



Dear Mahwah Community, I am excited to introduce the first edition of the Thunderbird Times! The goal is to share, on an ongoing basis, some of the wonderful things that are happening in Mahwah Public Schools. Within our first edition, you will learn about some notable events, awards, and experiences taking place in each of our schools and the district.

Amongst all the wonderful things happening in our district, it is crucial to share with the community the Mahwah Blueprint. This is our 5-Year Strategic Plan that guides our district's collective efforts and momentum forward. The

Blueprint is comprised of four frames:

- **Facilities**
- **Social-Emotional Learning**
- **Curriculum and Instruction**
- **Community Connections**

The above four frames serve as our strategic plan's pillars as we enter our fifth and final year of our strategic plan for Mahwah Public Schools, which we have called Mahwah's Blueprint 2020-2025.

In the school year ahead, we will transition to our next strategic plan cycle, which will require collaboration amongst our community to share your input and insights across the district regarding your experiences,

along with your respective hopes and goals for our district in the next five years. Dates will be sent at the beginning of the upcoming school year to invite all Mahwah residents to take part in this important process.

We are certainly looking forward to what's ahead in Mahwah! Thank you for all your support along the way. We recognize that this integral work could not be successfully completed without the collective efforts of all of you, from the inception of the district's strategic plan into the greatness that is to come!

Respectfully,

Michael DeTuro, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools



**Mahwah
Blueprint
2020-2025**



AMBITIOUS PROJECT CREATED IN MAHWAH HIGH SCHOOL WOODSHOP AND FURNITURE DESIGN CLASS

After growing up in a boating family, Mahwah High School student Lukas Hart, was inspired to take on a challenging project in his advanced woodshop and furniture design class: Lukas designed and is currently building a boat, a project that

will extend into his senior year.

"The whole purpose of this project was to challenge myself," he said. "I have learned the importance of never stopping after a failure. There have been failures with every single step along the way."

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BETSY ROSS STUDENTS EXPLORE SOCIAL-EMOTIONAL LEARNING TECHNIQUES

A crucial aspect of a child's education is fostering empathy – the ability to understand and share the feelings of others. Empathy extends beyond the classroom walls. It allows children to build positive relationships, connect with classmates, and navigate conflict.

Betsy Ross Elementary School is committed to nurturing well-rounded students who excel academically, socially, and emotionally. By understanding different perspectives, children can navigate social challenges with more understanding and resilience. This year, the school focused on developing self-awareness by helping students understand their emotions and communicate with them effectively.

School-wide morning meetings started with “Mindful Mondays,” where students participated in

age-appropriate activities that promote self-awareness and emotional regulation. Led by SEL coaches, Ms. Rainey and Ms. Pestreich, students participated in activities that promote responsible decision-making and social awareness.

Recognizing everyone needs a moment to recharge, each Betsy Ross classroom had a calm corner. These designated spaces offered students a quiet area to relax, take a deep breath, and refocus. Calm corners provided students with activities to give their brain a break and help them manage stress so they could then feel refreshed.

These practices equipped students with tools to manage their emotions effectively, which led to a more positive learning environment.



GEORGE WASHINGTON TEACHERS SPARK JOY IN READING AND WRITING

George Washington Elementary School was abuzz with excitement this year as students from kindergarten through third grade dove into the Reader's and Writer's Workshop curriculum, which enhanced literacy skills and fostered a love of reading and writing.

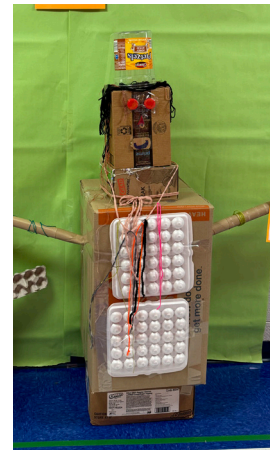
Kindergarten students wrote reminder announcements to encourage recycling. First graders learned to express their opinions through their writing, expressing views on their favorite things.

In second grade, students experienced a literary adventure with a “book tasting” event as they kicked off their classroom book clubs. The school STEAM lab was transformed into a cozy café, where students sampled a variety

of books, exploring different genres and authors.

This year, in Mr. Scillieri's class, second and third graders visited the local Wilkes Deli for a real-world experience with sandwich making. This experience was directly connected to sequencing in writing about the proper steps to make a sandwich and reading about a girl who orders a “bountiful” sandwich.

In third grade, the hallway was transformed into the “Starbucks Café,” a delightful play on the famous coffee chain. Here, students shopped for books to read in their book club unit! The ambiance was complete with barista teachers and café menus, featuring beverage names instead of book genres and levels.



LENAPE MEADOWS STUDENTS SOAR IN 23-24

Lenape Meadows School strives to create an environment that feels like home to everyone who walks through the school building doors – whether that’s students, parents, or the community.

The goal for the entire school community in 2023-24 was to SOAR, regardless of adversity. Students collaborated on the acronym which stands for Safe, On Task, Achieve, Respectful. Throughout the year, students and staff members were equipped with strategies and professional development so the entire school could “take

flight.” Thunderbirds caught consistently SOARING earned bracelets and wore them with pride!

New to this school year, thanks to third-grade teacher, Mrs. Kristin Pacelli (pictured), was the Kindness Cart. A monthly activity, kindergarten through third grade students participated in the Kindness Cart to show appreciation to their teachers. The cart was equipped with treats, drinks, pens, motivational stickers, and other fun materials. Students loved visiting teachers’ classrooms and spreading positivity.



JOYCE KILMER SCHOOL ENCOURAGES GROWTH BEYOND THE CLASSROOM

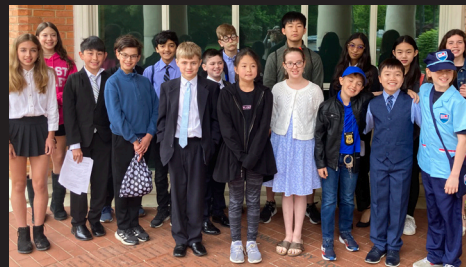
Academics and social experiences go hand in hand at Joyce Kilmer where the 2023-24 school year was themed, **“We grow when we learn together: better you, better world.”** From small-group learning opportunities to engaging peer-to-peer conversations, students regularly challenged themselves both inside and outside the classroom.

Part of achieving a “better you, better world” is through a commitment to service. Each year, the school bands together to raise funds for an organization. This year, students raised over \$7000 for heart health in collaboration with the American Heart Association.

The state-of-the-art Innovation Lab became the backdrop of Rocketry Week, where fifth graders celebrated by creating and launching rockets. The lab combines science, technology, engineering, and math with art education through a glass garage door connecting the lab with



the art room. At recess, students regularly visit the lab to use the technology to create during their free time.



Placing second out of 91 schools in the Law Fair Competition, the fourth-grade Mock Trial team practiced exploring perspectives, using evidence to build an argument, and creativity in the trial they titled, “The Case of the Concerning Catastrophe.” The team developed the story that follows a painter who broke her arm when she was allegedly chased by the dog who owned the garage that she was painting. Students participated in this challenge as part of the Gifted and Talented Program.

Often, Joyce Kilmer students spend recess running laps around the playground. Mileage Club, which started over 10 years ago, fosters a love of running and prepares students for the district’s track and cross-county teams. After

completing a mile, students receive a token as a reward, and they wear them proudly. The fifth graders ran a total of 3,014 miles (about the width of the United States) over the past two years. The fourth graders ran more than 1,123 miles (more than the distance from Florida to New York City).

Therapy dogs visited students through Puppy Club during Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) Day, a nation-wide initiative to highlight the value and importance of helping students develop SEL skills.

Students learned the importance of self-awareness and better ways to self-regulate their feelings through a menu of different activities.



EXPERIENCES AT RAMAPO RIDGE MIDDLE SCHOOL SOLIDIFY STUDENT PATHWAYS

Ramapo Ridge Middle School encourages students to pursue opportunities beyond the classroom walls. These opportunities help shape the soft skills, like communication, responsibility, and collaboration, that students will need in the future.

Students in the Gifted and Talented Art program worked with the Center for Food Action (CFA), a nonprofit fighting hunger and homelessness in North Jersey, to assist with the opening of its pantry, Choice Pantry for All. The artists designed and painted a vibrant mural of fresh fruits and vegetables which now welcomes visitors to the site. RRMS National Junior Honor Society (NJHS) also teamed up with CFA and sponsored a post-Thanksgiving Food Drive to replenish the food pantry.

Members of the Community Service Club and FORR (Friends of Ramapo Ridge) Club participated in the Holiday Cards for our Military Challenge. The New Jersey Department of Education, in partnership with the New Hampshire Department of Education, challenged students to create and deliver a collection of expressions of respect, caring, and gratitude to United States troops, veterans, and service families during the winter holiday season.

Students in the Select Choir and Select Strings performed a lively medley at the Mahwah Senior Center. The theater program then invited local senior citizens to the final dress rehearsal of its production of *Beauty and the Beast Jr.* The spring play was a smashing success with not an empty seat in the house for all three performances, including the sing-along matinee for the youngest audience members!

Eighth-grade musicians had an opportunity to build connections with Mahwah High School. The RRMS school band played with the MHS marching band at a home football game in September. Students in the winter guard and percussion groups at both schools teamed up for a special performance of their respective repertoires in the spring.

RRMS and MHS both hosted International Night in January, consistent with their shared mission to be “meeting places” for the community to gather. The event invited the school community to participate in a celebration of the rich cultural diversity within the Mahwah community through food, dance, artifacts, clothing, photography, and more.



MAHWAH HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS THRIVE IN ACADEMICS, ATHLETICS, AND THE ARTS

More than content mastery, the culture at Mahwah High School encourages student participation in other areas. Opportunities in the arts, athletics and other areas boost student experience and help students shape their next pathways.

MHS ACADEMICS

MHS was named to the **Advanced Placement® Program (AP®) School Honor Roll**, earning silver distinction this year. This recognition can be attributed to the 52.5% of seniors who took at least one AP exam during high school, 87% of seniors scoring a three or higher on at least one AP exam, and 12.6% (25) of seniors who took five or more AP exams!

The **Top Soaring Thunderbird Program**, designed by MHS administration and the Student Government Association, continues to highlight and celebrate positive members of our school community. The pillars of positive behavior exemplify what it truly means to be a Thunderbird. The T-Birds pillars are T-Trusted, B-Brave, I-Inspiring, R-Resilient, D-Determined, and S-Spirited. Each month, students and staff nominate one student and one staff member who exhibit one or more of these pillars in a way that stands out. The selected recipients are recognized for contributing to the positive culture at Mahwah High School.

MHS Class of 2024 senior, Merrick T. Sharp, was named a **National Merit Scholarship Finalist** and is one of the top 16,000 students who took the PSAT in 2022.

The **Thunderbird Partnership Program** (see page 6 for details) was selected by Character.org as a 2024 Promising Practice. The program was selected because it demonstrates significant impact and aligns with one or more of Character.org's 11 Principles Framework for Schools.



MHS ARTS

Last November, four MHS students performed with the **All-State Mixed Chorus** in Atlantic City and NJPAC in Newark. They were seniors, Billy Buckley and Ricardo Petroni, and juniors, Jachin Choi and Colin Mossmann. Ricardo was part of a solo quartet, which opened one song at the Atlantic City Concert.

Connor Yturregui, from the Mahwah Drama Club's fall production of "You Can't Take It With You" received a **Montclair Theater Award** for outstanding achievement by a student design technician, as well as four other nominations. Its spring musical "Les Misérables" received a **Metro Award** for Outstanding Achievement in Graphic Design for Daleena Wong, as well as four other nominations.



MHS ATHLETICS

MHS was awarded the **NJSIAA Sportsmanship Award** and banner for the 23-24 school year. The Athletic Department offers 27 sports across three designated seasons. Many of those teams qualified for county and state tournaments, with the girls basketball and bowling teams earning conference championships.

Three athletes were named **The Bergen Record's Athlete of the Week**: Joe DeMarco – Football, Marissa LaVerghetta – Basketball, and Liz Crammes – Lacrosse.

Fourteen seniors signed letters of commitment to continue their athletic careers at the collegiate level, ranging from Division 1 to Division 3.



Individual milestones celebrated in 23-24 included junior, Liz Crammes, who made 500 career saves as a goalie in girls lacrosse, and baseball players, Daniel McClanahan and Tyler Worth, seniors who both made over 100 career base hits. Senior, Marissa LaVerghetta, not only made 500 career steals in basketball, but also was named to the first team All-County in both soccer and basketball.

EXPANDING EXPERIENCES FOR OUR THUNDERBIRDS—INSIDE AND OUTSIDE OF THE CLASSROOM

The **Thunderbird Externship and Internship Program** allows students to spend time with professionals and at employment sites to have an authentic experience in the workplace. Students have learned so much from our Career Partner Mentors.

We are proud to announce that during the 23-24 school year, Mahwah High School had 32 students actively participating in our experiential learning programs: 19 students in the internship program and 12 in the externship program.

The Thunderbird Externship - Career Pathway Exploration & Job Shadowing program offers rising juniors and seniors a unique opportunity to gain real-world work experience. The program empowers students to take ownership of their education by pursuing an externship in a specific area of interest. Participants will expand their learning experience by participating in an authentic real-life career shadowing and exploration experience with a professional in the community.

For junior, Deve Patel, Class of 2025, the experience allowed him to apply his academic knowledge in a real-world setting, serving as a launchpad for the next chapter of his life.

“The knowledge I gained from this opportunity was truly one-of-a-kind,” he said. “It allowed me to explore engineering beyond the classroom. From understanding the basic workflow to experiencing the intricate technologies

used daily, I delved into what it means to be a professional in this field. This program has uniquely equipped me with invaluable skills and insights, preparing me to excel in my future endeavors.”

Our Career & Academic Internship program experiences are structured, supervised activities that may take place in a workplace or agency or a non-profit community organization. Work-based learning experiences are designed to give students structured, supervised activities that will assist them to clarify career goals, explore career possibilities, develop employable skills, or make the transition between school and employment or further education and training.

Summer Career & Academic Internships provide rising seniors with hands-on authentic workplace experiences over the course of 4-5 weeks during the summer. Internship experience can be paid or unpaid.

Senior, Vishakh Menon, found the experience invaluable. “My engineering internship with Mr. Kelly at the Mahwah Department of Land Use truly solidified my passion for engineering by helping me gain hands-on experience,” he said. “By managing infrastructure projects, reviewing designs, conducting basic material calculations, and communicating between various parties, I was able to not only hone my engineering skills but also develop skills that will help me in college and the workplace.”



LOOKING AHEAD: Six MHS students will perform with the All-State Choruses next year: Colin Mossmann, Jachin Choi, Kerry Prunk, Melvin Guevara-Mercado, Avani Singh, and Suri Lee. Colin, Jachin, Kerry, Melvin, and Avani will sing with the Mixed Chorus at the NJEA Convention and NJPAC next November. Suri will sing with the Treble Chorus at the NJMEA Convention and NJPAC next February.



MHS TOP MUSIC ENSEMBLES: The Symphonic Band earned a **Gold Rating** at NJSMA Concert Band Festival and was selected as one of the top four in Region I (out of 40 bands) which earned them a spot in the State Gala Concert at TCNJ in April! This is the highest honor a concert group can receive in the state of New Jersey. MHS String Orchestra also earned a Gold Rating for their performance at the NJSMA Region I Festival.

AMBITIOUS PROJECT CREATED IN MAHWAH HIGH SCHOOL WOODSHOP AND FURNITURE DESIGN CLASS

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His goal: build an 11-foot, 450-pound boat that will float down the Hudson River and will be able to accommodate him and Izzi, his Airedale Terrier-Poodle, and future boating buddy.

Lukas, 17, researched the boat project last summer before starting his junior year. (He already built a stylish table last year for a project.) Then, he began gathering materials and secured a \$400 sponsor: TotalBoat, a Rhode Island Boat Company owned by Jamestown Distributors. He has also sought expert advice, which he is incorporating into the project.

He drew up a plan for the boat, which his teacher, Daniel Catizone, reviewed and approved. He plans to call the boat something related to the Mahwah Thunderbird.

"This is probably the most ambitious project anyone has ever attempted since I have been here," said Catizone, who has been the school's teacher of technology and woodworking for five years.

Lukas has faced many obstacles with his project, Catizone noted. "It would have been really easy to give up, but Lukas has been very consistent with this build.

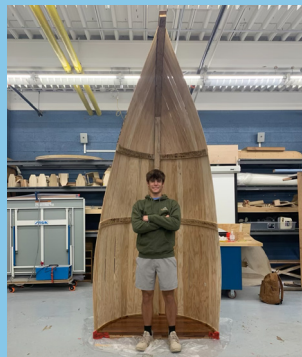
I have no doubt that he will be successful."

Lukas plans to finish applying fiberglass to the boat and then take it home for the summer and work on it in his garage. Right now, the boat has some gaps and will sink, he said. "I need to fill in the gaps and apply the fiberglass outside, apply mesh to the laydown and pour epoxy." He joked that it is not quite ready for the ocean.

After he finishes high school, Lukas said he hopes to study naval or regular architecture and learn to design ships, possibly at the University of Notre Dame.

Lukas embarked on his boat project as part of Mahwah High School's Career Pathways elective program, which allows students to design an educational program aligned with their possible post-secondary college and career interests. The school offers eight pathways which comprise of sequenced elective course concentrations.

Information about the Mahwah High School Career Pathways Elective Program and our Career Pathway Transcript Endorsements are located on the high school website, under the Academics tab at Career Pathways Program hs.mahwah.k12.nj.us.



MAHWAH HIGH SCHOOL HABITAT FOR HUMANITY CLUB RAISES MONEY TO BUILD HOME FOR BERGEN COUNTY FAMILY

Seniors in the Mahwah High School Habitat for Humanity Club set a lofty goal to raise \$140,000 to help build a home for a Bergen County family before they graduate in June. From shoveling snow to seeking corporate donations, the students have worked tirelessly toward the goal – which the junior leadership team taking over the club will continue with club members next year.

The seniors in the community service club proposed raising \$140,000 to fund the cost of supplies to build a home for a Bergen County family. The students have raised money by shoveling snow for senior citizens through the club's

Snow Angels Program, tutoring, corporate donations, and other fundraisers. To date they have raised \$53,027, with an additional \$20,000 grant pending.

The Volleyball Celebration on June 17 was a community-wide celebration featuring food trucks, music, and matches with students and staff from several district schools as well as alumni. Members of the high school volleyball team served as referees. Funds raised through ticket sales and concessions totaled roughly \$4,000.

Mahwah High School Assistant Principal, Craig Jandoli, said this year's seniors "are a very special group of

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MAHWAH HIGH SCHOOL HABITAT FOR HUMANITY CLUB RAISES MONEY TO BUILD HOME FOR BERGEN COUNTY FAMILY

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students who want to give back like no other group has done before." The students already earned their service hours, but still volunteer their time to help others.

Club President, Carleigh May, and Vice President, Noor Sikka, approached Club Advisor, Sarah Guzinski, and Jandoli about the idea for a special senior sendoff for a community-wide project to help a local family. The students already have several special senior activities but wanted to do something significant to make a difference.

Carleigh May, the club president, said she was excited to kick off this project before graduation. "As it is time for me to move on now, I am really excited to give back to the community that has given me so much and I hope this continues for many years."

Vice President, Noor Sikka, agreed. "We cannot wait to not only help a family in need, but to bring the community together for a good cause," she said.

Teri Capparelli, Executive Director of Habitat for Humanity of Bergen County, commended the high school and the club for their efforts.

"When Sarah and Craig informed me that the students want to raise \$140,000, I was absolutely overwhelmed with joyous tears," she said. "And three days before graduation, they are hosting an event to give back to the community. This says an awful lot about Mahwah that the young men and women are coming together to do something remarkable to help the people in need. I think it is pretty spectacular!"