



# Curriculum & Instruction

# Greetings from the Curriculum Department

## Building STEAM for 2016

Last year, you may have heard of the push to develop more integrated programs in the district. Programs that reach across content areas and combine them, with purpose, create a richer experience for interested students. In the Spring of 2015, the Curriculum Department presented its vision for a program that connected Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics or STEAM. This year we are hard at work making that vision a reality for the 2016 school year.

This year's 8th grade students, the graduating class of 2020, will be the first group of students with the opportunity to experience a new program of study at Ridge High School that ties together multiple content areas into one coherent academy. Currently, an application process is being developed and will be announced early this winter. This will provide our 8th graders the ability to apply and be interviewed for participation in the program at Ridge High School. With a focus on attracting the most motivated and passionate students, we hope the first cohort is the cornerstone of what will eventually be a program recognized around the state.

While the most drastic changes will occur with the high school program, William Annin Middle School will continue to grow its already strong STEAM offerings and look to have them culminate in a unique 8th grade experience for interested students. At the elementary schools, we are about to embark on a renovation of our science curriculum that brings us forward with the Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS). With so much happening, I suspect this newsletter will have STEAM as a recurring topic throughout the year.

In this newsletter you will find articles on a wide variety of topics that I hope will engage and inform you. From ways to keep science in focus throughout the holidays to the cultural inclusiveness we hope to achieve in the district, I think this newsletter has something for everyone. We will once again be conducting Curriculum Forums with the help of our district PTO's, so be on the lookout for information regarding dates and topics in the Friday Folder.

If you have read this far, I thank you for your interest and ask you for your help in keeping the school to home connection strong and encouraging your children to be the best students they can be.

Dr. Brian Heineman, Director of Curriculum and Instruction

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# World Languages

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## Our International Community

The Bernards Township Public School System is home to a wealth of cultures and languages that enrich our daily lives. Our community is composed of families who come from every continent, share different perspectives and teach us new things each day. It is always so interesting to learn about the school systems of the world through our conversations with the students and their families. Many of our international students arrive fluent in English with several years of English instruction beginning in early elementary school. Others participate in our ELL (English Language Learning) program that provides daily instruction by a certified ESL specialist. Together, the families and all district staff collaborate to help the students as they assimilate to our language and lifestyle.

Thanks to the support of NCLB Federal grant funding, our district hosts an annual International Welcome Night in early September for families who are new to both the country and the community. With support from the ELL teaching staff, as well as the World Language Department, families gather together in the William Annin Media Center to learn about the community and connect with families just like them. This year, the event hosted representatives from the Basking Ridge Public Library, the Literacy Volunteers of Somerset County, the local PNC Bank, local Dentist Dr. Micale and the Somerset County YMCA, who distributed information and small welcome gifts. In addition, all building PTOs generously donated t-shirts, magnets and more to raffle off to students who attended. While the parents conversed and got to know each other by participating in interview activities, the students were entertained by several RHS world language students who enjoyed conversing in different languages. The night was a great success and sure to continue for years to come.

In addition to our English Language Learning activities, the World Language Department provides multiple opportunities to connect our students with the cultures of the world. To highlight just a few: we invite Salsa or Flamenco Instructors into our RHS Spanish Elective classes, host a Spanish Tapas Feast for WAMS 7th graders, host a free pasta night for the community, visit plays and museums in New York, travel to Quebec City with RHS French students, and this year we had the pleasure of hosting 30 Italian High School Students for an 11 day trip to our town. We are so fortunate to live in an area of that celebrates diversity and the cultures of the world. Our program strives to teach students cultural competency and understanding through language and literacy.

Katherine Stotler, Supervisor, World Languages



# English Language Arts

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“We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit.”  
- Aristotle

In the Department of Curriculum and Instruction, we believe in a process of continuous improvement. We have developed the habit of asking how we can make the curriculum better. How can we build upon our strengths and address our weaknesses? How can we improve upon the curriculum and instruction to engage students and give them ample opportunity to develop their skillset?

Over the summer the English Language Arts Department has been hard at work revising curricula with these questions in mind. At both the elementary and secondary levels, our goal is to craft an engaging and educational experience for your children that will develop their abilities as readers, writers and critical thinkers.

In grade one, a committee of reading specialists, kindergarten, first and second grade teachers reviewed the end-of-year expectations for students and worked towards consolidating and condensing those standards into a more manageable reporting framework.

In grades three through five, teachers from every elementary building met to review and revise the district writing sample prompts and scoring rubrics. We sought to craft prompts that would hook students and allow them to provide a writing sample that displays their abilities as writers. Last year, we used the PARCC writing rubrics to score student writing samples. In response to teacher feedback, we have revised the writing sample scoring instrument, building upon the PARCC rubrics and weaving in language from several literacy luminaries so that teachers are better able to use these rubrics to craft future lessons based upon the observed needs of individual writers in their classroom.

In grade six, we thought earnestly about the transition from elementary to middle school and how we can engage students in English language arts from the outset. Our solution was to begin the year with the national bestseller *Wonder*. This text has many connections to the Viking Values program and does much to prompt empathy. The teachers are using this text to teach specific close-reading strategies that students can transfer to any text they read. So far the results have been very positive.

At the high school, teachers focused on the college prep course in twelfth grade. Again, the goal was to reflect on student needs throughout the year and respond. In 12th grade English, this meant reorganizing the unit sequence and texts to focus on writing style, including creative non-fiction, argumentation, research-based writing and rhetorical analysis. This allowed us the opportunity to incorporate texts from other ELA courses, including AP Literature and Honors World Literature. We have also revised the culminating writing activity for the course to allow students to research and write upon a topic of their choosing that relates to their interests and future studies.

Another way that we engage in a cycle of continuous improvement is to perform periodic program evaluations. This summer, high school teachers worked to research comparable districts, review available test data, and to generate surveys. In the coming months, look for a parent survey in the Ridge Friday folder. This will help us gauge reading and writing habits in our community as we work towards strengthening our community of readers and writers.

## Reading habits at home

Last year I wrote to you about the power of fostering a culture of learning in the home. With all of the after-school activities our children are involved with, it can often be difficult to find a regular time to focus on reading outside of school. And yet, if we don't, our children's achievement will be impacted.

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## English Language Arts (cont'd)

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Numerous studies have demonstrated the benefit of reading outside the classroom, even for just ten minutes a day. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends reading aloud to children daily. Oxford University Press writes that “the biggest single indicator of whether a child is going to thrive at school and in work is whether or not they read for pleasure. Young people who read outside of class are 13 times more likely to read above the expected level for their age.”

As we enter into a new school year, I encourage you to set a culture of reading in your home. Below are some tips and resources to help:

1. Set aside time every day for reading – even ten minutes a day can have a significant impact.
  2. Read aloud to your children, and, when they can read, ask them to read aloud to you, or encourage independent reading.
  3. Discuss with your children the different materials that you are reading and why, the books you are reading to them, and the books that they are reading on their own.
- Talk with your children about their interests, plan trips to the library, and find books that will support and extend what interests your children most.

David Hunscher, Supervisor, English Language Arts



# Science and Technology

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## The Upcoming Holidays offer Many Opportunities for Discussing Science!

One of the most effective ways to reinforce your child's academic growth is to discuss what they are learning in school and to point out examples in the real world. The upcoming holiday season provides rich opportunity for discussing real world science. For example, with Halloween nearly upon us many families engage in the tradition of carving pumpkins into Jack o' Lanterns. As you are elbow-deep in orange goo it would be a good time to pose the question, "Do you think a pumpkin is a type of vegetable or a fruit?" Many children do not think of fruits or vegetables in botanical terms and might be quick to answer, "Vegetable." Botanists and informed parents know that the term 'fruit' refers to fertilized reproductive parts of a plant that contain seeds for the purposes of dispersing them while the term 'vegetable' usually refers to the other edible parts of a plant, such as the leaves, stems, or roots. The more important follow-up questions would be: "How do you know?" "Why?" and "What evidence makes you think that?" These are great questions to use to promote scientific thinking with any age child!

After Halloween, the Thanksgiving season offers much inspiration for discussing science with your child. Of course the centerpiece of the holiday for many families is the Thanksgiving turkey. Some turkey-related science topics you may want to discuss with your child include:

Domestic vs. Wild Turkeys. Which do we use for our Thanksgiving feast? How are domestic animals different than their wild counterparts?



The wild turkey is a conservation success story in the United States. In the 1930's turkey populations were estimated to be at an all-time low of approximately 30,000 animals due to over hunting and habitat loss. Successful conservation and wildlife management efforts have grown the population to an estimated 7,000,000 animals today!

How does that little white pop-up meat thermometer in the turkey work? Inside the thermometer is a glob of solder that melts when the internal temperature of the turkey reaches a safe 185° F releasing the pop-up indicator!

For families celebrating Christmas, the sometimes frustrating tradition of putting up holiday lights might inspire rich science discussion. Why do some strands of lights keep working when a bulb goes out while, in other cases, the entire strand stops working? A discussion of the advantages and disadvantages of series vs. parallel circuits might be 'enlightening' for both parent and child! As you are warming up with a cup of hot cocoa afterwards consider the following topic for discussion: North American Caribou and Eurasian Reindeer – different, geographically isolated populations of the same species or distinctly different? Additionally, consider engaging your child in the decision-making process for selecting the holiday tree. Which would be environmentally more responsible to choose – a real tree grown by a local farmer or an artificial tree? This adds new complexity to the old 'Paper vs. Plastic' conversation. And as always, remember to ask, "Why?...How do you know? ...What evidence makes you think that?"

Matthew Hall, Supervisor, Science and Technology

# Fine and Practical Arts

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## The State of the Arts in New Jersey's Public-School Classrooms Today

This past September, I had the privilege of serving as a member of a planning committee to present the *2015 Arts Ed Summit*.

The first such summit in a decade, the meeting was held in Monroe Township, and featured a keynote talk from former Gov. Thomas Kean Sr., who in the late 1980s helped promote arts education as a central part of the curriculum and yesterday issued a call for a new campaign in support of arts in the schools.

Following Former Gov. Kean's impassioned speech, a panel discussion of top stakeholders and arts advocates spoke of the importance of Arts Education and educating the "whole child." Some of the organizations included were the NJ Association of School Administrators, the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation, the NJ State Council on the Arts, NJ State Department of Education. Senator Thomas H. Kean, Jr., of the 21<sup>st</sup> District also attended.

While there was some disagreement over the value of the new testing, all agreed that both schools and the state need to make sure arts-education mandates are being met.

Mark Biedron, president of the State Board of Education, said a serious review currently underway will reinforce such priorities. "This is really a tipping point right now in the area of education, and where we are with our curriculum and where we might be going in the next 10 or 15 years," Biedron said.

In addition to the panel discussions, participants were involved in sessions that focused on potential solutions to struggles still seen across many school in New Jersey. Susan Bivona (Mount Prospect Elementary School Visual Arts Educator) and Fiona Weiss (William Annin Middle School Visual Arts Educator) took part in these sessions and were able to share with their state colleagues the many wonderful happenings in our district.

As Supervisor of Visual & Performing Arts and 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills, I am proud of the accomplishment of our students and the guidance they receive from an outstanding and dedicated arts staff. From Music and Visual Art, to Dance and Theatre, the Arts are alive and *very* well in Bernards Township. Students receive music and visual arts instruction beginning in kindergarten and have a variety of offerings as they move to the secondary levels. Dance and Theatre Arts are elective course offerings at Ridge High School, along with ensemble experiences in band, choral music and orchestra at both Ridge and William Annin Middle School. Our ensembles receive numerous accolades throughout the school year and our students are well-represented at local, regional and state competitions.

Creativity is at the art of a well-rounded Arts Education and there is no better place to create than the Visual Arts classroom. Ceramics, graphic arts, painting and drawing are taken to the next level in each of our schools. Students showcase their talents in and outside of our schools with exhibits and art shows. Our students have received numerous accolades each year, some with financial and scholarship rewards. We are fortunate to have practicing artists teaching our students. They not only provide them with the guidance in the classroom, but enrich their education with real-world opportunities.

Thank you for supporting Arts Education our district and I look forward to seeing you at a concert or an art show this school year!



Michael Fackelman, Supervisor, *Visual & Performing Arts, 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning Skills*



# Counseling Department

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From the Counseling Department...

You may remember that, during the summer of 2014, a formal curriculum was established for the Ridge High School Counseling Department. This summer, we did the same for the elementary grades. Each module is linked to the [American School Counselor Association \(ASCA\)'s National Standards for Students](#), as well as the [New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards](#) for [Career Education and Consumer, Family and Life Skills](#). They are unified among our four elementary schools.

- [Guidance Kindergarten](#)
- [Guidance Grade 1](#)
- [Guidance Grade 2](#)
- [Guidance Grade 3](#)
- [Guidance Grade 4](#)
- [Guidance Grade 5](#)

This summer, curriculum was revised for the Ridge High School Motivating Adolescent Performance (MAP) Program, as well. Also tied to the ASCA Counseling Standards, MAP offers support in four broad categories: Social/Behavioral, Academic, Self-Concept, and Attitude Toward Learning. The curriculum for WAMS MAP was redesigned and given a new title to distinguish it from MAP testing and the 7th grade “maps” project. Now called *Viking Academy*, and the course focuses on developing student behaviors and skills necessary to be successful in middle school: Readiness, Organization, School Routine, Responsibility, Independence and Problem Solving. It is supported by ASCA Counseling Standards.

- [MAP \(Motivating Adolescent Performance\)](#) - Ridge
- [Viking Academy](#) - WAMS

Jillian Shadis, Supervisor of School Counseling

## Social Studies

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“The Bernards Township Social Studies program is committed to guiding students in the acquisition of *knowledge, skills and habits of mind* that will enable the students to interpret and analyze the society in which they live and will inspire in students a desire to become thoughtful, reasoned and **active participants** in their communities.” (*Bernards Township Social Studies Program Philosophy*)

Unfortunately, voter participation continues to decrease throughout the United States. Overall voter turnout for eligible voters decreased from 62.3% in 2008 to 57.5% in the 2012 presidential election. A more striking statistic is that 93 million eligible citizens did not vote in that election. New Jersey is not immune to this trend of increased voter apathy, with our voter participation decreasing from 66% in 2008 to 55% in 2012. ([www.bipartisanpolicy.org](http://www.bipartisanpolicy.org)).

As one of the untested subjects, social studies education has struggled to maintain its prominence in public education nationwide. But in Bernards Township it remains a priority, and our curriculum addresses the election process throughout the program. In our elementary schools, many of our students participate in mock elections on issues that directly impact their lives including the selection of a school mascot, the use of school uniforms and student council elections. Students in the upper elementary grades learn about important social studies topics such as women’s suffrage and the electoral college.

At the secondary level, students spend a great deal of time studying the electoral process. In the 6<sup>th</sup> grade, students study low voter turnout and the importance of voting, an electoral college simulation to discuss voting patterns and swing states, and a lesson on the path to the presidency where they discuss the qualities they would look for in a presidential candidate.

At the high school level, there are a number of curricular topics and activities that focus on voting. Students in Honors Government and Economics engage in a simulation of the election process starting with a presidential convention simulation and ending with a mock election of the students’ nominated candidates. Students in that course also engage in a nearly year-long study of the public policy process. The students select a public policy issue they are concerned about, research it and propose solutions to the problem after investigating all of the economic, legal and social issues related to the issue. The students come away from the experience with a deep understanding of the complexity of solving public policy problems and an awareness of the importance of being involved as an active citizen at all levels of government. Throughout our program, we strive to equip our students with the ability to think critically about the issues that will impact their futures and the passion to get involved and make a difference! Please be role models to your children and get out and vote!

Kristin Fox, Supervisor, Social Studies