

**ELLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS  
DISTRICT INSTRUCTIONAL REPORT  
SEPTEMBER 2015**

**1.0 Status of Initiatives**

September 8 was the first PTO meeting of the school year with an excellent turnout. **Kandace Murdock, Katie Kranz, Belinda McGehee, Aimee Boehm** and **Ines Knospe** were in attendance. Plans for the year were discussed. **Deb Ellis** was voted in as Vice President and **Kellie Buck** was voted as Recording Secretary. We thank them both for their service to our school community.

Curriculum Night at Center School was held on September 9. Parents were given information about the grade level curriculum and instruction, as well as information about the specials programs and intervention services. Teachers reported a strong turnout from our parents. Parents expressed appreciation for this new format and the wealth of information provided. Community programs such as the PTO and Scouting were also present to share information with our families. The staff was treated to a tasty pizza dinner beforehand by our school office.

A morning announcement by fourth graders acknowledged the importance of remembering the events of September 11. Students wore red, white and blue to honor the memory of this day. The PTO coordinated with Life Touch to take school pictures on September 16. We are grateful to **Kellie Buck** and her many volunteers for organizing this event in our gymnasium. On September 17, Center School recognized Constitution and Citizenship Day. The law establishing the holiday was created in 2004. Our focus is on helping children understand that laws and rules are important to help us maintain order and safety, as well as to protect important personal rights.

**Darlene Beaudry** organized a Welcome Back to School Ice Cream Social on September 25 honoring the many new families to our community. Over three hundred people attended. An Open Choice bus was arranged bringing students and their family members from Hartford for this evening social event. Twelve riders took advantage of the opportunity to join in the fun. After having their fill of ice cream, families stayed to chat with their neighbors and play on the playground until dark.

Crystal Lake School started the school year in its beautiful brand new wing of ten state of the art classrooms, a new main office, a nurse's office and intervention classrooms. Soon a brand new library and gym will become available for teaching and learning.

Crystal Lake School teachers participated in Learning Walks on September 28 with Rachel Rothman, the Teachers College grades K-2 staff developer for the district. Two teams of teachers visited classroom to gather data on areas of instructional focus. These walks will result in the creation of school and teacher goals.

The Crystal Lake School Climate Committee met in September to review the school's Safe School Climate Plan. The committee is using the National School Climate Standards as a guide in developing/revising the school plan. **Lisa LaForte, Jessica Giroux, Christine King, Colleen Bava, Martha Terrion** and **Michael Larkin** are serving on the School Climate Committee.

Monday, August 24 was a full day of professional development workshops for all Ellington teachers. One of the workshops required the entire Windermere staff (including paraprofessionals and ancillary staff) to come together as a team and participate in our PBIS school model. This past year, there were positive and helpful additions made to the program. This includes a Critical Thinking Center in every classroom, daily recitation of the new Windermere Pledge and a focus on "talk" from all professionals which is consistent and helps guides students toward the use of "I" statements and proactive rather than reactive rules specific to our school culture. In addition, the Windermere

team discussed new incentives for use in the cafeteria and during recess. In our continuing attempt to create an environment which is inviting and supportive, some teachers helped paint our new Buddy Bench.

Windermere School is proud to boast a Buddy Bench, new to our playground this school year. We hope that students who seek friendship from others or just need a kind word or gesture will utilize the buddy bench and know that the kindness and graciousness of our Windermere students will invariably emerge. Special thanks to our PBIS Team and especially to the **Varga family** and **Mrs. Warriner** for their artistic work in making this happen!

The first day of school is always a joyful and exciting time. Windy the Whale greeted students in front of the building (starting a tradition at Windermere) with high fins and hugs as students beamed with enthusiasm and collective hopes for success in the new year.

The new Windermere Pledge was introduced. All classes will begin their day with the Pledge of Allegiance and a special pledge (holding up three fingers to signify the W in Windermere: Superman was a special guest at the assembly and talked to students about making good decisions and using the special "Making Good Decisions" cards to help them negotiate through daily decisions in life.

During the first weeks of school, the fifth graders participated in team-building games outside on the playground. This first-ever initiative was important to our administrative staff because all Crystal Lake and Center School fourth graders enter Windermere School as fifth graders and experience expected and anticipated trepidation with entering a new school. Thus, bringing students together to get to know one another and begin building peer relationships is vital to the start of any new school year. The teachers, students, and even some parents were thankful and appreciative of this opportunity.

In the first week of school, the K-4 and 5-6 Literacy Teams reviewed data from the spring of 2015. Students who scored below grade level expectation were screened by the literacy staff to determine who would receive intervention services during the month of September. These groups are temporary until the Fall 2015 data is complete in order to form intervention groups. The screening data was shared with classroom teachers so that they could begin planning for their assessments and individual work with students. They supported classroom teachers during the reading assessment window. Teachers were supported by administering and analyzing Fountas & Pinnell running records.

The K-6 Literacy Team met several times this past month to review and revise the school's SRBI process which is to be rolled out to the whole school next month. The new SRBI process ties into our 2015- 2016 school goal which states: *"100% of Windermere School teachers will plan and deliver targeted, small group instruction for students who are below grade level expectation by establishing SMART goals at each SRBI Meeting and/or Common Planning Meeting as evidenced by completed Progress Monitoring Data Collection Forms collected during the week of November 30, February 1, March 14 and May 23."* This goal is intended to help staff to improve the quality of their small group instruction. The Literacy Team met with specialists to brainstorm and plan how this goal will work in their domains.

**Ms. Palasek**, our new Media Specialist, is supporting students and teachers in grades 1-3 as they learn to use their new Google Accounts. Students in grades 4-6 have learned to create and manage bookmarks and to navigate the new library website. She has created a schedule on Google Sheets for students in grades 5-6 to help in the library. These students have assisted 1st and 2nd graders log into their accounts. They are helping 3rd graders create a bookmark for the new library site. Some students have performed read alouds with small groups of kindergarten students. The intermediate students were available to help the younger ones select library books.

**Ms. Dhandapani**, our Technology Specialist, facilitated summer professional development sessions to support teachers and staff. Topics included: Implementing Digital Portfolios, Google Apps for Teacher Productivity, Google Apps for Feedback, Creating a Digital Classroom Space, and Enhancing your Digital Footprint. Approximately thirty teachers and administrators attended one or more of these voluntary sessions. In addition, she facilitated PD sessions on Implementing Digital Portfolios for grades 3-6 and Creating a Digital Classroom Space. Also, Ms. Dhandapani helped chair the first meeting of the 2015-2016 Technology Champions cohort. The focus of group is "Creating a Global Classroom." The first full-day meeting focused on how teachers can globalize their professional lives through Twitter, Blogging, and extending their PLNs. Twenty-one teachers were in attendance. The technology department supported the roll-out of Google Applications for Education accounts and additional Chromebooks for grades 1 and 2 across the district.

**Mrs. Marshall** and **Mrs. Toback-Reveley**, our Windermere School Counselors for the intermediate school, have been extremely busy with assisting our 5/6 program in a myriad of ways. They have delivered introductory lessons to all 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> grade classes beginning the month with weekly conflict resolution lessons in all 5<sup>th</sup> grade classes. At the same time, they kicked-off our cross-age teaching program and established participants for small group counseling as well as weekly counseling support for identified students.

The Intermediate Curriculum Night was held on Thursday, September 3, 2015. Over 200 parents were in attendance, and pleased with the organized and technology-fused presentations by teachers. The level of discourse and teacher-parent interaction was rigorous and positive. Parents were exuberant, supportive, and filled with overwhelming kudos for Windermere School! The Elementary Curriculum Night was held on Thursday, September 10, 2015. This night was also a great success with a large turnout and positive parent feedback on the format. Teachers presented a 30 minute presentation back to back so that parents with students in different grades were able to attend presentations in 2 different classrooms. Lastly, the Windermere Parent Teacher Organization (WPTO) held their first WPTO meeting of the year on September 21 at 6:45 p.m. in the media center.

The Ellington Special Services Department moved from SEMStracker program to IEPDirect program for all IEP and 504 forms. Ellington was one of five districts in the state of Connecticut that were not utilizing IEPDirect. Moving to IEPDirect eases the transition when students move to Ellington from another Connecticut district as the IEP is sent electronically from the sending district.

September was a very busy month at the middle school. After a very successful opening of school, each teacher quickly tackled the task of getting to know their students through a variety of activities including team and classroom building activities, establishing classroom routines and practices, and administering baseline assessments. In language arts, as part of the Teachers College workshop model, students began the work by launching their writer's notebooks and reader's logs. In mathematics, teachers got off to a quick start implementing fall units and administering baseline assessments. In addition, teachers took time to develop Google docs templates where students take mathematics weekly skill quizzes which are automatically scored, allowing immediate feedback to the student. In social studies, students have also used Google docs reading assessments, developed locally by the EMS social studies teachers. Teachers use the feedback from these sophisticated literacy assessments to develop targeted lessons and to provide students with personalized instruction.

In science, seventh graders open the school year with a unit on simple machines. Eighth grade starts the year with an inquiry-based unit focusing on force and motion. During the first full week of school, EMS rolled out a new Google Chromebook program providing unprecedented access to technology for all students. To support this new Chromebook initiative, EPS instructional

technology coaches **Mike Nash** and **Jenna Dhandapani** have been working closely with teachers by providing targeted professional development starting in mid-August. Finally, a series of new advisor/advisee lessons were developed over the summer and will be implemented throughout the fall as Ellington Middle School launches digital portfolios and student led conferences this school year.

Improving high school special education teacher instruction in the area of reading continues to dominate the special services department. All special services staff who work directly with students with reading goals have attended Just Words or Wilson Reading training. Additionally, teachers have been trained in Fountas & Pinnell reading assessments as well as QRI reading assessments through the reading department's **Emily Wry**. Emily has been providing half day workshops in reading strategies and progress monitoring to special education staff at the high school during the month of September. Additionally, **Michael Nash** worked with special education staff to use Google Docs to document student progress and share among other team members.

**Sara Spak**, the district BCBA, has been training individual teachers and paraprofessionals in Applied Behavioral Analysis (ABA) and Discrete Trial Intervals (DTI) to support students in receiving appropriate programming. Sara will be presenting a workshop during the next professional development day for paraprofessionals and teachers who would like to learn more about the program.

**Kristy LaPorte** and **Melissa Haberern** attended the Connecticut State Department of Education Back to School Meeting. New July 1, 2015 mandates were presented with expectations that Districts will implement the new laws. Some include new DCF mandates, Restraint and Seclusion Training and a parent's right to have paraprofessionals at PPT meetings.

**Dr. LaPorte** worked with **Valerie Baigert** and **Sarah Anderson** to schedule PMT training for paraprofessionals, administrators, psychologists and special education staff who require this training. Ms. Baigert and Mrs. Anderson are in-house trainers. They conducted one training session in September. Additionally, one will be held in October and one in November. The purpose of this training is to ensure staff in each building are trained to respond to a crisis which may require the emergency intervention of restraint or seclusion.

**Tracey Smith**, our new transition teacher and her team reopened the school store at Ellington High School. After weeks of cleaning, painting and ordering items for sale, the store had a grand opening with a ribbon cutting ceremony. The store will be staffed with our own Ellington High School Transition Students. This opportunity to support our students in gaining valuable retail experience as they move through the transition program offers many job site specifics. Students will learn about money, purchasing items, and customer service.

UCONN ECE Physics students were challenged to determine the maximum distance field goal an air powered rocket could make. Success in this inquiry-based lesson came through students working in small groups to develop mathematical models of the rocket's motion, knowing the only measurement they could acquire was time. In the end a calculated value of 112 yards yielded an actual tested value of 80 yards (we made an 80 yard field goal). Students attributed the differences in values to air resistance and minor errors in timing. Many smiles were seen on the students' faces as they tested their mental abilities in this real world challenge.

The high school band has had a very active fall season participating in Ellington Firemen's Parade, Four Town Fair Parade, Tolland Tricentennial Parade, and The Big E. The marching band enrollment this year is almost 100 students strong. The high school music department sponsored a fundraising cake booth at the Four Town Fair. Many parents participated by baking cakes for the booth at the Four Town Fair. On September 18 and 19 the OKP presented a senior play, Anne-Arky and the movie premiere of Deadbeats.

On Wednesday, September 16 and Thursday, September 17, the students in American Studies presented the 1904 World's Fair to freshman and junior history classes at EHS. The fair featured exhibits about science/technology, business, entertainment, lifestyles, and politics in the United States as well as monologues of literary and historical characters from the turn of the 20th Century. Allowing students to interact with and learn from each other was rewarding for all involved.

Ellington High School welcomes foreign-exchange student **Pauline Reschke** of Berlin, Germany. Pauline was introduced to the Board of Education at their September meeting where she addressed the board and thanked them for their hospitality.

On September 17, Ellington High School hosted the annual open house. This year there was a record turnout of parent participants who praised the event in the exit surveys. On September 30, the high school also hosted a mini conference night. New this year, students were invited to attend with their parents. Many parents and teachers agreed that inviting students created more meaningful conversations about the students academic achievements to date.

## 2.0 Next Steps

Grade level teachers, special educators, reading and math support teachers at Center School will meet in collaborative teams to review student assessment data, student progress, and plan their first data cycle to support student achievement. Teachers will complete a Tier II plan for students to target learning needs and supports.

Students at Center School will attend a Fire Prevention Assembly with Ellington's fire fighters for Fire Prevention Week. Fourth grade students are creating posters for the annual Fire Prevention Poster Contest in their art classes with **Steve Bernard**.

Fall assessments in reading and mathematics will be administered in September and October for teachers to use to plan for instruction, identify data team areas of focus and create intervention caseloads.

The Crystal Lake School community is looking forward to the next steps in the building project, including the opening of the library/media center and the gym.

The K-4 Literacy Teachers have blocked out a common planning time with grades K, 1, and 3 to work with classroom teachers. Time can be used to help these teachers prepare and plan for the new SRBI plan and whole school goal. The Literacy Teachers will meet with grades 2 and 4 when needed. **Mrs. Lewis** and **Ms. Loubier** pushed-in to classrooms offering whole class instruction to model reading strategies and will be modeling for classroom teachers how to plan and deliver effective small group instruction. The 5-6 literacy teachers are participating in a professional book club with the 5-12 Literacy Team to support coaching in the classrooms and will continue to assess classroom teachers' needs in reading and share with Teachers College and Administration for upcoming Teachers College professional development.

**Mrs. Schumacher** will continue to work with students in Tier II and Tier III groups to provide students with the basic number sense skills they will need to be successful in the regular classroom. She will do progress monitoring to track student growth. Based on the progress monitoring and communication with homeroom teachers, students will either exit math intervention, continue with services, or increase the number of days that they receive intervention.

During October, Ellington Middle School will finalize its school wide goals for the 2015-16 school year. Early analysis of SBAC results has the middle school beginning to focus on improving

students' literacy listening skills. In addition, measurable goals in the area of mathematics will be determined. Throughout the month, teachers will be developing their own individual and collaborative goals that will be aligned with school and district goals.

Supporting the school initiatives, October will host several advisor/advisee lessons that target helping students understand how to create an effective digital portfolio and the role this portfolio will play during December's student led conferences. In addition, the month will also have interventionists, school counselors, and administrators meeting with teams of teachers to identify and monitor those students in need of academic supports. Decisions will be based on early classroom observations and assessments, as well as individual student SBAC results.

October is student council election month at the middle school. Due to very high student interest in this student leadership opportunity, the EMS student council held a September primary. Top vote recipients are now scheduled in early October to present their leadership ideas at the annual student council election assembly. For many at the middle school, these thoughtful and persuasive election speeches are a highlight of the school year. Finally, the month of October will finish with the first ever student "activity night" where 350+ students will have a chance to actively participate in a wide range of fun activities including laser tag, sporting events, board games, watching a feature film, and eating plenty of pizza. This event is sponsored by the EMS Student Council and coordinated by EMS faculty and students.

### 3.0 Recognitions

**Becky Wentworth** presented certificates to students who had read over the summer for the Governor's Summer Reading Challenge. Students independently practice the reading skills and strategies they have learned throughout the school year in order to help them be better prepared for that first day of school in the fall.

The Support Room Intervention Team including **Valerie Baigert, Kim Skewes, Sandy Scully, Belinda McGehee, Audrey Quimby,** and **Trudie Luck Roberts** met with **Brian Evarts** and **Melissa Haberern** in order to review and plan for the structures for Center School's Student Support Room Intervention. Reading Support Teachers **Deb Hillemeir, Cristine Divenere, Allison Morris** and **Sheila Byrne** met with **Belinda McGehee, Sandy Scully** and the principal to review results of classroom Fountas & Pinnell assessments to form flexible groups for instruction based upon the results.

**Trudie Luck Roberts** presented the first of four parent Love and Logic evenings. **Diane Lasher-Penti** arranged for the babysitting for families who attend the series.

**Kara Modzelewski, Taylor Parker, Belinda McGehee** and **Katie Kranz** were introduced to the Board of Education at the Meet and Greet on September 25.

Crystal Lake School celebrated its summer readers with a Summer Reading Celebration in September. The following students participated in the Governor's Summer Reading Challenge: **Caitlin Danforth, Timothy Mutua, Lukas Tyropolis, Cole Winslow, Matthew Emery, Owen Lally, Kaylee Simmons, Meghan Yarnot, Ryan Crowley, Grant Domaingue, Sarah Lund, Karla Greenwood, Justin LaFleche, Zoey Madore, Rachel Milheiro, Kevin Pelletier, Kaitlyn Powers, Tyler Shaw, Andrew Boan, Evan Goric, Joanna Mutua, Ashton Walder, Kenzie Wiegand, Noah Boyce, Dylan Brown, Brody Sebben, Alice Doughty, Andrew Danforth, Emily Goodin, Connor Hildebrand, Abby Lund, Emily Mayne, Alexandra Emery, Brayden Sebben, Anna Tevelde, Rachel Tucker, Lola Vallez, Tyler Smith, Julia Yarnot, Christopher Boan, Camden Domaingue, Julia Goric, Katie Hurlburt, Juliana LaFleche, and Kayleigh Wiegand.**

**Karen Penda** attended a five day Responsive Classroom training this summer, the Responsive Classroom Advanced Course for teachers experienced in the core components of the Responsive Classroom approach but want to study the components more deeply.

**Lisa LaForte** attended a five day institute on the Teaching of Writing at Teachers College in New York City this summer.

The Crystal Lake School community inaugurated the brand new building with a Ribbon Cutting Ceremony/Meet and Greet on August 25. Superintendent **Dr. Scott Nicol** and Board of Education Chair **Mr. Dan Keune** joined **Mr. Larkin** in welcoming families to the new addition, a culmination of many years of planning, support, and advocacy by a number of individuals as well as the larger Ellington community. Stripes, the Crystal Lake School tiger mascot was on hand to cut the ribbon!

The first Crystal Lake School PTO meeting was held on September 8. PTO President Jennifer Lund welcomed all the families and reviewed the PTOs plans for the year. **Jennifer Lund, Beth Spanswick, Kris Picard-Wambolt, Cecelia Gerber, Robin Boyce, Jasmine Flores, Rachel Moser, Joann Scott, Christina Emery, Erica Lombardi** and **Michael Larkin** all attended the September meeting.

We continue to recognize and thank staff members for their relentless and consistent assistance to students, staff, and parents at Windermere with the *Prize Para Award*. For the month of September, Windermere administrators recognized a paraprofessional in the building who has been very important in carrying the load of work in our PAL program. We are indebted to the work of **Mr. Douglas**. He was awarded a certificate and lapel pin as a way to say "Thank you, for all you do!" Our aides, paraprofessionals, and tutors are vital to the success which epitomizes Windermere School!

In addition, we have added our lunch aides to the list of those we will recognize on a monthly basis. It is important for our students (and staff) to understand the important role these individuals play in the lives of our students - as any adults do - as models for our children and guiding them through lunch and recess on a daily basis. **Ms. Maslak** was awarded our first-ever *Amazing Aide Award* during a lunch session in front of our students and awarded a certificate and *Whale Done* pin for her support of our PBIS initiatives and efforts to help make lunchtime and playtime a pleasant experience for all.

The *Tireless Teacher Awards* for the month of September 2015 were awarded to **Mrs. Ducharme** and **Mrs. Schumacher**. Both work tirelessly with our staff in numerous ways at Windermere School. Mrs. Schumacher has contributed to the positive spirit in the building as well as providing academic ideas to her colleagues in the elementary wing. She devoted summer time to decorating hallway bulletin boards, organizing school supplies, and providing input to the school's master schedule. Likewise, Mrs. Ducharme continues to shine as a Windermere School leader in her role as Reading Specialist. Her work with students and staff draws high praise from many. Especially laudable was the concentrated, important, and vital work impacting and modifying our SRBI program at Windermere School. She encouraged teachers to pilot the use of new, comprehensive, and user-friendly forms last year and paved the way for a more streamline and data-driven process for our building.

**Ms. Palasek** has made a commendable effort to support technology initiatives at Windermere School. It is clear that collaboration with teachers and Instructional Technology Specialists is a priority for her as the Library Media Specialist. During library time, students are engaged in book selection and learning new technology skills. Chromebooks are being utilized for instructional purposes regularly.

**Mrs. Garrow** is off and running with technology this year! She has created a classroom website to share important classroom information with parents and a blog to journal classroom happenings (complete with photos). She is also utilizing Google Classroom as a digital classroom space. Here students are utilizing Google Docs for free writing, learning keyboarding skills along the way.

Joyce Agnew mentored positive leaders **Ainsley Armstrong, Aiden Caron, Audrey Davis, Christopher Hoover, Jack McGillis, Jimmy Maznicki, Amanda McTighe, Ethan Moser, Olivia Santini, Kavya Sajeew** and **Justin Swicklas** to act as guides and greeters at our annual Open House on Tuesday, September 8.

On Monday, September 2 our 7<sup>th</sup> grade social studies teachers **Rachel Dio-Rand** and **Scott Raiola** attended a Teachers College conference at New York University. The conference, titled 'Raise the Power of Narrative: A study of Perspective, Craft, and Convention and Learning Empathy', was presented by Mary Ehrenworth. In this seminar the instructor showed how to incorporate narrative style writing into the social studies classrooms.

**Jennifer Balnis**, 8<sup>th</sup> grade science teacher, and **Buffey Harris-Fogarty**, World Language teacher, attended TEAM training. This training educates teachers on how to host student teachers, or to become a beginning teacher mentor, by coaching and assisting using the TEAM reflection process.

**Sherryl King**, 8<sup>th</sup> grade math teacher, has been given the Linking Research and Practice Outstanding Publication Award from the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. She received this award for her co-authored article "Moving Students to "the Why", which was published in the April 2015 issue of *Mathematics Teaching in the Middle School*. Sherryl will be honored at the NCTM Research Conference in San Francisco, CA in April, 2016.

### **Student Accomplishments**

The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) announced that **Kyle Fitzgerald** is one of approximately 16,000 Semifinalists in the 61st annual National Merit Scholarship Program. **Nicholas Bennett** and **Daniel Joy** have been named **Commended Students** in the **2016 National Merit Scholarship Program**. A Letter of Commendation from the school and National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), which conducts the program, will be presented by the principal to these scholastically-talented seniors.

EHS Senior **Sapna Raghavan** is Miss Connecticut's Outstanding Teen. The pageant was held the summer at Mohegan Sun on June 27. Sapna's platform was embracing diversity through cultural awareness and she stated that she takes inspiration from author, Maya Angelou. Sapna has stated that she has had to overcome much adversity and learn to face negativity. Her goal is to broaden America's cultural outlook by celebrating and embracing all various cultures in our great nation. Her new title will certainly help her spread that message.

**Mrs. Ciarci**, Art Teacher at Ellington High School, has revived the mural club. Student members have spoken with faculty members to gather ideas to develop appropriate murals that will be reflective of the course content areas where the murals will be created.