

**ELLINGTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS
DISTRICT AREAS OF FOCUS
MONTHLY REPORT
December 2016**

Mastery Based Learning

Center and Crystal Lake School students in grades 3, 4 and 5 shared information about their academic progress with family members during the December Parent Report Card Conferences. Taking the lead role during part or all of the conference, students reported on progress toward mastery targets supported with student-selected evidence of learning based on their goal setting and reflection.

Crystal Lake School teachers continued to use the data team process in December to assess students' levels of mastery on the following topics: phonemic awareness, writing conventions, mathematical computation strategies, and computing with fractions.

Teachers who read, discuss, and implement current educational research are more engaged and ready to take on the challenges of the 21st Century classroom. For these reasons, EHS faculty members are currently reading four different books that support the district's area of focus; Mastery-Based Learning, Equitable Opportunities, Innovative Practices, and Personalized Learning. The EHS book club provides the staff with time to engage in meaningful discussions about how their readings impact their work in the classroom. The teachers are actively reading and discussing, analyzing personal preferences, reflecting on classroom practices, and modifying classroom practices on the basis of what is learned through book sharing. Another outcome is that teachers are acquiring new ways to develop the planning and delivery of instruction including such approaches as workshops, literature circles, promotion of higher-order thinking skills, critical-reading skills, and developing a positive student attitude toward learning. Through the book discussions teachers can better understand students' needs as learners by offering choice and voice in the learning process.

Students in Mrs. McGinn's Economics classes completed their "Shark Tank Challenge" performance-based assessment after completing a unit on Macroeconomic Principles & Practices. Students chose to begin a Sole Proprietorship or Partnership, create a product to bring to market, and draft a formal business plan that was then pitched to a panel of investing "Sharks", which included teachers and staff from various departments and AP Microeconomic seniors. Students demonstrated their knowledge of American Capitalism, Business Organizations, Business Growth & Expansion, and Demand and Supply through these projects.

EHS World Languages teachers have been trying one or more of the following: choice boards, different grouping strategies (such as by interest), differentiation by skill (reading, writing, speaking, listening), work on integrating more culture/real world examples/activities, facilitating achievement of students' goals for themselves in the target language, and student self-assessment and reflection on their own mastery of standards and skills.

Equitable Opportunities

Windermere conducted our second round of SRBI meetings in November and December and interventionists worked with classroom teachers and support staff to create SMART goals for each

student based on instructional needs. Interventionists will continue to service Tier 2 and 3 students in the classroom and in alternate settings, and use progress monitoring to track student data. In addition, the first round of teachers participated in Learning Walks. Some teachers hosted groups, and other teachers walked, and debriefed together, looking through the district lenses. Mrs. Powell and Mrs. Loubier facilitated this process, and gathered information from the debriefing with teachers. This information will be used to determine next steps in the Learning Walks process. This information will also be used by staff to generate questions as to how to improve the school.

The EHS administration is in the planning process to implement a, “Truth About Hate” program in conjunction with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL). The ADL describes this programs as:

Hate happens here in Connecticut and the seeds of hate can be found in every high school. Stereotyping, jokes, name-calling, and rumors are all seeds that can blossom into prejudice, discrimination and hate. The key to combating hate is to address these issues before they grow into major problems. This program is designed to help students understand how these issues affect their daily lives and the role they can play in challenging prejudice and hate.

This program will be presented to all freshmen. Part of the preparation includes training high school juniors and staff on February 21, 2017. The high school is looking forward to presenting this awarding program on March 2nd, 2017!

Innovative Practices

EMS teachers Mary Walsh, Jenn Reynolds, Danielle Leone, Nicole Bolduc, Technology Specialist Mike Nash, and Principal David Pearson have had their proposal accepted to present at the upcoming New England Secondary School Consortium (NESSC) Conference at the Hartford Convention Center. This large regional conferences is attended by 7-12 educators from all states in New England, including school districts affiliated with the League of Innovative Schools.

The presentation title is: When Developing a Vibrant Community of Learners, Which Comes First: Students or Teachers? Can there be a vibrant culture of learning and risk taking for students in schools without first establishing one for the adults who teach them? In this session, Ellington Middle School will share its approach to developing such a vibrant professional learning culture using structures like teacher-led book clubs, schoolwide learning walks, and professional inquiry groups focused on personalized learning. Participants will discover how Ellington Middle School used the Great Schools Partnership’s Proficiency-Based Learning Self-Assessment as a framework for individual and schoolwide reflection and goal-setting. This session will also zero in on the NESSC’s Global Best Practices Indicator 1.8: Learning Communities.

Mrs. Parker has established an intervention block program called *20 Time*. She proclaims that students should always look to be helpful to others, their community, and their world at least 20% of the time. Students focus on projects which are beneficial to our school, Ellington, and other people, in general. One project, for example, focuses on raising the awareness of all animals, worldwide – endangered or otherwise. They are involved in researching the WWF (World Wildlife Federation) in an effort to learn about animal conservation and help raise monies to assist this worthy organization.

Throughout Center and Crystal Lake Schools, students in all grades engaged in an Hour of Code in the media center and classrooms. The 'Hour of Code for Every Student' is a global effort designed to show that students from Kindergarten on up, and their teachers, can learn the basics of coding and computer science.

EHS hosted its first Hour of Code Monday, December 5 with 22 students that explored a variety of innovative practices through computer science. *"The Hour of Code started as a one-hour introduction to computer science, designed to demystify "code", to show that anybody can learn the basics, and to broaden participation in the field of computer science. It has since become a worldwide effort to celebrate computer science, starting with 1-hour coding activities but expanding to all sorts of community efforts,"* <https://hourofcode.com>. At EHS students were directed to <https://code.org/learn> to find ideas to help them get started and join the annual global event. Some students programmed robots, printed in Python, and decoded encrypted songs, while others played Pong, battled enemies, and designed racing code to beat the bot car.

Students left saying, *"It was fun to learn about code,"* and, *"It was a great experience that I would definitely try again."* Students were also encouraged to upload their progress to their EHS Portfolios and to check out the EHS Program of Studies courses such as AP Computer Science Principles, Computer Programming & Mobile App Development, Robotics, CAD and 3D Modeling, Music Production or Graphic Design.

Students in the EHS AP Spanish class participated in two different Skype interviews with native Spanish speakers. Students prepared questions based on an assigned topic they were studying. Student response from this activity was very positive. They enjoyed using their language skills in a real exchange with a native Spanish speaker, and requested that we do this more often.

Additionally, students in the AP Spanish class researched issues regarding stem cell research to complete our unit on science and technology and then created a class debate about the subject in Spanish. The debate was "heated" but enjoyable, and teachers overheard students continuing the debate in the hallway as they walked together to their next class.

Personalized Learning

In Mr. Scavotto's EHS English class students are working on a completely independently led project. Students brainstorm contemporary issues that they are interested in, select one, research both fictional sources and non-fictional sources, and then come up with a unique way to present their findings. Mrs. Wry, Reading Specialist, was able to participate in Mr. Scavotto's classes and support students with this project.

High School PSAT scores were reviewed and returned to all freshmen during English classes. Sophomore students met with their individual school counselor in small groups to review and receive their PSAT scores. Practice opportunities were discussed through Khan Academy. Information was given to students regarding EHS Achieves.

In Mrs. Blalock's F block Geometry class students self-direct how they are learning the geometry standards at their own pace and with their own learning preference. Some students have chosen teacher-directed instruction and assessment, some have utilized web-tutorials and videos, some students curated resources, and others have created tutorials and assessments to demonstrate their learning. Collectively, the class is working to create a geometry website full of tutorials either recorded in class, found on the web, or student generated.

At EHS, Mr. Grzyb and Ms Smolnik have been collaborating to create differentiated, customized lessons for Mr. Grzyb's classes in various areas of information literacy. These lessons cover such topics as Plagiarism, MLA 8 (the latest version of MLA) and Copyright. Web tutorials in the Google Classroom are posted so students can review what is being covered and learn at their own pace.

In Mr. DeCormier's ECE Physics Classes students work at their own pace using access to teacher-written, full explanations and mathematical solutions to complex physics exercises. Students chose which problems to solve and at what pace to work with an end goal in mind of mastering the curriculum laid out in learning expectations presented to each student. Mr. DeCormier acts as a guide and mentor promoting students to learn from each other in groups, research questions on the internet and answer individual questions as well as those posed by the class as a whole. All reference materials (written full explanations and mathematical solutions) are available on the Google Classroom for each student 24/7.

Students in Honors and AP Civics were able to choose a former United States President to research. Students will gather biographical information but focus their research on key events and decisions made during their presidency. Students will create a presentation with their chosen digital platform. Students will also complete a 2-3 page paper that focuses on students evaluating their chosen president.

Students in Computer Applications classes have the opportunity to choose their own long-term project to demonstrate their learning. They work on these projects in class at their own pace, and they have the ability to redo parts of the project to work towards proficiency or better.