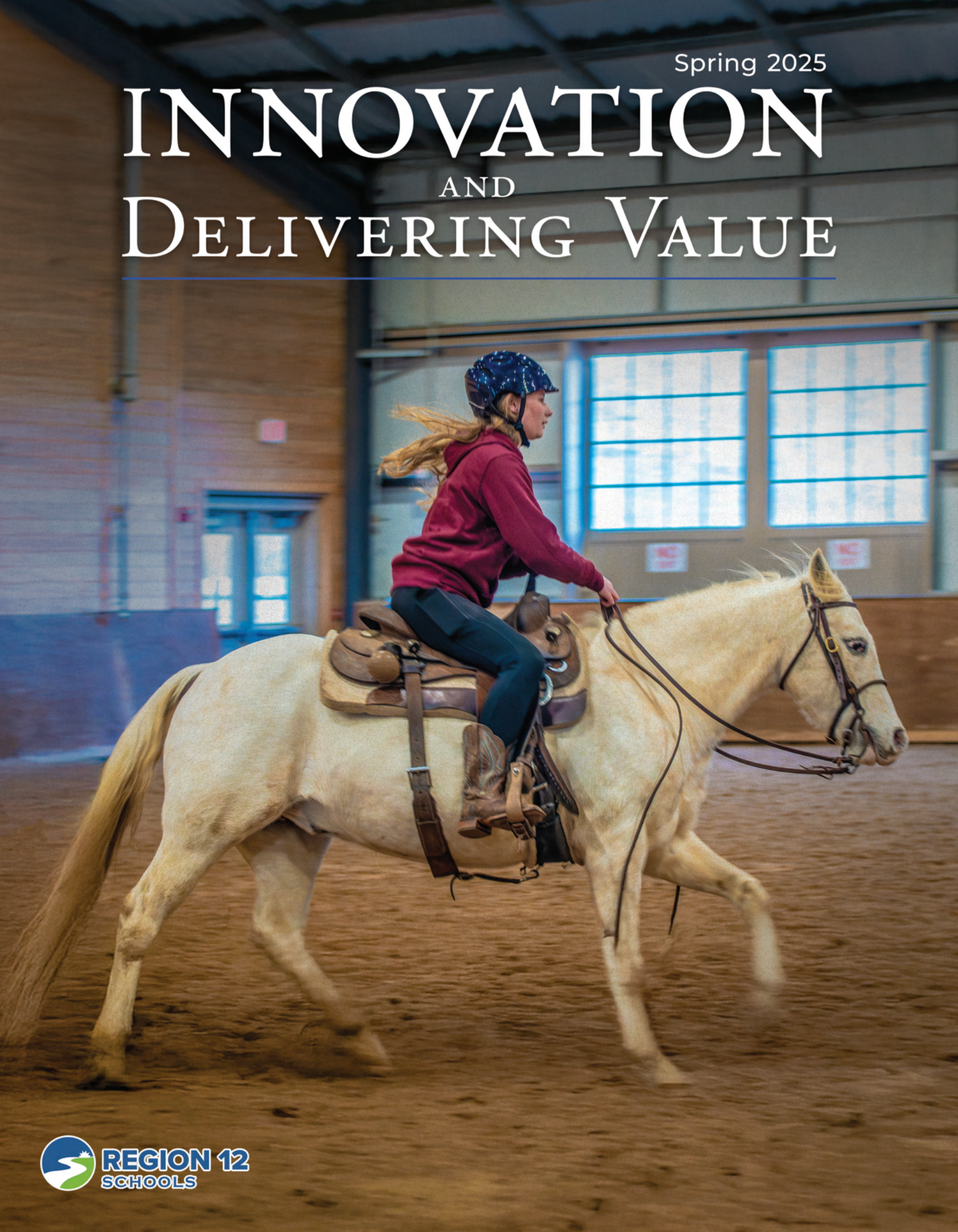
Spring 2025

INNOVATION AND DELIVERING VALUE



REGION 12 SCHOOLS

the SUPERINTENDENT'S MESSAGE

SPRING 2025



LEADING FOR INNOVATION IN REGION 12

Leading for innovation is often seen as one of the more complex yet rewarding tasks in a school district. As Superintendent, this means empowering our teachers, students, and leaders to prioritize the commitments outlined in our Strategic Plan—specifically in the areas of innovation and delivering value. As educational leaders, it's essential that we create an environment where creativity thrives, where risk-taking is celebrated, and where everyone contributes to shaping the future of education. "*Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower*," noted Steve Jobs, the iconic co-founder of Apple. In Region 12, we believe that true leadership is a collective effort that involves the courage to innovate, the vision to inspire, and the dedication to create a lasting impact for our students and community. Our teachers, administrators and staff are moving along a clear path toward new initiatives and ongoing improvements that support students' passions, academic engagement, and future success.

CREATIVE OPPORTUNITIES IN REGION 12

In Region 12, innovation is not a mere buzzword but a commitment that manifests through creative opportunities, unique programming, and intellectual engagement. Our district has long been known as a place where students can explore, create, and think outside the box. From the inception and ongoing success of senior projects to the expansion of elementary enrichment programs, creativity has been a hallmark of our philosophy while maintaining our focus on value. Our district's Strategic Plan has further crystallized our intention as leaders and staff "*...to continue to seek out new and innovative programs that will support student interest.*"

> Innovation distinguishes between a leader and a follower.
>
> **Steve Jobs**

At the elementary level, new enrichment opportunities take many forms. Students are encouraged to pursue their passions, transforming their learning experiences into projects that inspire others and demonstrate their growth. As part of our innovative approach, the Primary Partnership program—new this year—brings together 4th and 5th graders from all elementary schools. These students explore real-world concepts in the sciences and agriculture under the tutelage of high school staff. Working collaboratively with peers from each of the elementary schools across the Region, students gain a deeper understanding of these subjects, which not only sparks creativity but also fosters a sense of community and shared learning. More importantly, while these experiences yield high interest and foster content connections for our students, budgetary costs are minimal given our ability to use existing resources and the in-house expertise of our staff.

SENIOR PROJECTS: A CAPSTONE OF CREATIVITY

One of Region 12's proudest venues for showcasing innovation is our senior project. This long standing program empowers students to identify and explore their personal passions and career aspirations. The flexibility to choose and execute a project allows our students to engage in independent research and hands-on work that culminates in a public presentation. Over the years, the senior project has served as an integral part of our students' journey toward graduation, encouraging them to delve deeply into a topic of their choice, some that are inextricably linked to their own goals for the future.

Past senior projects have been as diverse as the students who undertake them. One student became a master of stained glass window-making, while another researched physicists to advocate for the inclusion of astronomy in the school's curriculum. Another student demonstrated a profound passion for environmental science by creating

a sustainability project that earned recognition beyond the school walls. These models have continued to inspire high school seniors when they reflect on research topics and projects they want to engage in to obtain a credit toward graduation.

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND MIDDLE SCHOOL INNOVATION

Innovation at Region 12 extends beyond high school. Middle school students are also making their mark through innovative, community-based projects. This year, middle school students, in partnership with the Shepaug agriscience program and the Steep Rock Association, are working together to create a trails guide for the Steep Rock Preserve. The project involves producing watercolors, line drawings, and painted tiles, as well as writing detailed trail descriptions. Meanwhile, students in our agriscience program will be constructing the posts and plaques that will be installed at the Preserve.

These collaborations offer real-world experiences that not only teach students valuable skills but also instill a sense of pride and purpose in their work. The value of such projects aligns with the thinking of educational innovator and author, Sir Ken Robinson, who once said, "*Creativity is as important now in education as literacy, and we should treat it with the same status.*" In our district, we believe fostering creativity and intellectual engagement are essential to preparing students for success in both their personal and professional lives.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT THROUGH PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

While we are a small rural district, staff and leaders continue to create environments where students are not just passive recipients of information, but active participants in their own journey. Our commitment to innovation is beginning to transform how we approach instruction and qualify achievement across the District. We want all students to remain challenged, to identify problems, to research solutions, and deliver products that not only enhance their learning but also benefit the community. Elementary students are provided the opportunity to showcase their artwork, build inventions that support humanity, or develop passion projects that demonstrate critical thinking and creativity, both of which are necessary for success in the modern world.

THE PATH FORWARD: FOSTERING A CULTURE OF INNOVATION

"*The future belongs to those who dare to dream and take bold steps to make those dreams a reality*," noted Eleanor Roosevelt. Leading for innovation is not a task that can be accomplished overnight. It requires time, dedication, and a constant willingness to learn, adapt, and grow. It's about creating opportunities where teachers and students feel empowered to take risks, explore new ideas, and contribute to something larger than themselves. As we continue to evolve and embrace change, Region 12 remains committed to fostering a culture where innovation thrives, new ideas for shaping learning are considered, and the value of our efforts are visible in the success of our learners.

Sincerely,

Lorrie Rodrigue

Dr. Lorrie Rodrigue
INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT



READING AND WRITING

APPRENTICESHIP AT WORK

By Emily Judd, Principal, Washington Primary School,
& Dr. Emily Rhew, Principal, Booth Free School & Burnham School

Inquiry through apprenticeship is a foundational aspect of reading and writing instruction in Region 12 elementary classrooms. In this model, teachers act as expert guides, leading students through the process of becoming active, engaged learners. By observing and learning from the teacher's modeling, students gradually develop the curiosity and skills necessary to become proficient readers and writers. This approach fosters deep engagement with grade-level content across various subjects, including language arts, science, and social studies. As students explore different genres and topics, they grow into experts in their own right, acquiring the necessary tools to think critically and communicate effectively.

The apprenticeship model comes to life through rich instructional practices and resources provided by the American Reading Company, alongside other print and digital libraries. The classroom becomes a learning lab, where the teacher immerses students in texts that exemplify key features of literature, informational writing, and argumentative texts. Through close analysis and guided discussion, students begin to think in ways that reflect the habits and processes of skilled readers and writers. This method helps students internalize strategies that allow them to engage with increasingly complex content and express their ideas in writing, mirroring the techniques used by accomplished authors.





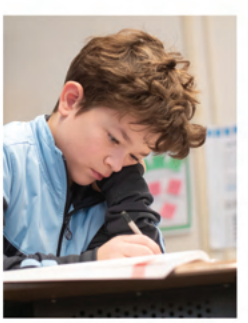
Within the apprenticeship model, students in grades K–5 study engaging topics such as bugs, weather, animal adaptation, traditional tales, U.S. states, and more. These topics spark curiosity and provide inspiration for student-driven research projects. To support this inquiry, teachers provide organizers with guiding questions and checklists that help students structure their research and think critically about the content. These tools foster a sense of ownership over learning and allow students to explore topics that intrigue them, all while developing essential reading and writing skills.

In addition to the inquiry-based apprenticeship approach, small group instruction and reading and writing conferences are incorporated. These sessions enable the teacher to address specific learning needs and provide targeted support. For instance, explicit instruction in decoding, vocabulary development, and comprehension is a focus during these small group and conference sessions. By working with students in smaller, more focused settings, teachers can meet students where they are in their learning journey and guide them toward mastery of key skills.

The apprenticeship model, combined with targeted small group instruction, allows students to develop a deep understanding of reading and writing while honing essential skills. This comprehensive approach to reading and writing aligns with the Region 12 district's commitment to delivering and facilitating powerful learning in the classroom that fosters habits of inquiry, critical thinking and reflection growing students' academic and personal growth throughout their lives.









REACH PRESCHOOL

Building Resilient Learners



By Allyson O'Hara
Director of Pupil Personnel Services

Dr. Mona Delahooke, child psychologist, stated, *"All of us- parents, educators, and providers should build emotional co-regulation into children's lives with compassion and understanding. It is the foundation that underlies a child's ability to self-regulate and provides life-long benefits to their physical and mental health. Emotional regulation depends on responsive caregiving - that is, relationships in which children regularly experience connectedness and engagement."* Our REACH team works hard to ensure our students' emotional regulation skills growth to promote kindergarten readiness.



Direct support in emotional regulation occurs through a whole classroom behavioral approach, direct teaching of skills, and opportunities to practice skills. The REACH behavioral philosophy supports students through positive reinforcement, consistent routines, and visuals to help students process verbal information. The play-based nature of REACH provides choices and opportunities to practice self-regulation. Many challenging experiences our students first experience in the school environment can be addressed through "teachable moments" with our REACH team members. Students can be supported in real-time with topics like how to enter play, accept someone entering your playspace, and problem-solve a conflict with a peer.

Emotional skills are taught directly using lessons from The Second Step Program. Students are taught about breathing strategies and mindfulness to support emotional regulation. Children are given directions on how to use the calming areas in each classroom. They learn what tools are present in that environment that allow for de-escalation. Children's literature is another way we facilitate students' emotional awareness, assertiveness, kindness, and acceptance of differences.

Our REACH teachers are sure to find ways to ensure parental collaboration in addressing these skills. Monthly newsletters that highlight new social-emotional learning are shared. Specific emails with photos of children learning and practicing new skills are sent to parents. At pick-up and drop-off, connections are made with parents and extended family to facilitate communication. Finally, during the fall and spring parent conferences, social-emotional learning and self-regulation skills are addressed.

Beyond the classroom, the REACH team collaborates to enhance emotional regulation support. Teachers engage in ongoing professional development, share strategies, and work closely with specialists to tailor support for each child. Through regular team discussions and reflections, they adapt approaches to meet students' evolving needs. By fostering a responsive and supportive environment, REACH helps build a strong foundation for lifelong emotional resilience.

Purpose-Driven Learning

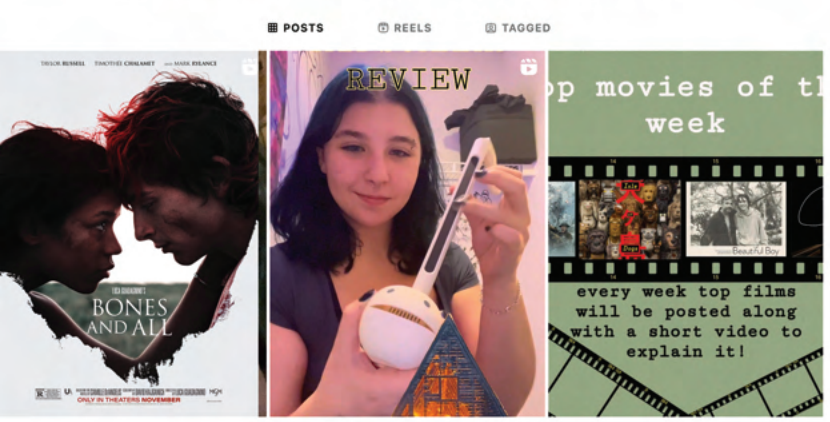
WHERE PASSION MEETS EDUCATION

By Wendy Youngblood
Social Studies Teacher, Senior Project Teacher

Shepaug Valley School's senior project is more than just a graduation requirement—it's an opportunity for students to innovate, grow, and make meaningful contributions. As a yearlong, self-designed initiative, senior project allows students to take control of their education and produce work of real value, both personally and for their community. This program stands out in Connecticut for its depth, rigor, and commitment to student-driven learning.

Over the past three decades, students have worked on projects in areas such as construction, vehicle repair, animal training, fundraising, medical research, and licensure in various fields. They've written and published books, documentaries, albums, plays, podcasts, and short films.

Recently, student-directed activities have been popping up at Shepaug and in the community. Tilly Skiles showcased students in the elementary singing club she ran at Burnham School, drawing over fifty attendees. Matt Buell received sponsorship from the Washington Rotary Club for a fishing derby at Shepaug, where he will also display his handmade lures. Mina Kheir-Eldin is creating a cookbook for low glycemic foods, while Hayden Lasky is publishing a book of protein-dense baked goods, donating proceeds to local food pantries. Ryn Hutchings is expanding their expertise in lighting design and cinema. Check out their posts on Instagram at *@rynlikesfilm*, or listen to the podcast *"Decoding Cinema"* on Spotify.



At its core, senior project fosters independence, responsibility, and skill development. Students plan and execute a personally relevant project, learning to think critically and creatively. The program empowers students to develop maturity and expertise, ensuring they graduate ready to function as competent members of society.





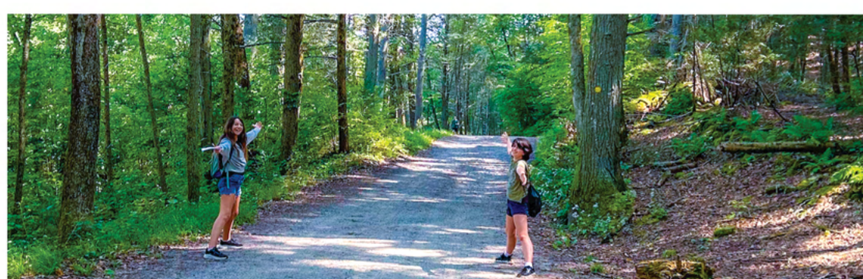
Students collaborate with teachers and advisors to shape their projects, refining ideas through milestone meetings, research, and reflection. Defending their decisions before an audience helps develop strong communication and problem-solving skills—essential for success after high school.

Time management is crucial in senior project. Students revise timelines, keep journals, and receive feedback to stay on track, reinforcing their ability to manage long-term goals. This structured approach ensures they develop the discipline needed for academic and professional success.

By year's end, each student completes a project of personal relevance and gains invaluable experience in research, design, and strategic thinking. senior project exemplifies Shepaug's dedication to preparing students for the future, equipping them to innovate, adapt, and deliver meaningful value in any path they choose.







COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

The Steep Rock Anniversary Trail Guide

By Michael Croft
Assistant Principal, Shepaug Valley School



The Steep Rock Association and Shepaug's sixth grade class are collaborating on a project to celebrate Steep Rock's 100th anniversary and draw families onto Steep Rock's hiking trails. Students are working on *A Passport to the Trails*, a booklet that will showcase maps, student artwork, poetry, and non-fiction writing focused on six trails within the Steep Rock Preserve.

Once published, families will be able to use the booklet as a trail guide. The booklet will also include blank pages for rubbings of relief sculptures that will be based on student artwork, produced with help from The Agriscience Academy and placed permanently along the trails.

Steep Rock officials and volunteers have been working with the sixth grade teaching team and sixth grade students on this ambitious undertaking. Students were placed in groups that studied and produced content inspired by one Steep Rock trail. They hiked their trails twice, each time with a teacher and a Steep Rock volunteer or employee, taking notes and photos along the way. Among other observations, students were struck by the differences in the forest between their first hike in early September and their second hike in late October.

The Steep Rock volunteers and employees helped students examine the flora, fauna, and terrain and try to make sense of the human and natural history of a small piece of this very special place. Students then used their notes and photos to produce written descriptions of the trails and drawings and watercolor paintings inspired by the forest.

The plan is for *A Passport to the Trails* to be published in time for Steep Rock's 100th Birthday in the spring.

Recently, sixth graders were invited to submit applications to join the Editorial Team that is in the process of pulling together artwork, maps, and drafts of writing to produce the booklet.

As of this writing, the eight-person Editorial Team was beginning this work. Ultimately, families will be able to use the booklet as they hike the trails; if they hike them all, they will win a (yet-to-be-determined) prize. Shepaug Valley School is grateful to the Steep Rock Association for their partnership in this effort.

The project has sparked excitement among students, who are eager to see their work come to life in such a meaningful way. The collaboration has fostered a deeper appreciation for local nature and the importance of preserving it for future generations. As the booklet nears completion, students are looking forward to sharing their creativity with the community and celebrating the beauty of Steep Rock together.

Ready, Set, Create!

By Emily Judd, Principal, Washington Primary School, & Dr. Emily Rhew, Principal, Booth Free School & Burnham School

PILOBOLUS BRINGS THE MAGIC OF MOVEMENT

Our elementary schools recently had the incredible opportunity to participate in a residency with Pilobolus, a world-renowned dance company known for its performances that blend acrobatics, storytelling, and creative movement. The residency with Pilobolus took place across all three of our elementary schools, bringing students together for an experience that showcased the power of teamwork, expression, and physical artistry.

One of the most exciting aspects of the program was its interactive nature. After weeks of practice, the Pilobolus dancers engaged with the students, demonstrating how movement can be used as a form of communication and self-expression.

Inspired by the captivating tale "The Council of the Animals" shared by Darlene Kascak, a Schaghticoke tribal storyteller, the students took part in an unforgettable journey, using dance to explore the deep connections between humans and animals. Guided by Emily Kent, the Education Director of Pilobolus, and teaching artists Melody Green and Quincy Ellis, the story was brought to life through movement and sound, embodying animals like bears, rabbits, hawks, frogs, and more. The experience began with an elegant dance performed by several Pilobolus dancers, illustrating the human characters in the story.

Beyond the entertainment, the visit from Pilobolus aligned beautifully with our schools' emphasis on creativity, collaboration, and physical education. The performance encouraged students to think outside the box, work together, and appreciate the importance of movement in everyday life. Teachers and staff were thrilled to see students leaving the performance buzzing with excitement, eager to explore movement in new ways.

We are incredibly grateful to the Northwest Connecticut Community Foundation and the Town of Washington for sponsoring this program and to Pilobolus for offering this experience this unique enrichment program. Their visit not only provided a day of wonder and joy but also multiple practice sessions that reinforced important lessons about teamwork, perseverance, and the beauty of artistic expression.

We look forward to bringing more enriching experiences like this to our schools in the future!













ENGAGING MINDS THROUGH PUPPETRY & PERFORMANCE







For the past two years, our third graders have had the exciting opportunity to work with Flock Theatre, a theater company known for its innovative use of puppetry. Last year, Flock Theatre collaborated with our students on their ARC unit on Fables, guiding them through the process of creating their own puppets and developing plays based on classic fables. The experience was a hands-on way for students to engage with literature, creativity and performance.

Students explored the structure of fables, then used their imaginations to bring the tales to life. With guidance from the Flock Theatre artists, they built their own puppets, developed dialogue, and staged performances for family members. The collaboration deepened their understanding of storytelling and fostered teamwork, confidence, and public speaking skills.

This year, we were thrilled to welcome Flock Theatre back to create a new project, this time using their ARC unit on Marine Life as inspiration. Students created stories centered around ocean ecosystems, marine animals, and the importance of environmental conservation. The experience merged science and the arts while reinforcing their learning in an engaging and memorable way.

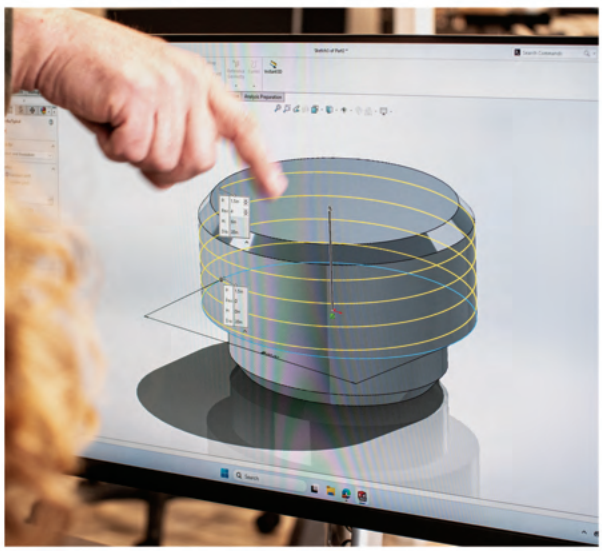
Both projects highlight the power of creative expression in education. We are grateful to Flock Theatre for providing our students with this unique opportunity. Their partnership has helped bring our curriculum to life, sparked curiosity and a love for the arts.

UNLOCKING NEW OPPORTUNITIES

COLLEGE & CAREER ACCELERATOR

By Donald R. Schels, Ed.D.
Principal, Shepaug Valley School

Shepaug continues to partner with EdAdvance's College and Career Accelerator ("CCA") to provide more dual enrollment opportunities for our students. In addition to our wide array of Advanced Placement and UConn Early College Enrollment classes, the CCA affords students more ways to earn college credits while enrolled at Shepaug. Under the current pilot program, our students begin their day in typical Shepaug classes, then are transported to EdAdvance's facility in Torrington where they take courses in manufacturing engineering, including coursework in computer aided design and other related STEM disciplines.







The students in our pilot program can earn advanced certificates in that engineering pathway. As our program grows, and we introduce the full range of available coursework, students could graduate from Shepaug with a high school diploma and an associate's degree in manufacturing engineering. That degree can lead to immediate employment, or can be transferred to a four year college, with 60 credits of advanced standing, supporting progress towards a bachelor's degree. The program is cost neutral for our school and our families, and represents an incredibly powerful opportunity for learners who want this path.

Looking forward, we hope to grow the scope and capacity of the program by offering some of the courses right here on our campus, taught by our teachers, and by adding more pathways beyond manufacturing engineering (CCA also offers pathways in allied health, education, and criminal justice). Students in the pilot program report they've had a transformative experience, and tell us they want to continue on with the sequence. We appreciate the chance to help our students have more choice in developing their post-secondary plans.

Guiding Students to Success

By Diane Decker, College & Career Center Coordinator

The Shepaug College and Career Center continues to focus on innovation and student success by emphasizing the importance of transferable soft skills, fostering strong partnerships with colleges, and bridging the gap between education and career opportunities in Connecticut's growing manufacturing sector.

Preparing for the Future



Supporting students in their transition from high school to college and/or the workforce requires an understanding of evolving student needs, changes in college admissions, and the increasing demands of today's job market. By adapting to these shifts and providing up-to-date resources, the center ensures that Shepaug students are well prepared for life beyond graduation.

Innovative Programs & Opportunities

Recent initiatives highlight a commitment to providing students with relevant skills and experiences.

- **College Connections**: In-person visits from over 60 college and university representatives.
- **Military Pathways:** Engagements with representatives from the US Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Space Force.
- **Essential Skills Workshops:** Sessions on resume building and the importance of a strong handshake.
- **Financial Assistance:** Scholarship application workshops to help students secure funding for their future.
- **Industry Exposure:** Connecting students with professionals from diverse fields, such as Belle Academy, the US Defense Talent Pipeline Program, Connecticut's Chief Manufacturing Officer, Timpro, and gaming careers.
- **Career and Education Opportunities:** Workshops and events, including Women in STEM, National Portfolio Day, Connecticut State Community College High School Partnership (HSP), CT Career Fairs, and College Fairs.







A Digital Resource for All

The College and Career Center's newly updated website serves as a vital tool for students and parents. It offers essential information on career exploration, college admissions assistance, and workforce readiness. Students and families are encouraged to explore this resource to make informed academic and professional decisions, reinforcing Shepaug's commitment to future success.

Scan the QR code to the left to visit the new College & Career website!



Shepaug Students Engage in Global Diplomacy

By Chris Dennis
Social Studies Teacher

Shepaug Valley School recently participated in the Harvard Model United Nations conference. Located in the heart of Boston, Shepaug was one of only a few Connecticut public schools selected to the 72nd session of Harvard Model United Nations. Twenty-three Shepaug students collaborated with students from over 200 secondary schools and 62 different countries to grapple with some of the most serious challenges in international relations. The conference lasted four days and there were approximately 3,600 students from around the globe in participation.

The theme for this year's conference centered on 'expanding horizons' and the issues that are beginning to shape a rapidly changing world. Issues included Artificial Intelligence, the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine, resource wealth, space exploration, food insecurity and climate refugees. Successful delegates offer nuanced arguments, thoughtful reflections, and careful consideration of those with different perspectives. While at the conference, students served on committees in the spirit of the real United Nations and worked to build compromises and alliances with students from different countries.

This year 21 students represented Montenegro and Mongolia. Additionally, two students served on a specialized committee. All student-delegates spent countless hours learning as much as they could about Montenegro and Mongolia - reading background guides and writing position papers. Many of the committees our students served on were complex and required extensive knowledge on economics, including but not limited to trade agreements, monetary policy, and foreign aid investment. These accomplishments are a product of the very good reputation that Shepaug students have carved out over the years at Harvard. This year's group continues to improve our reputation at the conference.



Some of the committees that our students served on included the International Monetary Fund, the World Conference on Women, the United Nations Environmental Programme, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the World Health Organization, and NATO, among many others. While working to build resolutions to the most pressing issues in the world, students had opportunities to build lasting relationships with students from all over the world. Our students continue to perform at a high level and carry themselves with integrity and respect.

New Elective Courses

By Keri Snowden
Director of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment

Students at Shepaug Valley School will soon have exciting new opportunities to expand their knowledge and explore future career paths with the addition of several one-semester elective courses in science and language arts. These courses, designed based on student interest and life after high school, will enhance academic experiences while preparing students for college and careers.

SCIENCE ELECTIVES

FORENSICS

Students with an interest in crime scene investigation and forensic science will now have the chance to take Forensics, an inquiry-based course focusing on real-world crime scene analysis. Hands-on labs will include fingerprinting, ballistics, blood typing, DNA analysis, and handwriting examination. With over 155 students expressing interest, this course is sure to be a popular addition!

UCONN ECE: INTRODUCTION TO ALLIED HEALTH PROFESSIONS

Through the UConn Early College Experience (ECE) program, students can earn college credit while exploring the diverse field of Allied Health Professions. This course, which will be offered opposite Sports Medicine for grades 10-12, will feature guest speakers from various healthcare fields, providing insight into career pathways, educational requirements, and employment trends. This addition expands our growing Allied Health Pathway.

LANGUAGE ARTS ELECTIVES

PROFESSIONAL COMMUNICATION & PERSONAL EXPRESSION

Designed to help students transition into college and the workforce, this course will guide students through crafting college essays, resumes, and cover letters, while also honing public speaking and professional writing skills.

NAVIGATING THE MODERN LANDSCAPE: CRITICAL THINKING & COMMUNICATION IN THE 21ST CENTURY

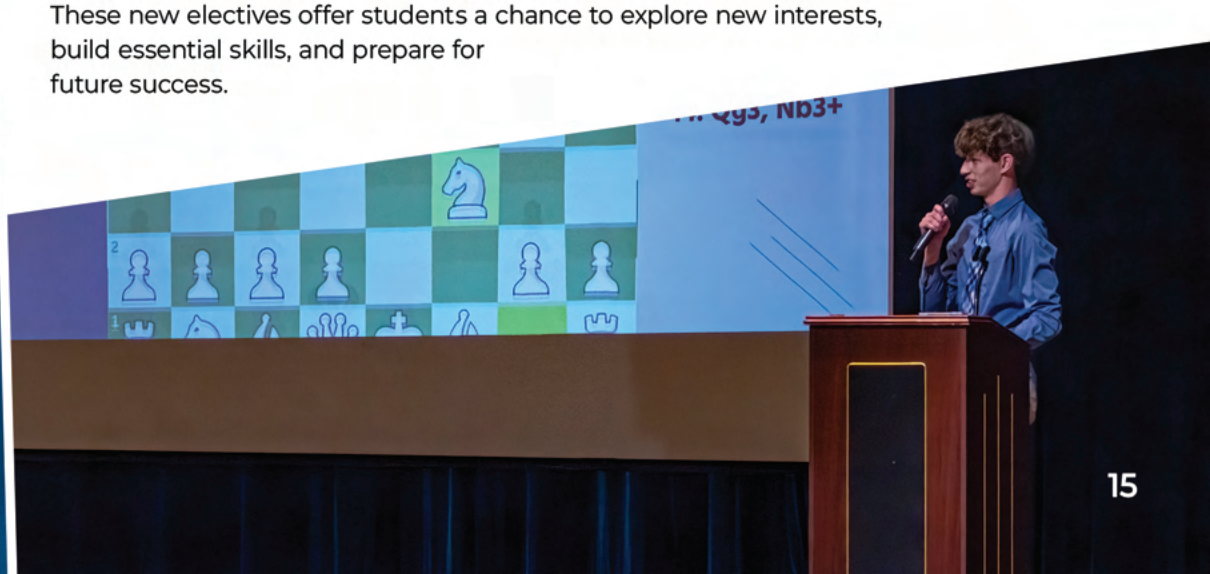
This course strengthens critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and media literacy, preparing students to analyze current events, engage in respectful debate, and develop technical writing skills.

UCONN ECE: SEMINAR AND STUDIO IN ACADEMIC WRITING AND MULTIMODAL COMPOSITION

Through the lens of memory and identity, students will engage in advanced academic writing, research, and multimodal composition, preparing them for university-level coursework.

These new electives offer students a chance to explore new interests, build essential skills, and prepare for future success.





Shepaug Leads the Way in Animal Science



By Ryan Blatchley, Agriscience Teacher, & Tyler Cremeans, Director of Agriscience

At Shepaug Valley School, The Agriscience Acedemy is dedicated to preparing students for a range of careers in growing industries by combining hands-on learning with modern techniques. Two programs - equine science and canine grooming & basics - offer students the opportunity to learn important skills while encouraging an entrepreneurial mindset.

Shepaug's equine science program is one of the only high school horse riding programs in the state of Connecticut and is rapidly establishing itself as the premier riding program in the state – but the program at Shepaug provides more than just horseback riding. It offers a comprehensive education in horse care – covering equine health, nutrition, anatomy, and behavior. Students learn to develop true horsemanship, focusing on effective communication and training techniques that make horses more willing and responsive. By integrating traditional equestrian practices with current research, students are prepared for a wide range of equine careers.

What truly sets this program apart is its innovative approach. Students learn advanced skills, such as suturing to refine their equine veterinary abilities, and gain hands-on experience at Shepaug's state-of-the-art equine facility. This combination of modern technology and equine knowledge gives students a deeper understanding of equine management and prepares them for careers in performance horse training, farrier work, equine veterinary medicine, nutrition, horse behavior training, and even equine therapy. Whether students aim to work professionally with horses or pursue further studies in animal sciences, Shepaug's program equips them for success in various equine fields.

In addition to equine science, The Agriscience Academy offers a highly specialized canine grooming & basics program, designed to meet the growing demand for trained professionals in the pet care industry.

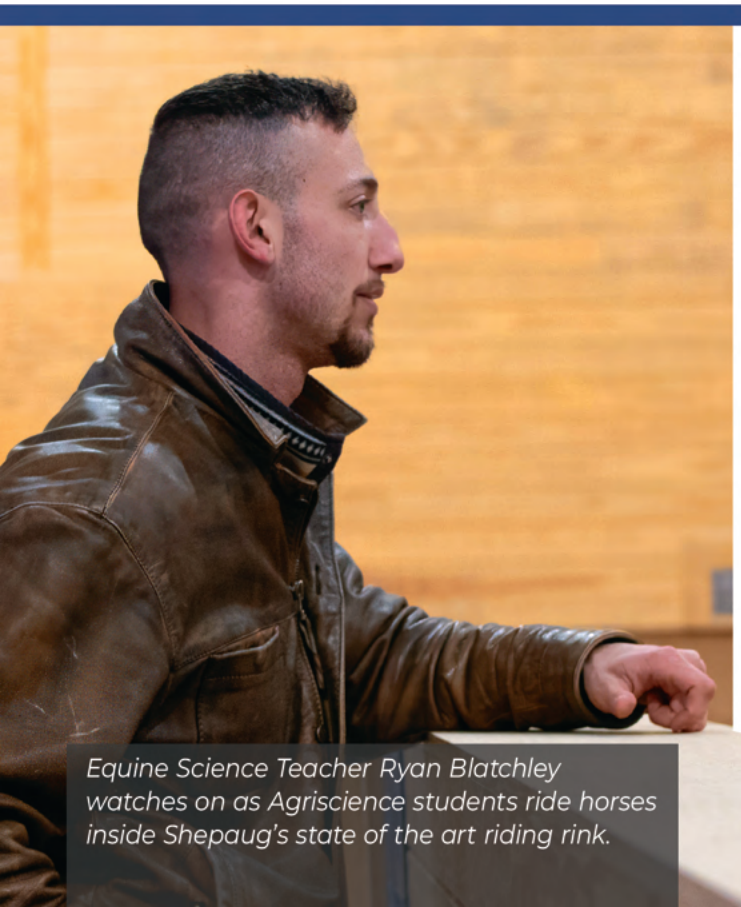
As pet ownership continues to rise, so does the need for skilled groomers who understand both the art of grooming and the health needs of dogs.

The program covers everything from basic grooming techniques to canine veterinary medicine, including anatomy, physiology, and common canine diseases. Students learn to handle various dog breeds and perform breed-specific grooming cuts tailored to each pet's needs. Beyond grooming, the program focuses on canine behavior, helping students create calm, stress-free environments for dogs. Techniques like music therapy enhance the grooming experience, ensuring the well-being of animals during their time at Shepaug. Students are also taught how to run a successful dog grooming business, gaining skills in customer service, business management, and marketing.

For those interested in small animal veterinary medicine, topics like canine illnesses, ethical breeding, and kennel management are covered. Students also learn from industry professionals in areas such as personal protection and professional dog handling.



> "Shepaug students graduate with the skills and **knowledge to excel** in equine and canine industries, whether they pursue careers or further studies in animal sciences."





Equine Science Teacher Ryan Blatchley watches on as Agriscience students ride horses inside Shepaug's state of the art riding rink.

SHEPAUG ATHLETICS

Maximizing Our Potential

By Matt Perachi
Athletic Director

Despite being a very small school, Shepaug has historically been known to have a very successful athletic program, with the past few years serving as a prime example. After an impressive 2023-24 campaign in which Shepaug won the Berkshire League Championships in Field Hockey, Golf, Boys Soccer, Baseball, Softball, Boys Tennis, and Boys Track & Field, Shepaug's fall 2024 teams started off the year in similar fashion. The fall 2024 Spartans won Berkshire League Championships in Golf, Field Hockey, and Boys Soccer. In addition, in the fall of 2024, Shepaug had six students participate on the Northwest United Football Team that won the Connecticut Technical Conference Championship, and perhaps most impressively, Shepaug also won the CIAC State Championships in Field Hockey and Boys Soccer.

Over the years, Shepaug Valley High School has enjoyed a high rate of athletic participation among the student body, and we have been able to maximize our potential. Given the small size of our student body, the long-valued "multi-sport athlete" is extremely important to the Shepaug Valley High School athletic program.





During the 2023-24 school year, Shepaug had 38 student-athletes selected as First Team Berkshire League All-Stars. Of those 38 student-athletes, 31 of them were multi-sport athletes, competing on two or three different Shepaug teams. In addition to Berkshire League All-Stars, Shepaug also enjoyed having six student-athletes selected to All-State teams during the 2023-24 school year. All six of those honorees were multi-sport athletes at Shepaug.

Participation in multiple sports has been a tradition at Shepaug Valley High School that dates back to the days when legendary Washington High School/Shepaug Valley High School coaches Ted Alex and Joan Gauthey roamed the sidelines. So much emphasis was put upon student-athletes joining more than one team at Washington High School that the "Athletic Point System" was designed to reward those who did so. To this day, that point system remains the basis for athletic awards at Shepaug Valley High School, and each year those competing for the top awards are always multi-sport athletes.

A study jointly conducted by the National Federation



of State High School Associations (NFHS) and Indiana State University entitled "The value of interscholastic sports: Impact of athletic participation on GPA and graduation rates" surveyed 208 high schools from various locations across the United States. The study concluded that not only did student-athletes enjoy higher GPAs and graduation rates than students who did not participate in athletics, but student-athletes who participated in two sports had a higher graduation rate than non-athletes and single sport athletes. In addition, the same study found that student-athletes who participated in three sports had a higher graduation rate than non-athletes, athletes who participated in one sport, and athletes who participated in two sports.





One of the things that appeals to many about Shepaug is the small size of the student body, and the opportunities for students to participate in multiple extra-curricular programs because of our size. In Region 12, we are very proud of the successes our teams have enjoyed, and we value the commitment and contributions that our students and their families have made to our athletic program. For those that are already involved in Shepaug Athletics, we would like to invite you to continue to help our programs achieve success, and for those that are new to our community, we would like to welcome you to join our programs and help us continue to maximize our potential.

CELEBRATING CREATIVITY AND EXCELLENCE

SCHOLASTIC ART SHOWCASE

By Donna Wright
Art Teacher



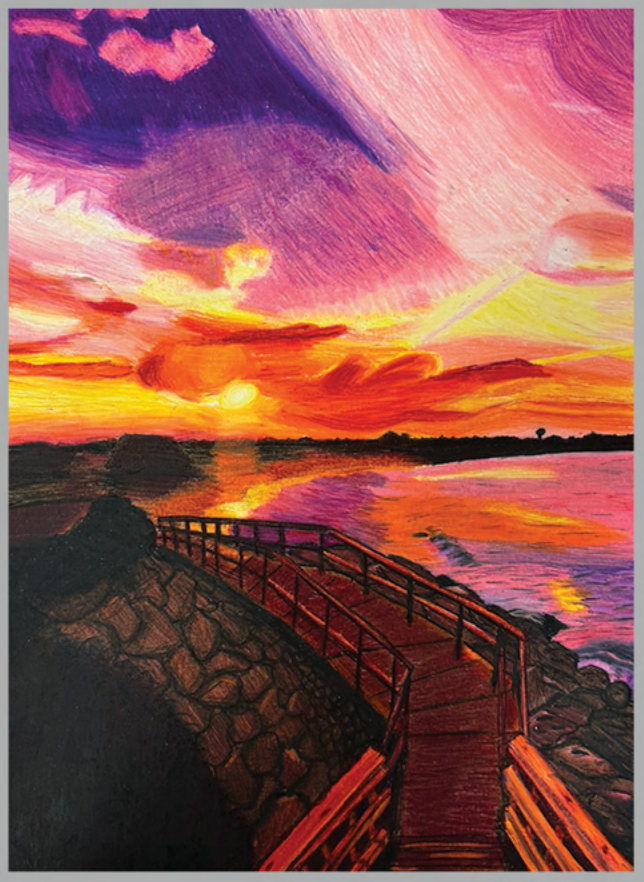
ELIZABETH CREECH

Several times throughout the year, the Board of Education and the Region 12 art staff recognize one student from each school for their excellence in the visual arts. The student's artwork hangs in the Board of Education office for a few months, is highlighted in the Region in Review, and is recognized at a Board of Education meeting.

This recognition not only celebrates the student's artistic talent but also fosters a greater appreciation for creativity within the school community. It is important for the Board of Education to support the arts, as it plays a crucial role in nurturing student growth and enriching the educational experience.



MORGAN WILBER



SERENA RAFFEL

SCHOLASTIC ART AWARD WINNER

Student artwork is juried by professional artists and university art faculty and is selected on merit for inclusion in a state-wide art exhibition held at the Hartford Art School. Beyond the honor of being selected for this high quality exhibit, students may be awarded Gold or Silver keys and Honorable Mention Awards in each of 18 media categories. Gold key winners will move onto the National Level Competition.



Maggie Pouder was chosen to exhibit her work in this year's CT Regional Scholastic Art Awards Exhibit from January 13th-31st at the Silpe Gallery at Hartford Art School. Maggie received a gold key award for her photograph titled Sprouting Stars. Maggie has studied both introductory and intermediate photography classes at Shepaug Valley School. She also actively takes photographs outside of school and has successfully exhibited her in-class and outside work. Her compositions are intriguing in both natural and manmade settings and she presents unique points of view and angles.



NICOLETTE LEITZ



EMILY GRANT



SENA TISSINGTON



CLUE: ON STAGE A LAUGHABLE HIT!

By Mollie Leonard & Peyton Ongley
Shepaug Dramatics Members

The fall play at Shepaug Valley High School transformed the stage into Boddy Manor for the production of CLUE: On Stage High School Edition. The cast and crew, made up of 32 students, many who were making their Shepaug Dramatics debut, delivered an unforgettable performance filled with mystery and plenty of humor.

CLUE is based on the 1985 movie and the classic board game. It follows an unsuspecting group of quirky dinner guests who find themselves trapped in a mansion with a murderer. As bodies begin to pile up, they hurry to figure out who did it, where, and with what weapon. With its quick witted comedy, the show kept audiences on the edge of their seat.

The production was a collaborative effort of students both on and off stage. The clever set changes helped transport the audience, through the labyrinth that is Boddy Manor, on the hunt for the killer. Lighting design by Ryn Hutchinson set the perfect mood, while the costumes, designed by Helena Nelson, Amanda Philip, and Bucky Nunez, helped bring each character to life.

Everything ran smoothly on and off stage due to the talented stage management duo of Marco LeClerc and Annabella Gronbach who handled it all with ease.

The standout performances by the cast included Mollie Leonard as Wadsworth, Peyton Ongley as Mrs. White, Kadence O'Keefe as Miss Scarlet, Daniel Baxter as Professor Plum, Talon Profeta as Mr. Green, Layla Cooperman as Mrs. Peacock, and Maya Paixao as Colonel Mustard.

The cast and crew was rounded out by Antonio Atencio, Xandri Armstrong Auerbach, Bella Boonomoonte, Anne Marie Connelly, Mikey Flynn, Delaney Ganchou, Quinn Kinoshita-McCauley, Margaret McAllister, Summer Medina, Abigail Pease, Rebecca Perun, Maddie Rak, Julia Remi Torres, and Julia Wologodzew.

All in all, CLUE: On Stage was a huge success, showcasing the talent and dedication of the Shepaug Dramatics students. The production was enjoyed by the community, students and staff.

AN INNOVATIVE APPROACH TO DISTRICT IMPROVEMENT

By Keri Snowden
Director of Teaching, Learning, and Assessment



The Teaching and Learning Council has the following members: *Don Schels, Kate Eddy, Sue Ubaldi, Linda McMillan, Lis Blum, Mark Peters, BJ Hosking, Chris Testani, Logan Messina, Ed Belinsky, Mike Croft, Emily Judd, Marianne Maher, Beth Hosking, Rita Gregory, Keri Snowden, Amy Testani, Monica Burnham, Emily Rhew.*

The Region 12 Teaching and Learning Council launched in the summer of 2024. This group of educators, representing all schools, grade levels, and content areas, is aimed at implementing the District's Strategic Plan to shape the future of education in Region 12 by focusing on powerful learning experiences for all students.

The Council's work will be directly aligned with several key Strategic Plan goals:

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1: Powerful Learning

Under Commitment 1, the Council will focus on establishing a deep understanding of teaching and learning. They will identify areas for improvement, support best practices, and deepen teacher knowledge of powerful learning and academic expectations. This will include assessing teacher use of instructional strategies such as project-based learning, inquiry, and flexible grouping.

Commitment 2 tasks the Council with developing a "Vision of a Learner" that reflects the District's mission of ensuring success for all students. The team will consider existing documents such as the District's and schools' missions, visions, and core beliefs about teaching and learning. They will also consider the skills and dispositions needed in today's world of work and life beyond high school.

For Commitment 3, the Council will utilize student performance data to facilitate instructional decisions. Based on student achievement on state mandated assessments, the group has chosen math as an immediate focus area. The Council is examining various aspects of curriculum, instruction, and assessment in math to determine specific strategies that will lead to improved student performance.

> "The Council will work on creating a system of continuous improvement through increased communication between grade levels and content areas."

STRATEGIC PRIORITY 4: Innovation & Delivering Value

Under this priority, the Council will work on creating a system of continuous improvement through increased communication between grade levels and content areas.

They will investigate new, creative instructional strategies to deepen student engagement in the classroom and document a list of potential opportunities to advance student learning including interdisciplinary and project-based activities.

The Council represents Region 12's commitment to continuous improvement and innovation in education. By bringing together dedicated educators to collaboratively shape the District's approach to learning, Region 12 is taking a proactive step towards ensuring that its students are well-prepared for future challenges and opportunities.

Stay tuned for updates as the Council works to shape the future of education in Region 12 and enhance student success.

PRIMARY PARTNERS

By Michael Croft
Assistant Principal, Shepaug Valley School

Region 12 fourth and fifth graders are getting new learning and social opportunities at Shepaug Valley School this year. They are making four trips to Shepaug for mixed grade and mixed school STEM activities. Student groups will spend one session in the greenhouse, one in the planetarium, and one in the small animal lab and the barn.

In the greenhouse, Agriscience Director Tyler Cremeans, Megan Davenport, agriscience teacher, and agriscience students lead fourth and fifth graders through hands-on horticulture work. In addition to planting seeds in soil and in hydroponic media, students transplanted seedlings and even harvested vegetables to take home! Students in the horticulture rotation also spend time in the Shepaug Floral Shop learning about flower anatomy and sustainable floriculture.

Shepaug Planetarium Coordinator Friso Hermans and Science Instructional Leader Stephanie Schuck are introducing elementary students to the potential of the Planetarium, including a tour featuring exoplanets, our solar system, and the impact of glaciation on Connecticut's landscape. The Planetarium is essentially a super cool movie theater with a hemispherical screen that can enrich the study of many subjects. Students viewed and learned about constellations, how planets move in the night sky, and how the solar system is structured. They also pondered the possibilities of life on other planets and around other stars.







Alumni Notes

Kailee Munson '14 was married on November 16, 2024 to Fadi Albakri, after almost 9 years of dating in Tampa, FL. It was amazing to have my whole family in town for the special event.



Meghan Gilmore Neri '98 is hoping to connect with food allergy and/or asthma families in the greater Shepaug community.

Currently, Meghan is a member of the Board of Directors for AAFA New England (Asthma and Allergy Foundation of America, New England Chapter) and she is the Team Captain for AAFA New England's 2025 Falmouth Road Race Team.

AAFA New England is a registered 501(c)(3) non-profit organization that has served all six New England states since 1979 to help people with asthma and allergies strive for life without limits. Their work focuses on support, advocacy, education, and research.

Food Allergy Conference & Expo Saturday, May 31, 12:30-5:30pm at the Sheraton Boston Needham Hotel, in Needham, MA. The program will include food allergy management workshops, time designated for informal "Chat and Connect" with exhibitors, connect with experts in the local food allergy community, and explore related products and services. Details and tickets can be found at e.givesmart.com/events/GXq.

Eileen Kelly-Aguirre '79, **Jim Kelly '80**, **Mike Kelly '81**, and **Lauren Kelly '86**, shared the passing of their mother, Pat, in January of this year. Pat was an adult graduate of Western Connecticut State University. Pat proudly taught English at Shepaug middle school for seven years. She enjoyed teaching and loved her students, a number of which she stayed connected to over the years. Her children and much adored 12 grandchildren will host a Celebration of Life once the weather warms. Feel free to reach out to Eileen at ekellyallen23@gmail.com if you would like to be informed of the date and details.

Chancellor Dutcher '19 is a professional wildlife photographer based in his hometown of Washington, CT. Chance first got interested in photography in high school and incorporated his love for photography in his senior project. He started out taking pictures of animals, flowers, trees and wildlife at local farms. According to Chance, the wonderful thing about photography is that capturing the beauty of nature allows him to express his creativity and also serves as a powerful way to share the tranquil moments and breathtaking scenes that inspire him.





He lives for the weekends, where each extra hour of daylight becomes an opportunity to capture the beauty of nature. Chance spends hours in the forests and fields of Litchfield County taking pictures of wildlife. Last year he traveled to Canada in search of owls. He has made several trips to Grand Teton National Park. His prints can be found at the Washington Supply Company or purchased through his website, beardeddutchmanphotography.com.



This past fall, Chance and **Hannah Lasky '19**, high school sweethearts, were married in Grand Teton National Park. Hannah is currently the Marketing and Administrative Manager for Inter CT FC, a premier soccer club in Connecticut. Hannah oversees various functions such as managing website design, coordinating practice and game schedules for 72 teams, manages registrations and the club's finances, and distributes weekly newsletters. Hannah and Chance currently reside in Washington.

David Kalisher '89 sent a report from Santa Monica, CA on the recent wildfires. "First, very happy to report that our home was unscathed. We live just a half block away from an evacuation zone line, which was briefly a "Get Out Now" zone. Still, after one night of crazy winds and giant smoke plumes seemingly right over the trees to our north, we evacuated for a few days. During that time, we learned of numerous friends and one family member losing their homes. It was a surreal time. The silver lining to it all is that Los Angelenos stepped up in so many ways to support one another. It was amazing to be a part of. Businesses were offering freebies, residents worked together to donate and distribute supplies. The entire ground floor of my nearby YMCA was transformed into a disaster relief site manned by an army of volunteers. It reminded me of Shepaug, the way we've stepped up for one another throughout the years. Not something I recognized growing up, but I've learned to appreciate it in the years since — forever bonded."



Jason Conway '96 coaches student Peyton Thomas during a baseball game on Ted Alex Field.

SHEPAUG ALUMNI COACHES & VOLUNTEERS

Several Shepaug alumni are actively involved coaching middle school and high school teams. Listed below are the alums coaching this school year, as well as noteworthy accomplishments of the teams they coach.

HS Field Hockey - Owen Moore '20
Berkshire League Champions, Class S State Champions 2024, Berkshire League Ted Alex Sportsmanship Award 2024

HS Girls Soccer - Nadia Ostrosky '20

HS Boys Basketball - Alan Stinson '18
Berkshire League Champions, Berkshire League Tournament Champions 2024-2025

HS Ice Hockey - Jason Conway '96, Dan Moore '84

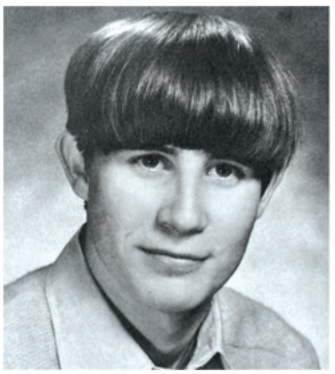
HS Swimming - Chris Papsin '01
Berkshire League Ted Alex Sportsmanship Award 2024-2025

HS Softball - Heidi Johnson '83, Dan Moore '84
Berkshire League Champions 2024

HS Baseball - Jason Conway '96, Mike Kersten '88, Justin 'Pokey' Planz '96, Scott Werkhoven '89
Berkshire League Champions 2024

MS Soccer - Jason Conway '96, Art Crabtree '64, Mike Kersten '88

Julie Mark Maruska '03 received Rhode Island's 2024 Elementary STEAM Educator Award. Her career has been dedicated to students receiving public education and currently works at The Compass School, a public charter school, in South Kingstown, RI teaching 5th and 6th grade Science.



Former Shepaug athlete and coach **Steve Pickett '75** passed away in the fall of 2024 after a lengthy illness. Steve was the winning pitcher in the 1973 State Championship Baseball game, the first baseball state championship in Shepaug history. He is widely regarded as one of the best players in Shepaug Baseball history and is remembered as an excellent teammate with a great sense of humor, and a lifelong Spartan. Steve spent over 40 years coaching middle school soccer, basketball and baseball, freshman boys basketball and varsity softball. In addition to his coaching career at Shepaug, Steve was very involved in Little League Baseball, American Legion Baseball and in the PWBA (PeeWee Basketball Association). Generations of Shepaug athletes were influenced by Steve and his contributions to Shepaug Athletics.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

CLASS OF 2006 REUNION

Leigh Childs, Luna LiVolsi Garcia, Kathryn Clair Bassett, Becki O'Brien Yoo and Wendy Thompson invite the Class of 2006 to save the date: Saturday, June 27th, 2026 for their 20th year reunion. For more information, join the Shepaug Valley High School Class of 2006 group on Facebook or email shepaugclassof2006@gmail.com.

SHEPAUG ATHLETIC FACILITY FOUNDATION

The Shepaug Athletic Facility Foundation is proud to announce the initiative to replace Shepaug fields with artificial turf is underway. The Foundation needs people experienced in fundraising and outreach to assist with this project. To get involved, please contact shepaugturf2025@gmail.com.

SHEPAUG ALUMNI ASSOCIATION

Our mission is to reach, serve and engage alumni and their families; to foster connections between the school and it's graduates, and provide Shepaug with goodwill and support.

CONTACT SCOTT WERKHOVEN, ALUMNI COORDINATOR ALUMNI@REGION-12.ORG TO JOIN OUR MAILING LIST.

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2025 Berkshire League CHAMPIONS!

Congratulations to the Golf, Soccer, Field Hockey, and Basketball teams of Region 12 on your incredible Berkshire League titles! Your skill, dedication, and teamwork have earned you a legendary status in the league. These victories are a testament to your hard work and the pride you bring to our entire community. Well done, champions! Your legacy will be remembered for years to come!



FIELD HOCKEY



GOLF



SOCCER



BASKETBALL