



DANBURY DIGEST

District News & Highlights Spring 2014



What's Inside:

- DHS eliminates mid-term and final exams
- District updates regulations to reduce allergic reactions
- Student-athletes dominate area sports competitions

Superintendent's Message

Dear Parents, Staff, Students and Community Members:

As the end of the school year approaches, we look back on a year filled with accomplishments from academic achievements to sports division titles and awards in technology competitions. Our high school cheerleaders were named State Champions and our boys' indoor track team and girls' basketball team took title in FCIAC, State LL and State Open championships.

The Danbury High School robotics teams competed on a world-class level just last month and, at the end of this month, a Stadley Rough Elementary School student will compete in the national spelling bee after taking the regional competition. The Broadview Mathletes competed successfully in regional competitions with one student qualifying for the states.

We look forward to continuing this momentum as we already begin to prepare for next fall. Our work on Common Core Standards has been diligent, and we will soon start to see the results of much hard work. Everyone is eagerly anticipating the Westside Middle School, which will focus on STEM and global studies; the magnet school is slated to open in the fall with 400 Danbury students and expand to 600 students by 2016-17.

Until then, the district has lots opportunities for students this summer, from our literacy van to summer playground camps and summer school programs.

Congratulations to all of our graduates and to everyone a healthy, happy summer!

Schools exceed targets for English language learners

Over the past five years, English language learners (ELLs) in the Danbury schools have markedly improved as a result of a researched-based educational model delivered by a dedicated staff. A state report for 2012-13 noted district-wide commitment has been a primary reason of this success. Because of the ever-growing number of students learning English, the school district has adopted a SIOP (Sheltered Instruction Observation Protocol)

model, an approach to teaching that extends the time students have for receiving English language support while learning subject material, such as science and math. This approach integrates teaching language and content and is effective for all students. The SIOP classrooms may include a mix of English speakers and ELLs, or only ELLs. The goal is for ELLs to have access to grade-level content while acquiring English proficiency. The model focuses on

developing vocabulary, clearly explaining academic tasks and consolidating the features of effective instruction into one instrument. Since instituting SIOP in 2008-09, the percentage of ELLs making progress has been nearly 90, well surpassing the state target of 80 percent. ELLs attaining proficiency has steadily been at 55 percent, exceeding the state goal of 30 percent. Prior to the installation of SIOP, the district has always met or exceeded

Continued on page 7

DHS robotics competes in VEX World Championship



Two robotics teams from Danbury High School headed to California at the end of April to compete in the Vex Robotics World Championship. Danbury’s E-team finished 55 of 86 teams in the math division, winning four of its last five matches. Team D finished 23 of 86 in the arts division.

D-team finished 14th in the world for Vex driving skills. The teams competed statewide earlier in the year earning two of the six Connecticut slots to the event from Connecticut. Erik Savoyski, DHS Technology Education Teacher and the team’s

adviser was awarded Volunteer of the Year, as he serves as a referee at all the state events. The team dedicated hundreds of hours toward building and programming their three world-class robots.

New principal one of 50 chosen for ‘Google Teacher Academy’

Dr. Frank LaBanca, principal of the Westside Middle School scheduled to open this fall, was one of 50 educators selected to participate in the Google Teacher Academy in June. The GTA is a professional development experience designed to help primary and secondary educators from around the globe get the most from innovative technologies. The intensive, two-day event during which participants

get hands-on experience with Google tools, learn about innovative instructional strategies, receive resources to share with colleagues and immerse themselves in a supportive community of educators making impact. “Westside Middle School will be a technology-enhanced learning environment,” said LaBanca. “The GTA will enhance my skills as an instructional leader to share cutting-edge

technology with the faculty.” Westside Middle School will offer educational programming in the areas of STEM and Global Studies. The school will accommodate 400 students from Danbury in its first year chosen through a lottery system; this number will grow to 600 students over the following two years.

Board of Education Members
Eileen W. Alberts, chairperson
Gladys Cooper
Michael Ferguson
Annrose Fluskey-Lattin
Richard Hawley, secretary
Richard Jannelli
David Metrena
Kathleen Molinaro, vice chairperson
Ralph Pietrafesa
Robert Taborsak
Phyllis Tranzillo

Students win with inventions at state competition

Ten students from Danbury schools were awarded for their inventions at the state’s largest invention competition held May 3 at UCONN Storrs. There were 35 students from Danbury among the some 600 competitors, chosen from 350 district competitors. The “recognized inventors” and are:

Grace Carey, Pembroke Elementary School; Liam Clark, Pembroke; Audrey Hinh, Shelter Rock Elementary; AnnaMarie Hickey, Stadlely Rough Elementary School; and from Rogers Park Middle School: Braeden Callaghan, Clarissa Lugo-Commans, Jack Pompilio, Ashley Corrie, Sophia Folino and Nathaniel Hornik.

The invention convention fosters interest in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics learning for students from kindergarten through eighth grade. Judges included teachers, scientists and engineers. This was the 31st year of the competition.

Rogers Park teacher publishes innovative program

Special educator Angela Mahoney has long been an advocate for special needs students. She's developed programs that have been wildly successful and helped build confidence in students by developing life skills. And her programs are getting noticed. Recently, Mahoney's curriculum "I Can Work! A Work Skills Curriculum for Special Needs Programs," was published by Therapro Inc. Mahoney, who teaches at Rogers Park Middle School, has a degree in

Intensive Needs Special Education and began teaching in 2001, as a prevocational teacher at a private, nonprofit school. "My role was to teach them prevocational skills in the classroom setting," Mahoney said. She realized the need to problem-solve and develop a strong program to meet her students' wide variety of needs. While considering how to make students feel challenged and successful while learning crucial skills, Mahoney literally thought about what they

would be doing and looked at the possibilities—offices, grocery stores, farms, retail stores.

"I started to see a pattern that then transformed into the "I Can Work!" modules: clerical, retail, food service and grocery. Creating a range of modules allowed me to focus on each vocational area one at a time and determine which jobs fell under each category," Mahoney said. "I knew that introducing and practicing a range of problem-solving occasions would highly benefit a number of students and

enable each one to perform confidently in these situations." Within two years, Mahoney was seeing progress. By 2006-07, she was serving working as an educator for students with autism in grades kindergarten through five and implemented "I Can Work!"

The program has a prevocational focus in all five modules with an initial emphasis on giving students a foundation on which to build their vocational progress. Mahoney hopes to implement the program at Rogers Park next fall.

DHS eliminates final and mid-term exams

Last year Danbury High School administered more than 34,000 mid-terms and finals and used more than 200,000 sheets of papers. Hundreds of hours are spent by faculty creating, revising and copying exams, but students' performances are not assessed or reviewed; instead, students are given their number grade with no opportunity for review. On May 14, the Board of Education, at the request of the high school administrators, voted to eliminate the current structure of mid-terms and finals. DHS principal Gary Bocaccio stated that the

reality is that the school can do a better job preparing students for college through other means of assessing progress, such as presentations and research projects. "We give tremendous amounts of tests," Bocaccio said. "They are overtested." In December 2012, Bocaccio charged the school's faculty with reexamining the value of traditional exams. More than 30 faculty participated in the study group and conducted research in five areas, including current practices, analysis of

exam data, research on potential impact on college administration, and alternatives to the exams. After examining the findings, Bocaccio and Dr. Meghan Martins, associate principal of instruction for secondary schools, surveyed faculty and spoke with several stakeholder groups, including The Danbury Enhancement Collaborative (TDEC), New England Association of Schools & Colleges (NEASC), Danbury Board of Education Policy Subcommittee, Parent-Teacher Organization

Continued on page 7

Congratulations to the Class of 2014

462 DHS graduating seniors have confirmed they are heading to college in the fall. Among their selections:

*Boston College
Dartmouth College
Fordham University
Hofstra University
Lehigh University
Northeastern University
Purdue University*

We wish all of our upcoming graduates best of luck in their new endeavors!

2014 summer school programs

This summer, Danbury Public Schools will be offering an increased summer learning program for all grade levels. The high school program will offer credit restoration classes, the Summer Accelerated Learning Program and a variety of exciting extracurricular enrichment course offerings. The STAR Program is a transition

program for Middle School students. STAR offers students an opportunity to learn academic, social and time management skills and practices. Additionally, the early learning program that services kindergarten through sixth-grade students will offer a wide variety of enrichment programs and camps.

Check the district website for program registration information!



DHS students 'Best in State' in software app challenge

By taking an idea and turning it into a software application that helps people who take medication on a regular basis, a team of five Connecticut Pre-Engineering Program (CPEP) students from Danbury High School earned the title of "Best in the State."

Competing in the second annual Verizon Innovative App Challenge, the Danbury team competed against some 1300 other teams on its climb to the top. In early February, the team walked away with prizes, but, team adviser Jack Tracey, a science teacher at the school, said the experience gained from the challenge was the biggest reward. The

application, Mediminder, reminds people to take their medications and when to have prescriptions refilled, and has links to physicians' offices. Tracey, who works with the team along with colleague Linda Kimble, said the team has been working on the application and the challenge since the beginning of the year. The students worked on the challenge in the group's afterschool program and also on their own at home.

The challenge required written essays, a video and a rigorous application. Team members include Tommy George, Anjali Pai, Lexie Pendergast, Steven

Schwab and Sameena Shaffeeullah.

"The challenge required our team to write an essay describing the app concept and create a three-minute video presentation about the idea," said student Tommy George. "The first level of adjudication was at the state level and our submissions were scored by two judges on categories including app concept, application of STEM skills and use of visual elements. The judges' scores were added to form our composite score, which was compared against hundreds of other apps in the state."

Science, Technology, Engineering and Math Summer Experience Program

Monday, July 14 - Friday, August 8
9 a.m. to noon

Danbury schools, Western Connecticut State University, Bethel schools and New Fairfield schools are offering a four-week summer STEM program. Students finishing grades 3-5 for the 2013-14 school year from Bethel, New Fairfield and Danbury are invited to apply.

Activities include field trips and instruction by WCSU professors and Danbury teachers. This program is supported by a CT State Department of Education Inter-district Grant.

The four-week plan includes:

- Introduction to Science, Technology, Engineering and Math
- Learn Video Production
- Production Plant and other in-house field trips
- GPS and On-Star Turtle Tracking at Riverhead Aquarium, Riverhead, NY
- Field trip days may be longer.

Cost: \$350 per child for all four weeks or \$100 per week, breakfast and lunch included. Parent participation in parent events (4) is required.

For more information, please call the Danbury Family Learning Center at 203-797-4734. Registration forms are available at www.danbury.k12.ct.us under the Learning Center Summer Learning.

Calendar

Tuesday, June 17:

Graduation – Danbury High School 5 p.m.

Thursday, June 19

Rogers Park graduation at DHS 2 p.m.; Broadview graduation at DHS 5 p.m.

Friday, June 20:

Last day of school (tentative)

New regulations adopted to reduce allergic reactions

The school district is taking new precautions for the 2014-15 school year to further reduce the risk of students having an allergic reaction to food products. By controlling the exposure to allergens, the district is asking, students, parents administration, faculty and staff to adhere to newly adopted policies recently approved by the Board of Education.

In keeping with Danbury Public Schools Food Allergy Policy, management will continue to focus on prevention, education, and emergency response., Monthly classroom celebrations with outside food have resulted in accidental exposures and near exposures for children with food allergies. As a result, the following are proposed changes to our

Food Allergy Regulations for 2014-15:

- No outside food will be permitted for classroom celebrations.
- Monthly celebrations will continue at the discretion of the teacher or building administrator, and will consist of food alternatives.
- The teacher may choose the daily snack time, in which children bring their own snack from home, for celebration time.
- Goody bags may only contain non-food items.
- Teacher of classes that have curriculum-based food activities, such as world language studies, will be required to send home permission

forms for children who have food allergies.

- Only the parent of a food allergic child will determine what food is safe for their child to eat.

The regulations are on the district website under BOE Policies. You can help staff and the school by taking advantage of opportunities to learn more about food allergies and by helping your child understand the foods they freely enjoy can be dangerous to others. An informational PowerPoint presentation on Food Allergy Awareness is available to view on the district website under News and Events. Please direct questions to Kathy O’Dowd, Health Services Coordinator, at203-830-6597 or odowdk@danbury.k12.ct.us.

Stadley Rough student wins regional spelling bee

Anika Malayappan, a fifth-grader at Stadley Rough Elementary School, was letter perfect as she spelled “sargassum” in the 32nd and final round of the regional spelling bee on March 20 at Western Connecticut State University.

Of the 64 spellers from the region competing for just one chance to earn a spot in the national spelling bee, five were from

Danbury, and all of the Danbury students made it through the first four rounds. But it was Anika who stood the longest in the five-hour challenge. Sponsored by Hearst Media Services, the bee was judged by Helen Bechard of WCSU, freelance editor Donna Christopher and Cathy Westervelt of Hearst Connecticut Media Group. Teacher and spelling

coach Marc Poliquin is thorough in his training from word origin and spelling patterns to derivatives and consonant blends. Anika, who appeared confident and calm, was faced with words such as “rhinoceros,” “masala,” and “amnesia.” She made it to the semi-finals of the Scripps National Spelling Bee in Washington, D.C., at the end of May.

School lunch prices to increase in fall

School lunch prices for 2014-15 will increase by 10 cents. This increase was mandated in order for the school district to maintain federal and state funding for its lunch program.

DHS sports teams 'on fire' all year

"All season long, our motto has been 'we are on fire,'" said Danbury High School cheerleading coach Joann Tatarzycki about her team. The DHS cheerleading team was named this week as the 2014 Connecticut High School Coaches Association Team of the Year.

From cheerleading to basketball, the athletics teams at DHS have had a remarkably strong season taking four state titles and three FCIAC championships so far for the season. The cheerleading team won the State Championship on March 8. That same weekend, the DHS wrestling team finished

second in New England. Earlier in the season, the boys' indoor track team and the girls' basketball team each completed a championship sweep taking title in FCIAC, State LL and State Open championships. The wrestling team earned the FCIAC and State Open championships.

Also earning honor last week was DHS social studies teacher Nick Fraticelli, who was named last week as the 2014 Connecticut Coaches Association Indoor Track Assistant Coach of the Year.

"The CIAC Class LL championship had 20 teams competing for a title, several of whom had

already won their local league championships," Tatarzycki said. "We knew it would be very tough, but we went in confident in our skill level. We compete with a smaller team of 14 on the mat, and we maximize our skill level by showcasing elite stunting skills such as single base stunts. That skill level pushes our scores to a higher range.

"None of this would be possible without the complete support of our athletic director, Chip Salvestrini and our athletic department. We are very fortunate for such support."

Board of Education Meetings

May 28

June 11 and 25

Broadview 'mathlete' qualifies for state competition

After competing in the Connecticut Northwest Regional Mathcounts Competition, the "mathletes" at Broadview Middle School earned a top spot and one student moved on to the state competition to be held on March 8 in Hartford. A member of the Broadview Math League, an afterschool program that focuses on challenging math programs, Broadview seventh-grader Bill Lam competed in the "Countdown Round" in order to qualify at the state level. About nine teams competed at the regional competition with some 90

students, mostly eighth-graders. Bill had the eighth highest score. The regional event took place at Naugatuck Valley Community College in February.

Broadview Mathcounts coach and teacher, Dolores Kelsey, and sixth-grade math teacher Ellen Meyer coordinate the Fairfield County Math League for coaches and teams from other schools. This is an association of middle schools that combine to have student competitions on challenging math problems. After taking a Mathcounts competition

test, the top ten students are chosen to participate in the full-day regional competition at NVCC. Broadview's team score earned it the "Most Improved School" award. Bill has been in the Math League for two years now and has a lot of support both at home and at school with his math and is grateful to his math coaches.

"Without you guys, I wouldn't have the opportunity to compete at Mathcounts and to be challenged as much as I am in school," he said.





Schools exceed targets for ELLs (from page 4)

state goals for 10 consecutive years beginning in the 2003-04 school year.

“Our gains in ‘making progress’ and ‘attaining English language proficiency’ are way above the state objectives,” Augusto Gomes, district administrator of ESL/Bilingual and World Languages. He added

that the program’s success is also attributable to the support surrounding the SIOF teachers; there are four coaches in the school system for grades six through 12. The coaches play an essential role in the process by providing stability and consistency. “We are in the forefront in the sense we have training and job-

embedded support,” Gomes said. “The coaching component is crucial. It fosters fidelity of implementation and provides the encouragement and support needed for sustainability.”

Danbury Board of Education
63 Beaver Brook Road
Danbury, CT 06810

We’re on the Web!

See us at:

www.danbury.k12.ct.us/

No more finals (from page 7)

(PTO), and Western Connecticut State University Student Focus Group.

Martins, who also spoke at the May 14 BOE meeting, said that students having this additional time in the classroom getting feedback and evaluation are students who will ultimately be more successful.

The only potential downside to eliminating exams that was detected would be that students would not have the experience

of sitting for traditional exams. Educational research is clear: the most powerful assessments are smaller, given more frequently, and are used formatively to provide students with detailed feedback so they can reflect and improve. Midterm and final exams are not given back to students because of test security reasons, so they are not a teaching and learning tool. The eight days lost to

testing, and the many more days that are lost to review for midterm and final exams, translates into ten percent of the school year or 14.5 weeks over the four-year period of a student’s high school career. DHS administrators believe that reinstating these exam days as instructional days will have the most positive impact on preparing students for college and the workplace.