



Mansfield Teacher of the Year Inspires Positivity and Collaboration

Mansfield Public Schools and members of the Teacher of the Year Committee selected Julie Hodgson as Mansfield’s 2026 Teacher of the Year. A passionate educator, a reflective practitioner, and a continuous learner, Julie embodies a deep commitment to students and a drive for self-growth.

Julie began her career at Mansfield Middle School more than three decades ago, and now teaches Grades 7 and 8 Social Studies. Over the years, she has blended inspiration from colleagues with tireless investigation into effective teaching practices, constantly evolving her craft. She recognizes that, "it is only by standing on the shoulders of giants and collaborating with colleagues that [I] made a lasting impact on students and families."



Mansfield Middle School Teacher Julie Hodgson qualified as a semi-finalist for State Teacher of the Year.

School of Education at the University of Connecticut also named her as an Outstanding School Educator in 2007.

(See Teacher of the Year on pg. 3)

Partnership with UConn Navy STEM Program Builds Skills for the Future



Engineering students from the UConn Navy STEM program have taught skills needed to cut parts, and assemble an underwater robot.

The UConn Navy STEM program is bringing real-world engineering opportunities to Mansfield Middle School. Over 10 one-hour sessions led by UConn students, Grade 6 students are learning skills to help them build a SeaPerch underwater robot. In the first sessions, students practiced careful measuring skills and used power tools to cut and drill PVC piping,

(See UConn Navy STEM Partnership on pg. 4)

Studying the Attributes and Advocating for the Best State Rock

Did you know that the State of Connecticut does not have an official State Rock? How would you choose one? How do you feel about the Portland Brownstone or Lantern Hill Quartz in comparison to Garnet Schist, for example?



University of Connecticut Professor of Earth Sciences Robert Thorson, a geologist and author, visited Grade 7 students to pose that question to them. In a project combining Social Studies and Science, students were introduced to seven different rocks. While passing around samples to touch and observe, Dr. Thorson provided an overview for the classes comparing each stone's distinctiveness, utility, beauty, advantages, and disadvantages among the choices.

The assignment to the class: select the rock that would be the best candidate as State Rock and write a paragraph of compelling advocacy. In late December, that hard work was shared to convince Mansfield State Legislator Gregg Haddad of the appropriate choice. A group of nine students read their recommendations to Rep. Haddad and Dr. Thorson. They encouraged the students to work toward consensus. If Rep. Haddad is successful in proposing a bill to adopt a State Rock, he urged students to testify before the committee of the legislature with their recommendations.

This cross-collaboration of Science and Social Studies will provide students valuable and authentic life experiences.



(Above) Grade 7 students are studying specimens to determine their choice for a State Rock, then (below) a select group presented their recommendation to Representative Haddad who plans to introduce a bill to name a State Rock.



Mansfield Elementary School is offering robust club opportunities after school this year, including Robotics, Debate, Tiger Strong, Kickball, Little Tigers-Big Hearts, Art Club, and Board Game Club.

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

As a Fund for Teachers Grant Recipient in 2023 she studied literature while visiting Italy. She recently completed a three-year fellowship in the Human Rights Close to Home Program at the University of Connecticut's Dodd Center. The State Teacher of the Year committee selected her as a state semifinalist, the top 12-15 teachers selected from all the district winners.

As an active member of the Mansfield Schools community, Ms. Hodgson has served and led



numerous committees, developed curriculum, and regularly engages families. Julie brings her positive and collaborative spirit to every interaction.

“Julie has high expectations for herself and for her students,” says Dr. Shamim Patwa, Director of Student Support Services who oversees the Teacher of the Year selection process. “As she shared in her address to our Mansfield staff at Convocation in August, she challenges each of us to ‘just show up’ in mind, body, and spirit every day. She is on a constant quest not just to be a better teacher, but to be a better person in general, so that she can connect with students in meaningful ways.”

German Students Visit MMS in Continuing 30-Year Exchange Program



Students from Gymnasium Sarstedt, Germany, visited Mansfield Middle School for three weeks in early fall. Trips to New Hampshire's White Mountains and New York City rounded out time in the MMS classrooms and exploring with home host families.

Paraeducator Trevor Roberts Respects Students and Peers



Trevor Roberts helps his students feel seen, heard, and supported.

Mansfield Public Schools is celebrating 2026 Paraeducator of the Year Trevor Roberts. For four years, Trevor has been a vital paraeducator in the 7th and 8th grade BEST program at Mansfield Middle School, offering consistency, calm, and care. He is a

steady presence, helping students feel seen, heard, and supported, whether through a hallway check-in or a quiet moment of de-escalation.

Trevor is respected as a teammate, and is a steady anchor for staff and students alike. Dr. Shamim Patwa, Director of Student Support Services says, “Trevor centers his work around students, supporting their growth as whole individuals, grounded in equity and connection. Whether guiding students who volunteer to serve families at the Covenant Soup Kitchen or helping a student express emotions instead of shutting down, Trevor builds bridges between frustration and growth, school and community. His mission is to help students become people others can look up to, instilling confidence, agency, and a deep sense of belonging.”

“This has been an amazing place for me to grow,” Trevor shared with the Board of Education at a ceremony in October. “And I love that I get to watch so many students grow and become amazing leaders and members of our community who continue to impress me when I see them. I think, oh my gosh, you have become the person I had hoped you would become because you have been in our schools.”

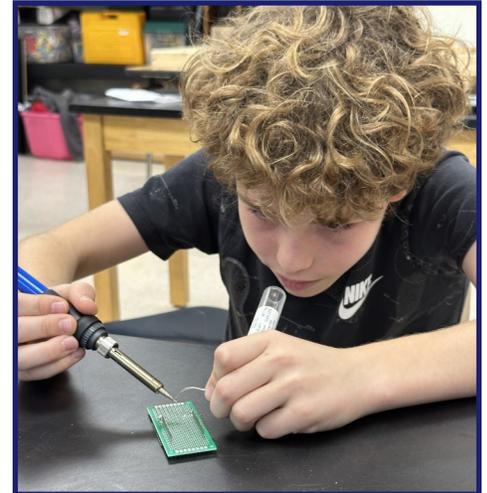
and then assembled the basic robot framework. Next they began developing crucial technical skills by learning about wiring and practiced soldering the electrical components. The culmination of this hard work will be the testing of their operational SeaPerch robots in pools of water, an eagerly anticipated event! This hands-on experience is building essential skills in design, physics, collaboration, and problem-solving. Teachers are supported with Technology Integrationists with the one-on-one instruction.

"Working with the SeaPerch Program is so beneficial to all students, says Grade 6 Science Teacher Val Moseley. "The skills they are learning and practicing are highly transferable, and essential to

their futures, whether they go to college, join the workforce, or learn a trade."

UConn is engaging in this outreach project with six middle schools across Connecticut.

The goal is to build engineering skills in middle school through college to help support the region's important maritime industry with a highly skilled workforce.



Finding Mansfield History in Our Environment



Mansfield Middle School Teacher Jenn McMunn points out plants that were useful to the Nipmuck peoples according to historic research, and students observed and recorded these artifacts.



In anticipation of America's 250th birthday celebration in 2026, teachers are finding engaging ways to present our region's rich heritage. In October, all Grade 5 students conducted a week-long Enrichment study of Mansfield's indigenous people as part of this year's "Mansfield 250" focus on implementing local history at each grade level.

Students researched using articles, photographs, and maps from the town website and the Mansfield Historical Society to learn about indigenous residents of Mansfield in pre-Columbian times. As an extension activity, students could participate in a hike in Schoolhouse Brook Park to photograph and write logs about natural resources in our present environment that historical records show were used by the local indigenous Nipmuck people.

For example, students examined photographs from the historical society of indigenous artifacts, used the caption to pinpoint the artifact's discovery site on a town map, and wrote inferences about the artifact's possible use based on its location and surrounding geographic features.





Knowing Students
Supporting the Whole Child
Ensuring Deep Learning

A Message from the Board of Education

This fall the community elected a new Board of Education for the district. We welcome to our Board four new members who are committing six years to oversee the direction of our district– Haley Gross de Jimenez, Kristen Dilaj, and returning members David Litrico and John Fratiello.

We also acknowledge the service of three long-time Board members. In October we saluted outgoing Chair Kathy Ward, Vice-Chair Susannah Everett, and Edith Allison. These leaders were integral to the District Development Plan we adopted in 2021 to guide our commitment to students and our Core Beliefs. They also hired new Superintendents, celebrated our new net-zero elementary school, and consistently promoted investment in education. They were responsive to both students and staff alike who presented our progress to them. We thank them for their service to our town and our schools.

What is ahead for our district? The District Development Plan guides the work of our district. In the coming months, school leaders and the Board will be reevaluating this strategic plan, taking the opportunity to refresh and reimagine future goals. Education is evolving and growing, just like the students entrusted to our care. We must be sure that our mission, goals, actions, and indicators are aligned with what serves students best.

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.



At Mansfield Middle School, Grade 8 students each partnered up with a Grade 2 student, asking them to imagine and sketch their ideal vision of a “Comfort Critter.” Then in their Life and Consumer Science course, the Grade 8 students transformed those sketches into patterns and hand-sewn creations. Students exchanged letters throughout the project and then delivered the critters in person. Grade 2 students were encouraged to ask their mentors what tools they used to make the critters, and what was their favorite part about making them. The project helps build confidence and communication skills for all.





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



Congratulations to Mansfield Elementary School which was named a School of Distinction by the State Department of Education for a second year in a row with recognition for their High Performance and High Growth English Language Arts (All Students) and English Language Arts High Growth (High Needs Students).

Important Dates

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| December 23- January 2 | Winter Break |
| January 14 | Winter Orchestra Concert at MMS 7 PM |
| January 15 | Board of Ed Meeting 6:30 PM |
| January 19 | Dr. Martin Luther King Birthday Holiday |
| January 22 | Board of Ed Meeting-Budget 6:30 PM |
| January 24 | Snow Ball at MES 1:30-5 PM |
| January 29 | Board of Ed Meeting-Budget 6:30 PM |

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Mansfield Public Schools

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