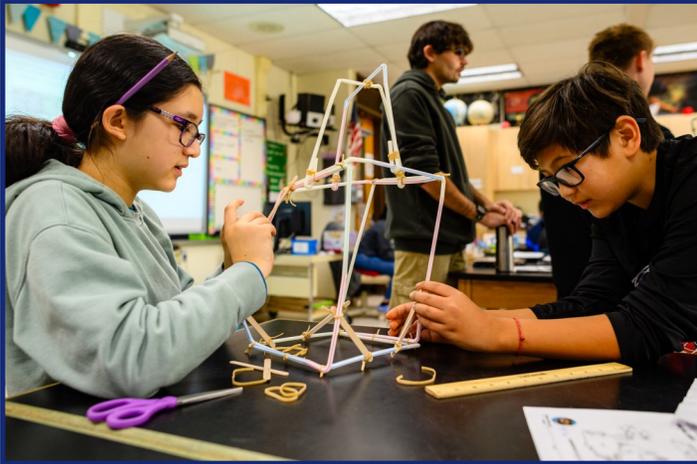


Mansfield Elementary School students are building reading and writing skills through "Foundations." These grade 1 students take turns practicing letter sounds, and then the leader signals with the wand to the class to repeat them. Foundations is a new program that focuses on phonics and word attack skills.



Knowing Students
Supporting the Whole Child
Ensuring Deep Learning

Mansfield Board of Education
4 South Eagleville Road
Storrs, CT 06268-9983



How would you design a structure that could stand up to an earthquake? These grade 7 science scholars were applying their theories using straws.

Important Dates

Dec. 13	MMS Winter Choral Concert
Dec. 20	MMS Winter Band Concert
Dec. 25-Jan.1	Winter Break
Jan. 2	Back to School
Jan. 10	MMS Winter Orchestra Concert
Jan. 15	No School-Dr. King Birthday Holiday
Jan. 18	Board of Education Meeting
Jan. 25	Board of Education Meeting

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Mansfield Public Schools

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