

Focus on 14

The Region 14 School District Monthly Newsletter

Ben's Bells Kindness Initiative at Woodbury Middle School

A small group of Woodbury Middle School students walked to the Post Office on a recent morning to hang a token of kindness in a tree on the green across the street. It is a Ben's Bell, a small copper cow bell with a dangling ceramic flower and accompanying message of intentional kindness – "You have found a Ben's Bell. Take it home, hang it and remember to spread kindness throughout our world."

Woodbury Middle School students hope that their small gesture - a symbol of kindness and its power in healing -- will help make their community a gentler place to live.

"I think the bell is a really good way to spread kindness," said eighth grader Addison Bushka, who added that walking as a group to hang their Ben's Bell was a great idea. "I hope that someone who finds this bell passes on the kindness it inspires."

Woodbury Middle School is partnering with Ben's Bells this year to support the Warrior Way and to foster an inclusive and accepting school culture. Twenty-five bells were gifted to WMS by the Ben's Bells studio in Bethel as part of the work the school is doing on intentional kindness and building an inclusive culture. Each multi-grade Family group was given a Ben's Bell to hang in a special place in the community.



Seventh grader Lila Farrelly said she thinks placing the bells throughout the community spreads joy and will surely spark a contagious kindness. "My hope is that when someone finds one of these bells, it makes their day and if they take it home, they feel better," Farrelly said.

Eighth grader Phoenix Celello said she recently found a Ben's Bell hanging at Hollow Park so she knows the joy the initiative can bring to a finder. "It made me feel really happy when I saw it," said Celello. "That's what the Ben's Bells initiative is really all about. It's been hard for everyone lately and we all need a little reason to be kind. I hope that the person who finds our Ben's Bell is someone who really needs it."

The all-school Ben's Bells initiative began in January at WMS. It included a lesson during school counseling monthly lessons on the origin and purpose of Ben's Bells and how the founder turned a tragic event in her own life into a worldwide kindness initiative.

Students also created kindness chains that are on display near the Support Services suite and decorated small signature Ben's Bells "Be Kind" paper flowers to hang throughout the school. Throughout the rest of the school year, the middle school community will learn and implement additional strategies to grow the practice of kindness at school and beyond.



Middle School Artists Featured in Art Gallery Showing

Woodbury Middle School students Maci Johnson, Isla Jones, and Emma Fitzgerald will have their art pieces displayed at the Young at Art K-8 student Art Show at the Washington Art Association. The students and their families have been invited to an artist reception on Saturday, April 1 from 3 -5 p.m. and their work will be displayed from April 1 - 22 at the Washington Art Association Gallery.

SAVE THE DATE
Anticipated Region 14 Budget Referendum Vote
May 2, 2023 6 a.m. – 8 p.m. Bethlehem & Woodbury

Elementary Students Participate in 1st Annual Science Invention Convention

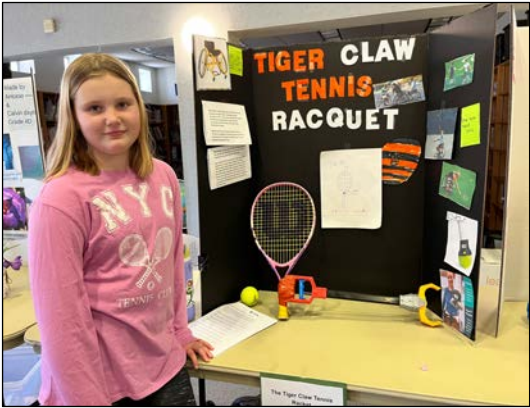
Need something to hold down a tarp?
How about a glass of cold water on a road trip? What about something to sort the thousands of Lego pieces scattered on the floor?

Region 14's elementary school student inventors came up with ideas for creative and useful inventions they unveiled at the first annual elementary science Invention Convention in March.

Students in 3rd through 5th grades presented their inventions to a panel of judges from the Region 14 school community including administrators, science teachers, and Board of Education members.

The scope of their inventions was vast and included cleaning and organizing solutions and gadgets, a sustainable horse saddle system, a kid's road trip organizer, a classroom noise level indicator, a Pop Its toothbrush to help kids who struggle with teeth brushing, and many more.

The judges scored the projects in areas of originality, designing and building, testing and refining, market potential, social value, and presentation.



The student-optional event was organized for upper elementary students in both schools by Christina Strell, the K-5 STEM and Social Studies Coordinator.

The Invention Convention is a national science competition. Five winners from each school were the top scorers and had the chance to move onto the virtual state semi-finals.



Curriculum Updates

K-5 Literacy

Exciting changes are coming to the elementary level reading curriculum for the 2023-24 school year as we align our reading instruction to reflect a structured literacy approach. This shift is supported by educational researchers as the proven, most effective way to teach the foundational literacy skills which are essential to a student's academic career: phonics, phonemic awareness, vocabulary development, reading fluency, oral language, and reading comprehension.

Region 14 has submitted a waiver application to ensure that any programs purchased and utilized by the district have been thoroughly vetted and proven effective prior to their implementation. Region 14 plans to purchase Foundations, a phonics program for pre-kindergarten through third grade, to supplement the current curriculum.

Next year, 30 minutes of phonics instruction will be built into the existing 90-minute literacy block for K-3. The 90 minutes also includes 30 minutes of small group instruction in literacy to work to enhance their skills in each foundational area. The small group What You Need (WYN) blocks put in place this year will continue next school year to provide extra support and enrichment to meet each student's current learning needs.



Additionally, prior to the start of the 2023-24 school year, the current curriculum will be updated with science and social studies topics and English learner supports embedded into the reading curriculum to build students' background knowledge while ensuring instructional and practice opportunities in all the foundational literacy components.

Teachers will be trained on the mClass Dibels 8th edition assessment to replace the i-Ready system used three times a year. The mClass includes one- to three- minute assessments administered individually that measure phonics, phonemic awareness, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, and letter name fluency. Teachers can frequently listen to students read one-on-one using periodic formative assessments and the three-times a year benchmark assessments. The mClass platform also includes data reports that are useful for whole and small reading group instruction planning.

Middle School Open ELA

For the 2023-24 school year, the Woodbury Middle School English Language Arts curriculum will shift to a content-driven and background knowledge-building model to strengthen students' competence as readers, writers, listeners, and speakers through compelling real-world content. The Open ELA curriculum focuses on reading, writing, and speaking; researching to increase background knowledge; analyzing, interpreting, and evaluating text; and researching to write and present arguments.

The curriculum includes four full-year modules for each grade level that are centered on a shared novel experience used for whole-group instruction. Each module includes additional texts and resources to build the students' content knowledge in the focus

area which may be science, social studies, or literature.

The integration of interdisciplinary content helps students see the connection between learning to read and reading to learn. Resources include informational texts, multimedia presentations, audio recordings and podcasts, e-books, and museum collections. Class discussions about various texts and topics will also serve as a tool for student assessments.

Additional instructional time in 6th and 7th grade will be utilized each day for small group instruction to provide teachers an opportunity to meet students at their instructional levels and provide more personalized instruction in areas like vocabulary, spelling, reading fluency, reading comprehension, and writing.

The Open English Language Arts curriculum is fully aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards.



Math in K-5

Math instructional alignment from Kindergarten through 9th/10th grade Geometry will be a reality in Region 14 next year as we adopt the Illustrative Mathematics (IM) curriculum for grades K-5. Illustrative Mathematics is a problem-based curriculum that encourages critical thinking, problem-solving, and collaboration among the students to ensure that they truly understand the "why" and "how" behind the math they are doing and are able to apply their learning to new situations.

Students' use of oral language and writing to explain their thought processes further develops their literacy skills while also providing numerous opportunities for them to develop the Region 14 Vision of a Learner attributes: thinking critically and creatively, communicating, and collaborating effectively, demonstrating empathy, persevering, adapting and adjusting, and taking initiative.





Spanish classes made a visit to the Museum of Modern Art in New York City. Students spent their time investigating the theme of identity through the lens of many famous Hispanic artists.



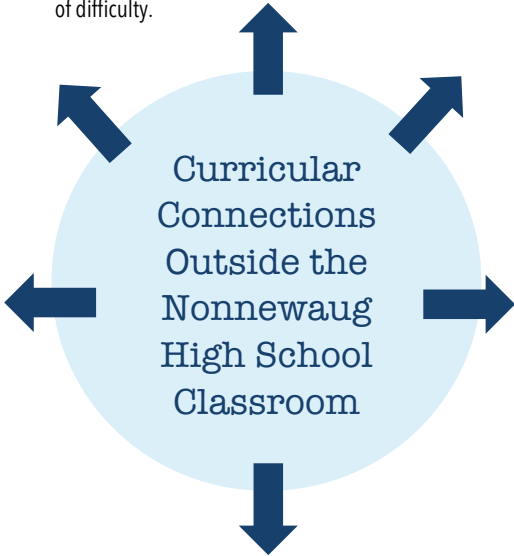
Math students headed to Southern Connecticut State University in New Haven for the Mathematical Puzzle Programs (MaPP) High School Challenge. They joined students from around the New Haven area for a day geared toward solving math puzzles varying in levels of difficulty.



Agriscience students in the Aquaculture and Natural Resource classes visited the Burlington State Fish Hatchery, one of the three main hatcheries in Connecticut. Students learned about strip spawning, fish feeding, life cycles, and multiple growing methods.



Agriscience students toured various local dairy farms for their annual Dairy Day to see first-hand how the industry operates. They visited Devil's Backbone Dairy Farm in Bethlehem and Canaan View Farm in Canaan. They also visited Cowpots and Freund's Farm that makes biodegradable, plastic-free seed-starting pots using cow manure from Canaan View Farm. This field trip helps students understand that sustainable production agriculture includes business management, nutrition management (for both humans and animals), environmental stewardship, soil science, plant science, and mechanical technologies.



Students in the American Sign Language 1 class headed to the American School for the Deaf in West Hartford, the first permanent school for the deaf in the United States. They toured the school and heard about the programs for the deaf and hard-of-hearing students and received a tour of the Cogswell Heritage House and the museum archives.



Journalism students teamed up with University of Hartford students and faculty for a hands-on experience at Journalism Day. Students learned the art of creating video podcasts, operating lighting studios, and how to orchestrate a television broadcast.

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