



WHAT A YEAR IN REGION 14!

At the December Region 14 Schools Board of Education meeting, Superintendent Brian Murphy celebrated the district's accomplishments, citing improvements across all schools in many areas, including math, science, and ELA.

"We are extremely proud to say that Region 14 is in the top 24% of all school districts in the state," Murphy said, adding that this ranking, determined by listing all 199 districts by overall Accountability Index from highest to lowest, improved three percentage points from last year. "Region 14 is excelling, and it's a testament to our students, our hardworking staff, and our supportive parents in our communities."

This fall, Bethlehem Elementary School was named a CT School of Distinction for the second year in a row and is ranked in the top 5% of Connecticut schools. Nonnewaug High School ranks among the top 25% of schools in the state. Murphy noted that Region 14 has a School of Distinction each year since the 2021-2022 school year, when Mitchell Elementary School first made the list, and then again in 2022-23.

"We are proud that we have a School of Distinction on the list for the last four years," Murphy said. For K-12 districts, approximately 50% of Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability Index is based on the state's assessments administered to students each spring, with the remaining 50% measuring school and district performance and growth using 12 indicators, extending beyond test scores and graduation rates to gauge how well a school is preparing its students for success.

Other highlights include Woodbury Middle School's recent encouraging performance on the SBAC in ELA. WMS students scored the highest on the ELA test since the SBAC began there in the 2014-15 school year.

Director of Teaching and Learning Dr. Taryn Fernandez attributed this success to the WMS ELA curriculum Open EL, now in its third year, as well as the redesign of the ELA blocks that give one full block each of English and Literacy to 6th and 7th graders each year. WMS also earned its highest school score on the Next Generation Science Standards test since its inception in 2018.

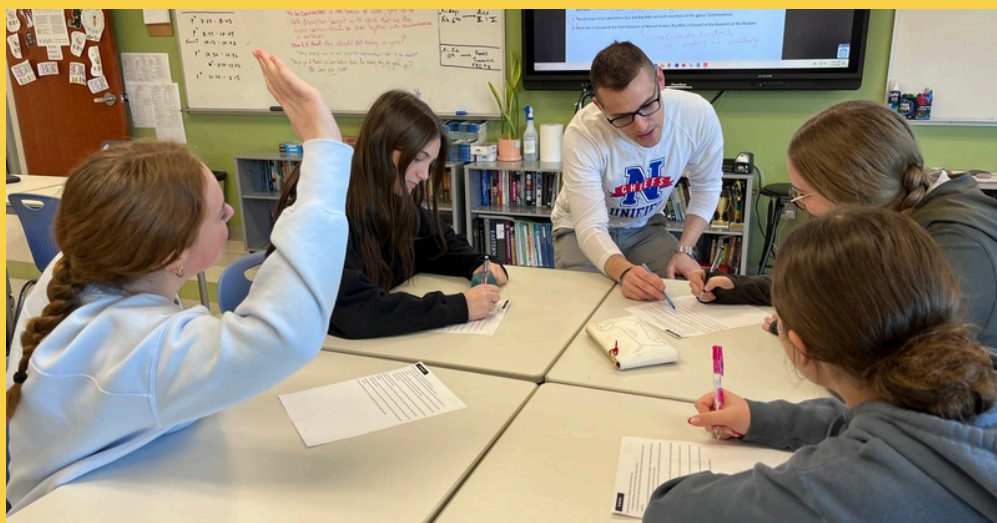
At the elementary level, Region 14 is in the third year of implementing Illustrative Math, an innovative problem-based K-12 program and curriculum designed to energize math classrooms and equip students with critical skills, understandings, and practices, such as Building Thinking Classrooms and collaborative projects. Dr. Fernandez said this has resulted in 75% of students in Bethlehem reaching math proficiency on the SBA, the highest proficiency percentage since the SBA began. Additionally, MES has achieved its highest proficiency scores on the state NGSS science assessment since its first administration to students.

Also at the elementary level, students have made improvements in literacy with the implementation of new programs like Into Reading and the Science of Reading, resulting in BES having a 71% proficiency in reading in the state standard measurement.

Dr. Fernandez also noted that at Nonnewaug High School, weekly department-based Professional Learning collaboration, especially among the English Department, resulted in an impressive 13% jump in students' English SAT scores for the 2025 session.

Another important accomplishment in Region 14 is the reduction in chronic absenteeism, essential to the school performance as a whole, and measured on the Accountability Index. The chronic absenteeism rate for the Region has dipped to below 10%, a drop of 2.2% since the 23-24 school year.

"This exemplifies the importance of being present in school and how it affects academics," Dr. Fernandez explained. BES and NHS are showing the greatest improvement, with BES down 7.8% and NHS down 5.3%. "Both schools were recently invited to a panel with the CSDE and EdAdvance to share best practices in improving student attendance," she said.



DECEMBER HAPPENINGS IN OUR COMMUNITIES



Nonnewaug High School choir students were joined by members of the Bethlehem and Mitchell Elementary school choruses for some beautiful caroling at the annual Tree Lightings in Bethlehem & Woodbury. Additionally, Region 14 Elementary School Music Teacher Jessica Lopa brought a few chorus students over to the Woodbury Senior Community Center for caroling during their annual Holiday Luncheon.



At WMS, a Gratitude Tree in the front lobby of Woodbury Middle School last month reminded the school community that, like an evergreen that stays vibrant through every season, thankfulness is meant to endure all year long. WMS School Counselors led December school-wide lessons for students to focus on the importance of gratitude and identifying aspects of their lives for which they are grateful. Students wrote notes of gratitude to people who have impacted their lives in a positive way and created wooden ornaments to adorn the tree and promote positivity at WMS.



The students in the Culinary Program at Nonnewaug High School host the annual drive-through Senior Citizen Holiday Meal each year in early December. They began the process of creating the meal in the fall with an apple-picking trip to March Farms for the apple dessert and worked through until December to get everything ready. The completed boxed meals, a result of their hard work, were delivered to 170 senior citizens from Bethlehem and Woodbury to warm their holidays.

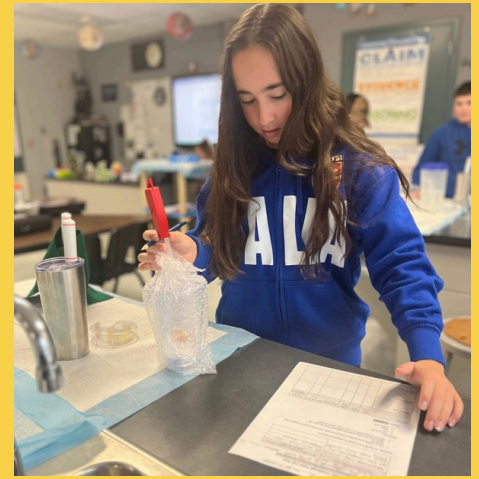
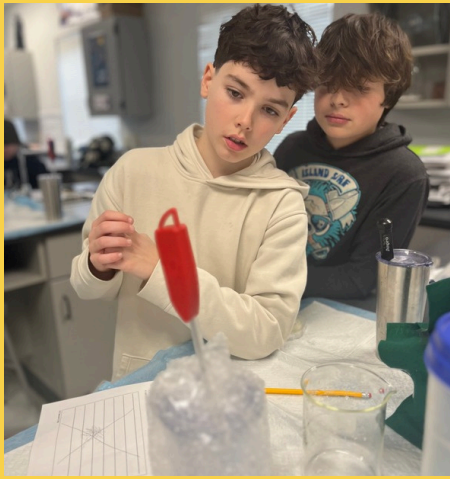


In December, students and staff came together to honor NHS senior Jonathan Cheung. Students and staff wore orange, the color for Leukemia Awareness, to show support to Jonathan, who was diagnosed with Leukemia in November and is undergoing treatment in the hospital. The picture of the sea of orange with the scoreboard set to 55 – his football number – was sent to Jonathan with a card signed by members of the Chiefs community. Students were also given orange ribbons and could purchase a rubber Leukemia Awareness bracelet for a donation. The Orange Day raised more than \$1,200, which will go toward helping the Cheung family navigate through Jonathan's treatment. In addition, all schools hosted a PJ Day for the Kids where students and staff wore pajamas to school and collected donations for Connecticut Children's Foundation. Region 14 Schools raised more than \$2,000 with some of that going directly to the Cheung family.



PRELUDE TO THE WMS PENGUIN PROJECT

Sixth-grade students explored the idea of thermal energy with a Tumbler Challenge Cold Cup Test. They determined which everyday drink tumblers are the best to keep drinks cold by measuring how the temperature changes under certain variables. Students used cups of metal, hard plastic, and flimsy plastic filled with ice water and insulated with different items -- bubble wrap, felt, foil, measured the temperature changes in intervals of nine minutes. This lab gets students thinking about the kinds of materials they will use on their January project -- innovative ideas to help the penguins survive by keeping the heat to a minimum.



LIVESTOCK PRODUCTION CLASS HANDS-ON LEARNING

The Nonnewaug High School Livestock Production class had an incredible hands-on learning experience during the annual Crown Roast Processing Day in December. Students worked through the full processing process, applying classroom knowledge to real-world skills in meat fabrication, food safety, and quality presentation. Jason Woike from the Meat Department at Labonne's stopped by to share his time, expertise, and industry knowledge with our students. Members of the Region 14 community and NHS have the opportunity to support these Livestock Production students by pre-ordering a roast package they prepare for the holiday season.



BARN CHALLENGE IN AG

What elements make a successful farm design? NHS sophomore Agriscience students worked for about a month on researching, designing, and developing their own proposals for original farm businesses. Their Farm Design Challenge projects were a testament to their creativity, problem-solving, and agricultural knowledge.



NEW ESPORTS AT NHS MADE BIG STRIDES IN 2025

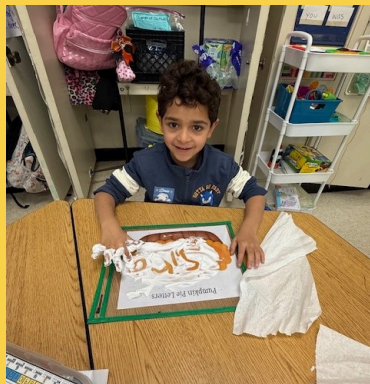
The Nonnewaug High School Esports team earned the title of the Runner Up in the Super Smash Bros State Championship CIAC at Quinnipiac University in December. This is an impressive finish for the first-ever Esports teams at NHS, who eliminated the undefeated #1 team, Conard Red Wolves, first showing at the semifinals. They competed in a close match against the Hall Titans in the finals. Esports became a high school CIAC-sanctioned sport several years ago. Last summer, NHS Media Arts teacher Katie Blake officially formed a competitive SMASH BROS/Play Vs ESports team for ten interested student gamers at Nonnewaug. Their season began with a few technical glitches, where they had to move competitions to Post University. But this new team didn't miss a beat. For their first match in September against Johnathan Law High School and Conard High School, NHS Esports came home with two winning games and were enthusiastic for the rest of the season. The team is looking to expand play for the upcoming spring season, which begins in late January. Mrs. Blake plans to offer a league for Super Smash Bros and Mario Kart.



BES LAUNCHES FIRST STUDENT NEWSPAPER

FEELING GOOD ABOUT PHONICS AT MES

Mitchell Elementary School first graders had an absolute blast working on a phonics lesson using shaving cream. This multi-sensory lesson helped students with letter formation and retention, and helped them with fine motor skills as they work on their phonics.



Bethlehem Elementary School published the first edition of its school newspaper, The Bulldog Beat. This project was developed by a few interested students as an enrichment activity with BES interventionist Ian Budrewicz.

The Bulldog Beat's first edition included stories on BES events, including the Halloween Dance and the Book Fair, features on staff members, and games and puzzles. Thatcher Beatty is the Editor-in-Chief and proudly presented the first issue at a recent school-wide Town Meeting.

WAYS TO CONNECT WITH REGION 14

