



Grade 1 Teacher Anthea Grotton creates an inclusive world for all students in her classroom.

Anthea Grotton, Teacher of the Year, is Committed to the Power of Education

Anthea Grotton, Grade 1 Teacher at Mansfield Elementary School, was selected by her peers and school leaders as Mansfield's 2025 Teacher of the Year. She was celebrated by fellow staff members at Convocation in August, recognized by the Board of Education in October, and at the statewide Teachers of the Year ceremony in Hartford in November.

Anthea is a relative newcomer to Mansfield Schools, now in just her third year here, but brings 22 years of experience to her unique leadership style. In her Convocation remarks to staff she shared her belief in the "power of education" reflecting on her father's long commitment to teaching children to read and the way he impacted these children's lives. She is a tireless advocate for equity, noting that "as a third generation, multiracial educator, educational equity has been a lifelong mission." She wants to ensure students see adults at school who look like them, and wants her classroom to be an "inclusive, safe space where all are welcome."

(See Teacher of the Year on pg. 3)

Igniting Excitement for Learning

Former Mansfield Middle School student Larry Wasiele admits he was not a conventional learner, and was a challenge for his teachers in the classroom. Now he is an accomplished artist who has designed the University of Connecticut's branding and sculpted the famous statue of Jonathan the Husky that stands outside of Gampel Pavilion. Therefore, he was a great choice to kick off the district's Convocation ceremony in August, thanking and motivating teachers and staff to Know Students and find a way to ignite learning with all youth in their classrooms.

The concept that "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire" is behind the three key drivers or strategies in Mansfield Schools: Support the Whole Child, Know Students, and Ensure Deep Learning. To "ignite" excitement takes creativity and inspiration as an educator, and Mansfield aims to support staff in providing that level of learning.

Renowned author and educational pioneer Ron Berger worked with staff at their Professional Learning

(See Igniting Learning on pg. 4)



Whether working one-on-one, or teaching an entire classroom, skilled teachers continually seek ways to ignite a love for learning in students.

Serving Scratch Cooking & Local Milk

Mansfield Public Schools is the first school district, along with (Region 19) Edwin O. Smith High School, to offer bulk milk to all students PreK to 12, demonstrating a commitment to low waste, sustainable practices, and local foods. The milk travels about 2.5 miles from Mountain Dairy to Mansfield Middle School where the district hosted state leaders to celebrate this “hyperlocal” accomplishment.

Mansfield Public Schools launched the commitment to local milk when it opened its new elementary school in the spring of 2023, the first new net-zero energy elementary school built in Connecticut. The district specified a bulk milk dispenser as part of its standard cafeteria equipment. Students responded positively to the fresh milk choices, and handled the self-serve dispensers responsibly, so the district applied for grant funding from the Connecticut Milk Promotion Board and New England Dairy to bring the bulk milk program to Mansfield Middle School and E.O. Smith High School.

This fresh milk is produced by Mountain Dairy, which has been supplying Mansfield and surrounding communities with delicious milk since 1871. Members of the Stearns family attended the MMS celebration to observe students enjoying their milk, and brought a cheerful poster to add to the



Self-serve bulk dispensers with a choice of Mountain Dairy milks are used at Mansfield Elementary, and have been added at Mansfield Middle School and at E.O. Smith High School this year.

MMS Students Travel to Germany



Twenty Mansfield Middle School students participating in an exchange with a school in Sarstedt, Germany enjoyed a three-week immersive experience living with families, attending classes, and traveling. The middle school will benefit from hosting the German students next fall in this cultural exchange.

cafeterias’ colorful local milk messaging

Mansfield Schools’ kitchens celebrated National Farm-to-School month with local food tastings and a contest to name each cafe’s cow mascot. Each month more “from-scratch” items are added to the menu, many made with locally sourced produce and products. Under the guidance of Chef Maraiah Popeleski-Tilley, RDN, Food Services staff have been working with professional chefs to learn and improve production kitchen practices such as knife skills, efficient produce processing, and expanding offerings of cultural specialties and flavors.



Mansfield Schools Food Services also prepared a Community Dinner recently, in cooperation with other partners of Taste of Mansfield. The vegetarian meal featured items that are all standard school meal recipes, demonstrating to the community how sourcing locally and preparing meals from scratch is a great commitment to healthy food ways.



Superintendent Peter Dart congratulates Teacher of the Year Anthea Grotton (left) and Paraeducator of the Year Michelle Varga (right) at Convocation at the start of the school year.

Teacher of the Year *(cont. from page 1)*

A lifelong learner, Anthea continues to seek out academic challenges such as her current pursuit of Orton Gillingham certification in multisensory reading



instruction. She contributes to her local Mansfield community participating on the MES Care Team, Mansfield Teacher Leaders, and the MPS Diversity, Inclusion, Equity Committee.

Her learning quest has taken her to Finland and Reggio Emilia as part of this work.

Mansfield is fortunate to have such a committed and visionary leader working with our young students.

Paraeducator of the Year Michelle Varga Aims to Make a Difference

Mansfield’s Paraeducator of the Year Michelle Varga may be in just her third year in this role at Mansfield Middle School, yet she recognizes the integral role of paraeducators within the fabric of the learning experience– what she describes as “the secret sauce that makes it all work beautifully.”

Michelle consistently reaches out to students with warmth and a genuine willingness to make connections. At lunchtime she is eager to tell students about the locally grown produce they are eating, to share a corny joke, and befriend the student sitting alone to find a table for them to join. She also makes an effort to greet students during homeroom and check in with them at the start of the day. As she notes, “these are the little extras that make all the difference in a child’s day.”



Students are not the only beneficiaries of her lively kindness. Michelle has taught Zumba to staff and students and participated in the Special Olympics Torch Run to support law enforcement. When some young friends expressed interest in birds, she founded an after school club and worked with them to earn MMS status as a wildlife habitat with the National Wildlife Federation.

Michelle is an exemplary member of the school community who embodies the valuable role that paraeducators fill connecting with students.

Instrumental Program Strong and Growing in Mansfield

Mansfield Schools offer string and instrumental instruction for students as young as Grade 2. This year, 179 students are engaged in the string program at Mansfield Elementary School, with 66 Grade 4 students enrolled in band. At Mansfield Middle School, there are nine different instrumental ensembles for students to join. Nearly half of MMS students, 270 total, are engaged in one or more musical option, including chorus.

Please attend one of our Winter Concerts (see back page) to hear the results of their fine work!



Igniting Learning *(cont. from page 1)*

session in October. Chief Academic Officer of Expeditionary Learning Education, Inc. in Massachusetts, Mr. Berger is a former teacher and carpenter who is known for his work with “Models of Excellence”, a collection of high-quality Grades PreK-12 student work to inspire educators about what is possible in the classroom. He brought samples of this work for Mansfield teachers to see and read.



“We have studied Ron’s work closely in Mansfield,” says Candace Morell, Mansfield’s Director of Teaching and Learning. “It continues to be the exemplar as we continue to build out practices connected to student exhibitions, portfolios, and student-led conversations and celebrations. We are certain his ideas spark teacher thinking about the infinite possibilities for the year ahead,” she adds.



“Igniting” a student’s passion for learning is not a one-size-fits-all approach. For students to own their own learning requires relevant, authentic real-world experiences which give them voice.

Students in Mansfield have experienced these “deep learning” studies through units that have included local, primary resources, locations, and experts who are willing to work with our students. Such experiences have included Joshua’s Trust, DEEP, Army Corp of Engineers, The Witness Stone, and the CT Museum of Culture and History. Through a clever combination of resources, challenges, and connection, the district strives to support students and the teachers who care for them.

LEGO Lab Builds Excitement for STEM



Students team up to design and build using LEGO blocks in the MES LEGO Lab which combines science concepts with creative play

Imagine a classroom that has an entire wall designed to accommodate LEGO creativity. The facilities staff custom-built a wall in the STEM lab at Mansfield Elementary School (MES) over the summer to support the PreK to Grade 4 LEGO Learning program that’s now in place for all students.



These programs are not only designed to ignite creativity and critical thinking but also to enhance collaboration skills and provide play-based learning opportunities for all students using familiar LEGO forms they love.



According to STEM Teacher Michelle Mather, students at MES are engaged in LEGO lessons during their STEM classes as part of a play-

based education program. These lessons include creative engineering, exploring science concepts, coding, and basic engineering concepts that include loads, forces, and stress.



Knowing Students
Supporting the Whole Child
Ensuring Deep Learning

A Message from the Board of Education

With a special invitation from Superintendent Peter Dart, Board members were excited to participate in the Community Read over this summer, coordinated with the Mansfield Public Library and Mansfield Public Schools. The book, *The Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt, outlines how smartphones, social media, and the overuse of devices that connect to the internet dangerously impact children’s health, but that the negative impacts can be curbed through play and minimizing screen time. The author also reinforces how a play-based childhood promotes healthy development. In our community discussion on the book, parents and staff alike considered how more play can be incorporated into our schools, and our free time at home.



Therefore, the Board of Education was eager to endorse an effort we hope will take hold in our community: Mansfield Make Time for Offline. **We encourage everyone to make a pledge to help enrich the lives of our community by encouraging all members, especially our children, to play more** and balance the use of technology, social media, and smartphones. This call to action encourages young and old alike to exercise, create, engage and connect directly with others, host fun activities—whatever you consider play. The website page www.mansfieldct.gov/MakeTime will feature activities and ideas across our community.

Within the district, we are urging our school leaders and teachers to find ways to incorporate play-based learning for all students, in all grades. That might mean more digging in the gardens at MES, hikes on the Mansfield Hollow trails, and building LEGO robots. At MMS, trips to Bicentennial Pond or outdoor learning activities continue to be encouraged and supported. Our policy of smartphones being “off and out of sight” at school is modeled by staff and students alike.

We encourage every Town department, every club and organization, every business, and every household to take this pledge. Mansfield is a wonderful community to play in. Let’s all Make Time for Offline!



(Above) At Mansfield Elementary, PreK students play on the specially designed Trike Path.

(Left) MMS physical education classes concentrate on trying new activities and improving personal performance.



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



Children benefit from free play time and play-based learning at Mansfield Schools, including recess time at MES and a free choice block at MMS.

Important Dates

December 11	Mansfield Middle School (MMS) Winter Band Concert 7 PM
December 18	MMS Winter Choral Concert 7 PM
Dec 23 - Jan 1	Winter Break
January 18	MMS Winter Orchestra Concert 7 PM
January 22	MES Grade 3&4 Strings Concert 6:30 PM
January 23	Board of Education Meeting
January 30	Board of Education Meeting

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Mansfield Public Schools

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