



# THE DARIEN DIFFERENCE

## School Spotlight November 2025 - Issue 3

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Dear Community Members,

Welcome to the third edition of The Darien Difference - our new District Newsletter that spotlights all the wonderful things that make the Darien Public Schools truly special. Each month we are taking a deep dive into one of our District schools and showcasing how the Vision of the Graduate is in action every single day and how it contributes to truly setting Darien apart from other Districts in Connecticut.



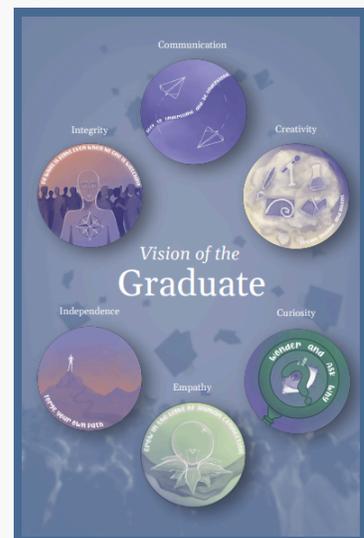
The November edition highlights the wonderful work happening at Middlesex Middle School and the many ways that our students and faculty are living the Vision of the Graduate - every single day!

Middlesex students were well represented in two wonderful displays of creativity and talent in the third annual tenor and bass showcase and the District's K-12 Art show at UCBC in town. Additionally, students collaborated to help those in need with a food drive for Person-to-Person and a medical supply collection drive for Pacific House, both beautiful displays of empathy. Showing that competition is not always in the athletics space, MMS students showed great success in the Quiz Bowl this month, continuing their streak of quick-witted dominance!

Please join me in celebrating what makes Middlesex Middle School a wonderful learning community. In our December edition, we will learn all about the wonders of Ox Ridge Elementary School.

Sincerely,

Eric A. Byrne, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools



# Vision of the Graduate

Principal's Perspective: Mrs. Kate Dimoulas



## What does the Vision of the Graduate mean to you in one sentence?

The Vision of the Graduate is a commitment the Darien Public Schools makes to our students and to each other; one which gives equal value to nurturing the mind – through communication, creativity, and curiosity – and to the heart – through empathy, integrity, and independence.

## How does it come to life at MMS?

The last line of the introduction to the DPS Vision of the Graduate is my favorite: As a result [of their PK-12 learning experiences], we believe we will graduate individuals who have a strong academic foundation and are prepared to use the knowledge and skills they have acquired to cast and fulfill a purposeful vision for themselves, their community, and the world. At Middlesex Middle School, the Vision of the Graduate comes to life as our students have a myriad of academic and extracurricular opportunities to strive towards individual goals, find and test their strengths, exercise their courage and their voices, and make meaningful and lasting positive relationships.

## How do students develop some of these attributes in middle school?

Our rich middle school curriculum utilizes a team model for core subjects and includes diverse offerings like World Language and Unified Arts to foster the skills necessary for life-long learning. School counselors actively push in to support students in developing the attributes of the Vision of the Graduate, supporting students in growing as independent learners and self-advocates, exploring interests and curiosities, culminating with an eighth grade Career Day where community members enrich our students' vision of their future pathways. Students exercise Communication, Creativity, and Curiosity across disciplines, while their Independence, Empathy, and Integrity shine not only in our hallways, cafeteria, and recess but in how they connect their learning to themselves and their community – in and beyond the school day.

## Is there an example you can share of students living the Vision of the Graduate that made you proud?

I am so proud of our students' inclusion and advocacy, and we are fortunate to have many examples here at MMS! In Unified Sports, student athletes of all ability levels participate on the same team to develop their understanding of team activities and train; athletes and partners build bonds while cultivating leadership and responsibility. Our annual school musical is open to all who audition, and our music ensembles are heterogeneous – their performances are spectacular and joyful. The student-led No Place for Hate committee inspires our community to learn from and about each other, stand up for one another, and keep MMS a respectful and positive place. At MMS, our students live the VOG: We do the right thing, even when no one is looking (**Integrity**). We seek to understand and be understood (**Communication**). We grow in the light of human connection (**Empathy**).



# Celebrating Low Voices: The Tenor and Bass Showcase Hits a High Note!

On Thursday, November 6th, the Middlesex Middle School (MMS) auditorium was filled with rich, powerful tones as we hosted the 3rd Annual Tenor and Bass Showcase! This energetic event was much more than a typical concert; it was a collaborative celebration designed specifically to spotlight low voice singers—Tenors and Bases—and ultimately encourage greater chorus participation across all of our schools. The showcase successfully brought together 70 talented students from grades 4 through 12, demonstrating the depth and breadth of the DPS music program. The excitement began the night before with a bustling, cross-grade rehearsal, which included a pizza dinner generously sponsored by the Darien Music Parents Association. During this rehearsal, the 10 performers from MMS learned a special song to perform with the seasoned Darien High School (DHS) singers, and all 70 participants mastered a massive full-group song, fostering incredible community and musical collaboration.

The main event featured a thrilling lineup that showcased the very best of DPS talent. Performances included the powerful MMS Combined Boy's Choir, the combined might of the DHS Concert Choir and Tudor Singers Combined Men's Choir, and the fan-favorite DHS Fantastic Four. The audience was also treated to a fun, collaborative faculty quartet performance featuring music teachers from both MMS and DHS. The night hit a spectacular high note with a captivating performance by the renowned a cappella group, the Yale Spizzwinks!, who brought a special connection by featuring DHS alum John Raskopf. The 3rd Annual Tenor and Bass Showcase was a resounding success, proving that when the low voices come together, the music program's future in Darien is incredibly bright and full of opportunity for every student.



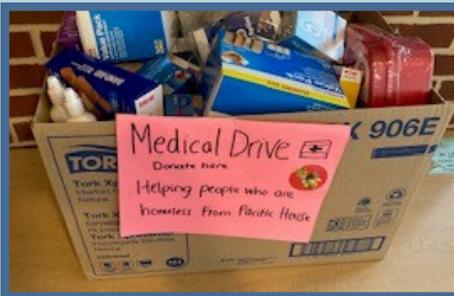
# MMS Students Drive Change:

## A Successful Medical Supplies Collection for Pacific House

The concept for the successful medical supplies drive at Middlesex Middle School (MMS) wasn't born in a planning session, but from the incredible initiative of three eighth-grade students: Mila Diamond, Hunter Dias, and Katherine Au. As part of their advocacy project for the Healthy Living 8 class, the trio took a simple lesson in First Aid and boldly imagined a creative solution to a real-world problem: providing basic supplies to neighbors in need. Their self-motivation drove them to identify who in the local community needed help with health and safety, embodying the Vision of the Graduate commitment to bringing about positive change.

Mila, Hunter, and Katherine chose Pacific House as the recipient of their donations. They felt the local shelter's core mission to end and prevent homelessness perfectly aligned with their goal of ensuring vulnerable individuals had access to essential care. This hands-on, community-focused approach to problem-solving quickly engaged the entire MMS student body and faculty. The three students' enthusiasm was contagious, demonstrating how their curiosity could inspire thinking in others and prompt the community to participate in solving a local need.

The community's response was overwhelming. When the drive concluded, Mila, Hunter, and Katherine were proud to report they had collected more than 50 essential medical items from the generous MMS community. By partnering with Pacific House, these three eighth graders not only made a significant contribution to local welfare but also proved that powerful change can start with just a few dedicated students in a classroom, turning a class assignment into a humanitarian success story.



# Academic Dominance: Middlesex Quiz Bowl Ranks #1 in the Nation!

The MMS Quiz Bowl program isn't just a club; it's a national powerhouse! Since its inception in 2009, this interscholastic, buzzer-based competition team has amassed an unparalleled record, winning more matches than any other middle school program in the country and claiming over 30 tournament victories! This legacy of excellence hit its peak in 2016 when Middlesex secured an astonishing four different national championship titles! Quiz Bowl questions span the entire academic spectrum—from poetry and physics to ancient history and current events—demanding broad, rapid-fire knowledge from teams of up to four players.

Fueling this success is a massive, dedicated roster of around 60 student members who attend weekly Thursday practices, with highly committed students starting daily practice sessions the very morning of the first day of school and running straight through to June! The program relies heavily on its dedicated coaching staff, including head coaches Barbara Ivey and Ken Romeo, and assistant coaches Michele Mattera, Olivia Sheldon, Andrew Turriago, and Katlin Tyrol, who manage this vast, high-achieving group.

And the program keeps on growing and expanding its reach, hosting the annual Charter Oak Scholastic Open tournament—a regional staple now in its 14th year—that recently brought teams from New York, New Jersey, and Massachusetts to the MMS campus. Middlesex teams compete in high-stakes academic competitions both in person and online across the country all year long. This year's competition schedule is already packed, with plans to attend major regional tournaments in New Jersey and Virginia, culminating in anticipated appearances at National Championships in Chicago and Orlando! The program's strength was recently on display in the semi-finals of last weekend's tournament, featuring the stellar eighth-grade A-Team (including players like Lucien Presseau, Eason Brooks, Adam Kornstein, and John Mollica, among others), proving that the tradition of excellence is alive and well at MMS!



# Community Compassion:

## Middlesex Students Show True Meaning of Giving

This month, the Middlesex Middle School Student Council proudly continued one of our school's longest-standing traditions—the annual food drive benefiting Person to Person in Darien. For more than 30 years, MMS students have partnered with this local organization because it directly supports families right here in our own community. Student Council, along with advisors Jackie Kelly and Kerriann Sievering, believe it is important for students to see the impact of their efforts close to home, and Person to Person offers immediate, meaningful assistance to neighbors who need it most. From pasta to canned soup to peanut butter and jelly, the generosity poured in, creating a mountain of several hundred donations that shows once again how MMS students and families can make a real difference in our community.

This year, Student Council embraced the guiding idea that “the purpose of life is to discover your gift, and the meaning of life is to give your gift away.” By giving their time, energy, and compassion, our students demonstrated how powerful it can be when young people share their gifts in service of others.

Our Student Council members organized, promoted, and collected donations with incredible enthusiasm, helping fill the food pantry shelves ahead of the holiday season. We are grateful for the generosity of our MMS families and for the students who worked hard to make this community effort such a success. (Toys 4 Tots is around the corner!!!)

Student Council at Middlesex Middle School is a leadership organization made up of students who are committed to improving their school and community. Members from all grade levels take an active role in planning service projects, supporting school-wide events, promoting school spirit, and giving student voice to important conversations.



# MMS Art Showcase:

## Celebrating Process, Dedication, and Diverse Voices

Once again, MMS is buzzing with artistic pride as the art department selected its top student work to the highly anticipated UCBC Town Art Show! Each year, the art department, led by teachers like Eleni Rosenboom, selects 10 pieces of art from each grade level to represent the school. This rigorous selection process is challenging, as the teachers look far beyond the finished product. They ultimately select students who display dedication, strong work ethic, and positive studio practice habits, guided by the belief that the artistic process—including curiosity, patience, and the courage to explore—is equally as important as the final creation. The resulting collection is deliberately diverse, showcasing a wide range of media, techniques, and concepts, including clay pieces, watercolor paintings, acrylic paintings, realistic portraits, and marker drawings, ensuring the show is inclusive of all different styles and methods used by MMS students.

This diverse selection is a direct reflection of the engaging curriculum fostered in the art rooms. Seventh-grade art teacher Eleni Rosenboom, for example, grounds her classroom in the belief that “creativity is a universal human skill that grows with practice, not a talent reserved for a few.” Her students dive into projects that build both technical skill and emotional expression. This includes designated time for Social Emotional Learning sketching, where students use art to express unique viewpoints and practice risk-taking. In their realism unit, students create powerful Half-Face Portraits of inspirational figures, often working upside-down and grid-by-grid to build skills in perceptual awareness and detail. Further explorations include designing Bas-Relief clay pieces that balance drawing and sculpture, and mastering challenging Watercolor Painting techniques by controlling water-to-pigment ratios and layering light to dark colors. This comprehensive approach ensures that every student develops the foundational skills and confidence needed to become a dedicated, creative contributor to the annual UCBC Town Art Show and beyond! Check out our student work [here](#).

## Partners in Growth:

### Greater MMS Community Focuses on Middle School Development

This fall, the MMS community, in strong partnership with the Middlesex Parents Association (MPA) and several key community partners, engaged in a focused effort to better understand and support the critical developmental phase of middle school students. This commitment to growing together as parents and educators was kicked off by the MPA's summer/fall community read, *Finding the Magic in Middle School: Tapping Into the Power and Potential of the Middle School Years*, by Chris Balme. The book explores the three essential questions middle schoolers seek to answer: Who am I? How do I connect? What will I contribute? The learning continued on October 24, when author and educator Chris Balme joined the community for a virtual book talk, sharing his research on a framework for understanding this age group and offering keys to supporting their needs for belonging and autonomy.

This shared learning experience was swiftly followed by a visit from renowned motivational speaker, Tanner Clarke, on November 7. Clarke addressed students during the day, focusing on their ability to find "one second of strength at a time" as they overcome distractions and live intentionally toward their fullest potential. Tanner then held an evening talk for families and community members, underscoring the collaborative spirit between MMS and its partners, which included The YWCA, Thriving Youth, The Depot, The Y, Wave Strong, and OK to Delay. Opportunities like these, and the upcoming "Coffee with Karla" (the Teen Talk Counselor) spotlight this unique commitment to shared learning. MMS is dedicated to ensuring that both students and the adults who support them receive the best resources to navigate these formative middle school years.

# Looking Ahead



**Thursday, December 4**

Middlesex Winter Orchestra Concert  
DHS Auditorium, 7:00 pm

**Saturday, December 6**

Board of Education- Tour of Schools  
9:00 am

**Monday, December 8**

Middlesex Winter Band Concert  
DHS Auditorium, 7:00 pm

**Tuesday, December 9**

Board of Education Regular Meeting  
7:30 p.m. (approximate time)  
Central Office

**Wednesday, December 10**

Middlesex Winter Choral Concert  
DHS Auditorium, 6:30 pm

**Thursday, December 11**

Tokeneke Winter Concert- 9:30 am  
5/6 Jazz Lab Showcase- 4:15 pm

**Friday, December 12**

PLC- DHS Late Start  
K-5 Literacy Early Dismissal

**Tuesday, December 16**

Hindley Winter Concert- 9:30 am

**Wednesday, December 17**

Holmes Winter Concert - 9:45 am  
DHS Holiday Spectacular - 7:00 pm

**Monday, December 22**

Hindley, Holmes, and Royle Early Dismissal

**Tuesday, December 23**

ELP-12 Early Dismissal

**Wednesday, December 24 through Friday, January 2**

Holiday Recess  
Schools closed

**See you next month! Up next, Ox Ridge Elementary School!**