

# Focus on 14

The Region 14 School District Monthly Newsletter

## Mitchell Elementary School Named “School of Distinction” by CSDE



Mitchell Elementary School has been designated as a “School of Distinction” by the Connecticut State Department of Education for overall student performance and high academic growth for the 2021-22 school year.

“This tremendous accomplishment places Mitchell Elementary School in the top 10% of elementary schools in Connecticut based on their Next Generation Accountability Index score,” said Region 14 Superintendent Brian Murphy. “This honor is a testament to the wonderful efforts of staff and support of parents.”

In December, the CSDE released results from the 2021-22 Next Generation Accountability System that measures individual school and district growth by gauging how well a school is preparing its students for success. The Next Generation Accountability index is primarily based on the state’s Smarter Balance Assessments given to students each spring.

Mitchell’s accountability index is within the top 10% of all elementary and middle schools in Connecticut - 82.4% compared to the 69.7% state average. Mitchell is also among the schools with the highest student growth for all students in English Language Arts and in Math.

In ELA, 81.2% of Mitchell’s students met their growth goals compared to the state average of 60.4%. Mitchell students saw 88% of students meet their goals in math compared to the 65.2% state average.

“I cannot express how proud I am of the whole team here at Mitchell,” said Principal Kelly Pinho, who began her role as principal in September of 2021. “When I got here last year, I told my staff that with our team, we are going to do great things together. This shows we are on well on our way to do that.”

### From the Superintendent

In December, Region 14 launched a program to mitigate student learning loss that occurred for some students during the pandemic.

We began the **Student Intervention Academy**, a pilot program that addresses learning gaps in the areas of ELA and Math for students in kindergarten through the eighth grade. The afterschool program is made possible by a Title I grant and is staffed by our interventionists and guided by teachers’ lesson plans. The district math and literacy coaches have also been instrumental in ensuring student needs are being met.

There are about 70 students from Mitchell and Bethlehem Elementary as well as Woodbury Middle School who have been identified by our Student Success Team members as needing extra help. They meet after school several times a week for small group tutoring and, so far, the results have been promising.

The student sessions include a portion of the time with an interventionist, a portion of hands-on lessons followed by working on a computer program set exactly to the student’s individual level of growth. Students will be reassessed after six months to determine whether they need to continue.

We are proud to offer this free program to our students and are thankful for the dedicated staff working to see success for these students.

Brian Murphy

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## Joy in January Aims to Bring Change to Student Connections at WMS

Positive words. Listening. Being helpful. A card to show appreciation. These small acts are just some of the ideas offered to the Woodbury Middle School community by members of the WMS Alliance group during the kickoff to the "Joy in January" Challenge. The "Joy in January" Challenge is a month-long school-wide kindness initiative brought forth by eighth grade Alliance member Ava Hirleman who wanted to start the new year off with a boost of kindness.

"We had a mindset challenge in December in Alliance, and it went so well that I thought we should do something for the whole school," Hirleman said. "It seemed like a good way to start the new year off by being kind and offering words of encouragement to each other." Hirleman said she hopes this challenge will foster a more connected and inclusive middle school community.

Alliance leaders introduced the challenge to students and teachers during the Friday morning WMS Family and will check in with them every week to see how the challenge is progressing. "The idea was to bring this to WMS Family because all the grades are mixed together and it's a time that students in different grades can make some connections," Hirleman said.

Alliance member Julia Gwiazdoski, who is in eighth grade said she feels the WMS Family groups are the perfect place to start this joy challenge. "Sometimes we as eighth graders don't remember what it was like as a sixth grader," Gwiazdoski said.



WMS Alliance Members Julia Gwiazdoski and Ava Hirleman

## BES Student Council Members Attend CAS Leadership Conference



Decision-making. Communication skills. Problem solving. These are the some of the topics Bethlehem Elementary School student leaders worked on at the Connecticut Association of Schools Elementary Leadership workshop earlier this month.

Twelve fourth and fifth-grade members of the BES Student Council attended the CAS Elementary Leadership Conference at Naugatuck Valley Community College on January 11 with hundreds of other students, student leaders, parent volunteers, and teacher facilitators from elementary schools around the state.

BES students enjoyed a variety of breakout sessions to learn new skills and broaden their knowledge and understanding of key concepts with the aim of bringing what they learned back to their schools and sharing it with classmates.

Following an assembly on kindness and leadership at the start, student breakout sessions for the half-day conference were everything from learning about leadership in classrooms and sports to an improv session to a lesson on how to be upstanders not bystanders at their schools.

Other topics were about peer conflict, acceptance and inclusion, and helping students find innovative ways to have their voices heard.

Tricia Dannenhoffer, Student Council Advisor and fourth grade teacher has brought BES students to the CAS conference for the past eight years. She said the event pushes students to see ways that they are leaders that they may not even recognize.

Natalia Calabrese, a fifth grader, said her favorite part was the improv-session. "It was fun, and I liked the way it taught us skills on how to work with people we don't know," Calabrese said.

Fourth grader Francis Cuccia said the sports-leadership sessions were the ones he found most appealing especially those focused on determination and balancing school with sports.

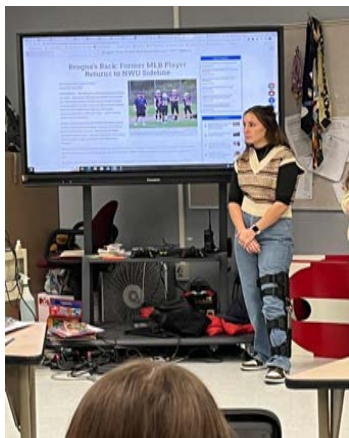
"It was all about perseverance and not giving up something you love even when it's hard," Cuccia said.



## Journalism Workshop Fosters the Love of Writing for WMS and NHS Students

Members of Nonnewaug High School's student-run newspaper and one of their faculty advisors, Kyle Brennan spent the day this month in Adam Brutting's ELA classes at Woodbury Middle School sharing advice and writing experiences with eighth graders. Students on the Chief Advocate staff explained the process of brainstorming, pre-writing editorial meetings, fleshing out and making story ideas better, where and how they find inspiration for their stories, and how to make even a national story relevant to their school.

Brutting and Brennan, who began bringing the journalism students together last year, said the experience introduces a diverse kind of writing to middle schoolers preparing for high school and gives them an insight into what may have inspired the love of news writing for their older peers. "I am on the Chief Advocate because of the experience I had in this class last year," said freshman Maia Colavito, staff writer on the paper.



"The journalism students talk about why they like this kind of writing that is different and cool, and it gives the younger students who may not like traditional writing another option."

ELA Teacher Adam Brutting

## WMS Artists in "Celebrating Art," ASAP! Young Photographers and Scholastic

Seven Woodbury Middle School students were named winners in the "Celebrating Art" contest for the fall of 2022. Their entries included pieces in watercolor, colored pencil, pastels, and markers. The 25 entries were in the top 30% of the entries for the area and will be published in the "Celebrating Art" book released soon. Students are Cora Grogan, Sadie Nichols, Sophie Mehegan, Elianna Obolewicz, Lena Mayo, Maddox Poythress, and Raegan LaPointe. Additionally, 8<sup>th</sup> grader Aeden Rivera won a Scholastic Art Awards Honorable Mention for his jewelry creation and 6<sup>th</sup> grader Aurora Rose was selected for the ASAP! Young Photographer's Celebration for her photo "Bats."



## Region 14 Students in the News



### NHS DECA Earns "Thrive Award" for Community Service Campaign

Three DECA members to participate leadership summit



### VFW Audio Essay Award NHS Sophomore Katie Farrell

Farrell earned 1<sup>st</sup> place in region and 3<sup>rd</sup> overall in Connecticut



### WMS Students Organize Clothing Drive for Ukraine

7<sup>th</sup> grade friends hold successful warm weather clothing drive



### MES Student Council Donates to Community Services Council

Students give \$150 earned in coin fundraiser to help local families

## Role Modeling and Peer Engagement at MES

Giving older students opportunities to be good role models for their younger peers is one way Mitchell Elementary School creates a respectful and inclusive environment for all.

Mitchell third, fourth, and fifth graders recently created SOAR presentations for their younger peers on the proper behaviors expected of them in the classroom, the cafeteria, the hallways, the bus, and on the playground.

SOAR is an easy acronym for the Mitchell Eagles about the proper behavior in school -- Self-control, On task, Act responsible, Respectful. Fourth graders created informative posters and shared with their second-grade peers, third grade met with first grade, and kindergarten heard from their fifth-grade buddies.

This meeting of the grades helps the younger students learn from older role models but making and presenting these SOAR expectation posters also helps to reinforce for the older students what it means to be good members of the school community.



## WMS Students Head to CMEA Music Festival in March

Seven Woodbury Middle School students in orchestra and choir have been accepted into the prestigious and competitive Connecticut Music Educators Association Northern Region Middle School Festival. The Music Festival will take place on March 10 and 11. The seven students from Woodbury Middle School will practice with and perform alongside music students from 46 towns in the Northern Region.



The students heading to the Festival are Lucy Oster, 6<sup>th</sup> grade Choir - Soprano; Dani Martino 7<sup>th</sup> grade Choir - Alto; Madeline Meeker 8<sup>th</sup> grade Choir - Soprano; Phoenix Celello 8<sup>th</sup> grade Choir - Alto; Flynn Amodio 7<sup>th</sup> grade Orchestra - Violin; Maeve Feeney 7<sup>th</sup> grade Orchestra - Bass; and Kaylee Maciulewski 7<sup>th</sup> grade Orchestra - Harp.

The students auditioned in December and January in the greater Hartford area and scored high enough to be invited to the Northern Regional Music Festival. Prior to attending the festival in March, the students work individually on the pieces they will perform with their ensembles. They will rehearse with their groups on March 10 and perform together in choral and instrumental concerts on March 11.

## Unified Sports at NHS Gets 2<sup>nd</sup> Special Olympics Designation

There's a place in the Nonnewaug High School athletics program where the scoreboard doesn't matter. Where building confidence for someone else is at the center. And the rewards are endless. It's a place where athletes with and without disabilities meet in a positive and inclusive environment and leave as life-long friends.

Unified Sports at Nonnewaug High School began in 2007. It is a national Special Olympics program that combines student athletes with disabilities with student partners without disabilities on sports teams for training and competition.

The successful program has garnered on-going school and community support over the last 16 years and has been recognized as a Special Olympics Unified Champions program twice. A banner from the new national designation will be presented on February 10 during the Winter Pep Rally and will be hung next to the one received in 2018 as a testament to this essential and exceptional program.

"Unified is an inclusive program that cultivates relationships and builds confidence for kids to participate with their peers in sports," said NHS teacher Conor Gereg, who oversees the Unified Program and the Nonnewaug Buddies Club with teacher John Dominello.

Nonnewaug hosts teams in Unified Basketball in the winter and Unified Volleyball in the spring each with a six-game schedule complete with uniforms, busses, tournaments, and plenty of fans cheering them on.

Dominello, who has been with the Unified Sports program for 10 years, said the program is a huge benefit for all participants. "It creates a friendship for both the athletes and the partners that are strong and continue well after they have graduated," Dominello said. "It is so amazing to see how organically these relationships happen."

Senior Andrew Greene, who plays varsity soccer and tennis for the Chiefs, said being part of the Unified Team has reinforced the importance of empathy and caring for one another. "The reason we put on the uniform isn't about us, the individual, but helping our teammates," Greene said.

Basketball season will culminate with an athlete, partner, and Region 14 staff game Tuesday, March 14 at 2:30 p.m. in the gym. The event will include an alumni feature with some of the Unified Program's Special Olympics alumni and graduates attending the game.



## Student Artists Sweep Scholastic Art Awards

Region 14 students had an incredible showing in the 2023 Scholastic Art Awards competition with artwork from 17 students receiving many awards including prestigious Gold and Silver Key Portfolio Awards. Nonnewaug High School art students received 15 Gold Key awards, one Gold Key Portfolio, five Silver Key awards, two Silver Key Portfolio awards, one best in drawing award as well as several honorable mentions for their work in drawing, painting, mixed media, photography, and ceramics. Additionally, one Woodbury Middle School entry received an Honorable mention in the jewelry category.

Senior Samantha Molzon was awarded one of only 10 Gold Key Portfolio Awards in Connecticut and will have her art portfolio reviewed by a blue-ribbon panel of judges at the national level in March. Madison Dannenhoffer, who received a Gold Key for her drawing, was also awarded the Connecticut Art Educator's Award for Best in Drawing.



### **Honorable Mention Awards**

Gabriella Berardis - Drawing - "Escape to Fantasy"  
 Gretchen Davis - Drawing - "Trepidation"  
 Eliana Groben - Painting - "After I Survive the Rain"  
 Samantha Molzon - Drawing - "Behind the Mask"  
 Madison Willis - Drawing - "Wild West"  
 Jiaqi Xie - Design - "Self-Control"  
 Aeden Rivera Woodbury Middle School - Jewelry - "Butterfly in Blue"

### **Silver Key Awards**

Helena de Castro - Drawing - "Talking to the Moon"  
 Kiera Jacobi - Mixed Media - "Conscious Separation"  
 Rubie Lombardi - Drawing - "The Next Best American Novel"  
 Emily Matozzo - Drawing - "Nonna's House"  
 Regan Moran - Drawing - "Feeling Blue"

### **Gold Key Awards**

Mae Addeo - Mixed Media - "Five Slices"  
 Madison Dannenhoffer - Drawing - "Parked"  
 Madison Dannenhoffer - Drawing - "11:05 Romantics"  
 Gretchen Davis - Drawing - "My Life"  
 Helena de Castro - Painting - "Rising From the Ashes"  
 Eliana Groben - Drawing - "Boo Boo the Fool's Best Act"  
 Eliana Groben - Drawing - "Still Swimming"  
 Eliana Groben - Drawing - "Outburst"

### **Gold Key Awards**

Samantha Molzon - Drawing - "Sawing Time"  
 Samantha Molzon - Drawing - "Turnout Gear at Rest"  
 Regan Moran - Drawing - "Audience Member"  
 Ethan Moshier - Ceramics - "Shades of Jade"  
 Ella Quinn - Photography - "Unapologetically Herself"  
 Sarah Walsh - Drawing - "Caged In"  
 Madison Willis - Drawing - "Baby Face"

### **Portfolio Awards**

**Gold Key Portfolio** - Samantha Molzon - "Always Ready"

**Silver Key Portfolio** - Gabriella Berardis - "Exorcism  
 Required: Bipolar Disorder"  
 Eliana Groben - "Face It!"

### **Honorable Mention Portfolio**

Madison Dannenhoffer - "After the Crash"  
 Gretchen Davis - "Scenic Expressions"

### **Special Awards**

Best In Drawing - Madison Dannenhoffer - Drawing - "Parked"



The student artwork is being shown at the Slipe Gallery at the Hartford Art School from January 17 through February 3, 2023 at the 33<sup>rd</sup> annual Connecticut Regional Scholastic Art Awards. It is the largest juried student art exhibition in the state.

The Scholastic Art and Writing Awards is the nation's longest-running, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens.