



## **Student Agency: Learning Never Stops**



**Grades 5 to 8 Mansfield Middle School performers rehearsed their musical production after school for ten weeks.**

Mansfield Middle School (MMS) students staged three performances of *Disney's Aladdin, Jr.* in early April, a culmination of months of after-school rehearsals that included songs, dance, cues, and lines of script to memorize for the on-stage actors. Other students learned to operate lighting and sound equipment, build sets, and handle other behind-the-scenes production responsibilities and publicity.

The school takes on these ambitious musical productions typically in alternating spring semesters. Under the direction of Teacher Ryley Zawodniak, who worked professionally in theater, MMS has produced *Lion King*, *The Little Mermaid*, *Shrek*, and *Charlotte's Web*. These performances are one example of the commitment at Mansfield Public Schools to Support the Whole Child. Learning isn't

*(See Learning on pg. 2)*

## **Four Mansfield Educators to Travel as Fund for Teachers Fellows**

Four Mansfield teachers have been selected for international travel this summer through Fund for Teachers. This national organization awarded 77 teachers of the 282 applications received from across Connecticut, allowing teachers to pursue their self-designed professional experiences.

From Mansfield Middle School, Grade 8 Language Arts and Social Studies teachers Julie Hodgson and Michelle Szych will travel to Florence, Italy in June to attend the International Creativity Workshop to learn practical techniques to stimulate students' imagination and innovative thinking. They will also travel to Rome to visit additional sites for curriculum enhancement.

At Mansfield Elementary School, Support Services Teacher Lucia Roberts and Reading Teacher Ashley Rancourt were also named as fellows. They submitted a project that will take them to New Zealand to

*(See Fund for Teachers on pg. 3)*



**Mansfield Elementary Teachers Ms. Roberts and Ms. Rancourt were surprised with Fund for Teachers Fellows backpacks by mascot Thunder the Tiger, students, school leaders, and fellow staff members.**

## Mansfield Middle School Visited by State Leaders

Mansfield Middle School was the host site for Lieutenant Governor Susan Bysiewicz's roundtable discussion with Department of Children and Families Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly, and State Department of Education Deputy Commissioner Sinthia Sone-Moyano in early spring. Three MMS students, plus local and state officials and school leaders, joined the conversation about examining social connection in schools. The roundtable highlighted the culture and programs at MMS that emphasize the Whole Child, anti-bullying efforts, the effects of social media on young people, and more. Members of the MMS Sunshine Club greeted and escorted the guests.



WTIC Radio interviewed MMS students who participated in Lt. Governor Bysiewicz's roundtable.

### Learning Never Stops (cont. from page 1)

just about mastering academic skills, these after-school activities often provide the spark a student needs to build confidence and pride in themselves.

MMS offers options for competitive athletics each season, and pick-up games are also available. For students interested in expanding their musical experience, voice and instrumental ensembles are available, such as Fiddle Band for string players. Life skills opportunities are also popular including Crocheting Club and Photography Club. The Change Makers work on how to make the earth a better place. The Bird Watchers Club accomplished qualifying the MMS campus as a Certified Wildlife Habitat with the National Wildlife Federation. Other student clubs include Yoga, Quiz Bowl, Coding, and Board Games.

After-school club options are also available at Mansfield Elementary School including Robotics and a Knowledge Hub Club.

Research shows that having the chance to engage in high-quality, collaborative activities may help boost academic success, and helps to support the Whole Child. Fun opportunities like these after school encourage what is known as *student agency* which means learning through activities that are meaningful and relevant to individuals, and driven by their personal interests.



Student agency is defined as the capacity to set a goal, reflect, and act responsibly to effect change. When people are in control of their own learning, it becomes personal and meaningful—students become motivated to learn. Mansfield Public Schools works to incorporate this concept into learning during and after school hours. To ensure these opportunities are equitable for all, the district provides late buses so every MMS student can have a safe ride home at the end of the day. Supportive teachers and staff members lead a variety of clubs and activities to appeal to many interests. Mansfield Public Schools works to help every student finds their own successful path to becoming a lifelong learner.



visit Summit Point School where they will learn about inclusive practices for students with specific learning disabilities. They will study how the native Maori language and culture are integrated into the classroom. Both Ms. Rancourt and Ms. Roberts were awarded a Fund for Teachers fellowship previously.

Many Mansfield educators have earned fellowships from Fund for Teachers through the years, traveling to countries including Korea, China, Denmark, and many destinations across the U.S. In Connecticut, Dalio Education is the funding partner for this year's program grants.

Growing Educators is a Core Belief of Mansfield



Public Schools. District staff have pursued many professional opportunities this year, many of them giving presentations at conferences. For example, Grade 8 Language Arts

Teacher Tara Achane-Miller presented at the National Literacy Conference, LitCon 2024. Her presentation entitled, *Writing With a new Lens: Using the Visual Arts to Engage Writers*, allowed colleagues from across the country to practice and apply strategies that blend art and writing together to produce compelling written/visual work products.

MMS Latin and English as a Second Language Instructor Kevin Ballestrini will be presenting at the American Classical League's Annual Institute hosted



**School leaders surprised Melissa Szych and Julie Hodgson with the news of their selection in their MMS classrooms so students could celebrate, too.**

at the University of Arizona in June. Kevin's presentation, *Beyond Translation: Fostering Reading Proficiency and Critical Thinking in the Latin Classroom*, focuses on developing critical thinking skills while developing proficiency in the target language through authentic learning experiences. Kristin Archambault, French and English as a Second Language Teacher, presented to colleagues at the recent Northeastern Conference of Teachers of Foreign Languages in February. The focus of her session was on purposeful engagement strategies that place students in the center of their learning. We are extremely proud of our educators who exemplify our MPS Core Beliefs in their daily work and share their expertise with colleagues near and far.



**Christine from the Connecticut Museum of Culture and History visits Grade 1 to teach about communities in advance of the students' field trip there.**



**Sketching pond side outdoors during art class at MMS provides inspiration for young artists.**

## Employing Technology to Engage Minds



**First graders begin to learn coding principles with a tiny “Bee-Bot” which they learn to program.**

Skills in problem-solving and collaboration are critical to active learning. Principal Kate McCoy, concluding her first year with the district, has facilitated the addition of a LEGO Education lab to support STEM instruction starting this fall. These programs are not only designed to ignite creativity and critical thinking, but also to enhance collaboration skills and provide enrichment opportunities for all students.



This new LEGO initiative will be available in all grades PK-4 in the MES STEM program and with classroom learning opportunities, too. With programming that is progressively more complex, young scholars will be engaging in collaborative exploration of physics and engineering concepts through exciting challenges and activities using LEGO bricks, in addition to the dynamic coding and robotics programs. Through projects and hands-on challenges, students will learn to work together, communicate effectively, and solve problems as a team.

“We believe that these programs will provide enrichment opportunities for all students, regardless of their background or interests,” says Principal McCoy. “Whether they are aspiring engineers, coders, or simply curious learners, LEGO Education programs offer something for everyone, encouraging students to reach their full potential and discover the joy of learning together. Get ready for a year filled with collaboration, creativity, fun, and endless possibilities!”

## Experiences through Virtual Reality

Using virtual reality (VR), students at Mansfield Middle (MMS) and Elementary Schools (MES) travel to places across the world to study concepts in science, culture, and language. By wearing special headsets, students see a virtually real, three-dimensional setting come to life which they can observe and describe to a study partner.

For example, MMS Grade 7 science students used VR sets to observe giraffes on the African savanna, and, aided by study guides, were prompted to notice how they adapt to their environment. At Mansfield Elementary, World Language classes “visited” a town in the state of Michoacán, Mexico where the Monarch Butterflies spend the winter.



**While one partner reads the questions, the other student describes their observations, then they swap places so the experience is shared.**

Robotics is already a critical part of the curriculum. More than 50 MES fourth graders dedicated their time and energy to an after-school Robotics Club, and their classmates had the same exciting opportunity to build their robots during STEM class. They participated in an in-school VEX IQ Robotics tournament in April, the culmination of months of work. Students in Grade 1 are already beginning to dabble in the concepts of programming sequences.



Knowing Students  
Supporting the Whole Child  
Ensuring Deep Learning

## A Message from the Board of Education

One of the most important jobs the Board of Education performs for its community is reviewing and recommending the annual budget for the school district.

School leaders invest enormous effort in managing talent, financial resources, and imagining the upcoming year to optimize the community’s investment in education. They observe trends in population, and in emerging needs of students. As a Board, our role is to ensure the important work of the district, and its young students, is supported. As our mission states, the district and the community is committed to ensure that each and every child develops the knowledge, skills, and dispositions essential for civic engagement and personal excellence. School budgets are not merely dollars, but a tool we use to help meet students’ needs.

**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.*

Mansfield holds a high respect for rich educational experiences. Our community has just invested in a net-zero energy elementary school that supports 21st century learning, and reflects the value of sustainability that we believe is so fundamental to our future. Investment in the middle school facility will enhance security, sustainability, and learning spaces. Learners will benefit from these investments.



We value education here. And while the BOE budget represents a 0% increase over last year, innovation and expanding access and opportunities continue to grow.

## Bike Mansfield Ensures All Students are Confident Riders



Thanks to community partner Bike Mansfield, every Grade 4 student will now learn to ride a two-wheel bicycle, and master safe riding skills. Through grants and fund raising, Bike Mansfield purchased a set of bikes plus helmets and training elements so an entire physical education class can ride at once. They also purchased a trailer for storage in off-season. Students participated in Bike Week in May to begin their bicycling experiences.





Knowing Students  
Supporting the Whole Child  
Ensuring Deep Learning

Mansfield Board of Education  
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Mansfield Middle School students are engaged in Aquatic Ecology studies this spring, visiting nearby Bicentennial Pond to collect and observe specimens.

### Important Dates

June 6	BoEd Meeting-Student Leadership Award Celebration and Staff Retirees
June 10	Grade 4 Promotion Ceremony, MES
June 13	Grade 8 Promotion Ceremony, MMS
June 13	Last Day of School for PreK
June 14	Last Day of School for Students
July 8 - Aug. 1	Summer School
August 29	Start of School Year for Students

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## Mansfield Public Schools

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