

Around the Courtyard

Williams Middle School
410 Williams St., Longmeadow, MA 01106
December, 2014



*WILLIAMS MIDDLE
SCHOOL
NEWSLETTER*

DECEMBER, 2014

Upcoming School Events

January 1	New Year's Day—No School
January 5	School Resumes
January 12	Gr. 6 Concert—LHS—7:00 p.m.
January 13	Gr. 7 & 8 Concert—LHS—7:00 p.m.
January 19	ML King, Jr. Day—No School
January 22	Parent Conferences—Gr. 6-8 afternoon & evening ½ Day – 11:30 a.m. dismissal
January 23	Grade 6 Parent Conferences - 11:30 a.m. dismissal (Grade 6 only)
January 29	School Improvement Council—4:00 p.m.
February 2	Late Start Day—10:30 a.m. school begins
February 6	LHS Music Presentation—8:30-9:20 a.m.
Feb. 16-20	Winter Break
February 23	8 th Grade to LHS for Scheduling Presentation 9:00—11:00 a.m.
February 25	LHS Counselors visit Gr. 8 Students 8:30 a.m. 8 th Grade Parent Info. Night—LHS – 6:30 p.m.
February 26	School Improvement Council—4:00 p.m.

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FROM THE PRINCIPAL'S DESK

Hello WMS Families,

How quickly the holiday season has arrived this year – time seems to be moving at warp speed these days. I hope this December Newsletter finds you preparing for some relaxing times with family and friends.

I wanted to take some time in this space this month to update you on some of the new initiatives we rolled out this fall. I have already taken some time to share with you my excitement around our English classroom choice reading libraries we added in all three grades. As I have shared during the fall, these libraries continue to excite our students here to engage in reading – especially when they have a voice in what they are reading. Along with these libraries, we have seen some changes with how we are delivering our literacy curriculum. Our teachers have become even more intentional in the way they are teaching students to break down text. From close reading strategies to explicit instruction on annotating text, students are not only reading more but they are also developing skills which allow them to comprehend and analyze what they are reading. While much of this is not altogether new, the intentional focus on explicit reading instruction has been great to observe in our classrooms.

Another change this year has been the addition of a literacy specialist to our staff. Over the past several years, we have had a math interventionist working with students but have never had the equivalent focused on literacy – until this year. With these two parallel positions, we have created math and literacy labs, which allow us to support students in addition to their regular math and ELA classes. We have also used these resources for challenge work for some students. These programs have also allowed us to create a true “tier 2” intervention model for many students who have not had this option in the past. To briefly explain our Response To Intervention (RTI) tiered model – all students receive tier 1 instruction in their regular classrooms. For students who need additional support but who are not on an IEP, they are now able to access support in the math and/or literacy labs as part of our tier 2 model. Students who have been identified for special education typically receive their additional support in a tier 3 setting (a special education classroom). Before this year, students who were not making effective progress in their regular classroom were often referred for special education testing as this was the only way they could potentially access additional services, if they met the special education criteria. With our tier 2 math and literacy lab classrooms, there is now a step in between and, through the first four months of the school year, these lab classrooms have been very successful in meeting student needs. We have developed clear entrance criteria into these programs and continue to work on clear exit criteria as students progress. What is most encouraging is that many students are able to access these programs without having to go through the evaluation process and without the need for an IEP. While we continue to refine these programs, we are very excited to have these resources available for our students. Our hope is that, eventually, we can meet the majority of student needs without involving the special education evaluation process.

I understand that this is somewhat complicated, but I wanted to do my best to explain this model to all of you. We continue to look for ways to support all learners at their individual learning level. I am also hoping to begin to send home additional information and resources on how parents can support their children with their work outside of school – more to come on this....

Wishing you all a very happy and healthy holiday season and a wonderful New Year!

Chris Collins, Principal

Updates

Car Line Update

We have noticed an improvement in the morning car line. When we are able to empty six or seven cars at a time as opposed to one, the line moves much more quickly. Thank you to everyone who is dropping their child as soon as they reach the sidewalk. When you wait in the carline to make sure your child is dropped at the door, it slows the line for everyone. Please continue to drop your child as soon as you reach any part of the sidewalk so we can keep the line moving for everyone.

GRADE 6 NEWS

Math

In December, the 6th graders have been learning about calculating the area of both simple geometric figures as well as more complex composite shapes. In January, they will begin a unit on ratios, rates, and proportions. Students' ability to reason proportionally affects their understanding of fractions and measurement and it will support their understanding of functions and algebra in 7th and 8th grades.

Social Studies

Mesopotamia, the world's first civilization, is the focus of social studies right now. Amazing agricultural technology, architecture, and the development of government, organized religion and social classes all began in the Fertile Crescent approximately 5-6 thousand years ago. After this unit, Ancient Egypt is on the agenda with its great pyramids, amazing treasures, and fascinating beliefs about the afterlife.

Science

We have completed our study of ecosystems and biomes and are forging ahead to chapter three, which is called Living Resources. Students will study environmental issues, such as pollution, forest and fisheries, and biodiversity. To enrich the curriculum, we will continue to use Discovery Education, the online science tech - book.

English

Students have completed their second common writing assessment, a research paragraph on the environmental issues from the novel, Tangerine. We are starting a nonfiction unit, and to reinforce the skills taught, students will apply what they learn to their nonfiction choice book. Weekly MCAS questions continue to be assigned.

GRADE 7 NEWS

Science

We are beginning our work with topographic maps and discussing mass movement of material. This will continue our discussion of erosion, deposition and formation of various landforms.

Math 7.1

Mrs. Bradshaw's accelerated math class is currently working on proportional and nonproportional relationships. The class has solved for unit rates and looked at ratios. We will also be exploring scale and indirect measurements. Soon, we will be moving onto percents, discount and markups and interest. We've been using our new study guide books to introduce new topics. We've found the books a useful warm-up to the lesson.

Math 7.2

Mrs. Bradshaw's and Mrs. Lawson's 7.2 math class has been working on adding, subtracting, and factoring linear expressions. We are now beginning a unit on equations. We'll be solving both one and two step equations as well as equations with variables on both sides. Keeping up with homework and notes will be very important throughout this chapter.

ELA

In ELA, we have been working closely with social studies. Together we have talked about, read about, and written about Africa. After reading [A Long Walk to Water](#) by Linda Sue Park, we considered some of the major problems affecting people on that continent. Students selected one of the many issues affecting people in the countries/regions in that part of the world, conducted research about it, and reported their research by writing expository essays.

Through choice reading, we have explored a variety of genres and expressed our comprehension in a variety of writing formats. We would like to remind students and families that a regular reading habit of at least 30 minutes per night is an important part of our ELA expectations.

Social Studies

In 7th grade social studies, we are finishing up a unit on Africa. Students have explored the physical and cultural geography of many African regions. We have focused on apartheid, wildlife, socioeconomics, and conflict in Sudan, and students completed an essay on a specific problem facing Africa. Next we will examine the Middle East and Asia.

GRADE 8 NEWS

Science

We are wrapping up our work in Chemistry by studying the periodic table. Students will be completing an Element project which is due the middle of December. Our next topic is Geology with Earth's Interior.

Algebra

In trimester I we developed key concepts and skills in modeling with equations and inequalities and in solving them, covering forms of linear equations, interpretations of equations as showing change, and ways to view graphs as something more than just points on a line. In trimester II we'll apply these ideas to model increasingly complex situations, with an emphasis on visual interpretations of the algebra in terms of transformations and families of graphs.

Pre-Algebra

Ms. Lawson's pre-algebra class finished several algebraic chapters on simplifying expressions and solving equations. Next the class will learn about linear functions and systems of equations connected with geometry and some real life applications. Continued homework practice and good note taking will be key in the success of understanding these new concepts.

Mr. Scanlan-Emigh's pre-algebra classes developed key ideas about how quantities start and change over October and November (slope, rate of change, & speed in graphs and linear equations), as well as just solving equations. This is the core of algebra and will continue in trimester II, along with geometry and review of basic skills in fractions, exponents and previous material.

ELA

We have all finished reading Chains and the graphic novel, Frankenstein. Students have also been actively engaged in choice independent reading and written responses to their reading. Through conferencing and discussions, we have had many opportunities to get to know the literacy skills of our students. To continue with a thematic look at science fiction, we are/will be reading an excerpt from Flowers for Algernon, which gives us many opportunities for critical thinking and discussion.

History

In 8th grade social studies, students spent last month learning about the Constitution, learning about the branches of government, the Bill of Rights, and what it means to be an American citizen. We are now back to chronological history, looking at the "Early Republic" period from Washington's presidency to Jacksonian democracy.

Notes From the Nurse

Parents - as you are most likely aware cold and flu season has begun. The best protection we have against contracting germs is to wash our hands frequently. Students who do become ill should not return to school until they have been fever free for 24 hours without the use of Tylenol or Ibuprofen. Consult with your health care provider for their suggestions for avoiding illness.

Absentee/ Tardy Information

Students are considered absent until they are physically in the building. Therefore, if your child has an appointment please call or email me and let me know. So many times parents don't think we need to know this but it is important for us to know. Also, I am the person who calls you if you have not called the school about your child's absence or tardiness.

Many people either don't leave messages or hang up when they get connected to the Health Office but this is one of the correct places to leave a message about an absence or tardiness. The other is to call our Absentee Call Line directly at 413-565-4104.

Also parents if you are going on vacation with your children please also add my name to your email list. Parents are very conscientious about letting teachers know about the absence but I have no idea why your child is absent and would appreciate the heads up.

Information for Grade 6 Parents

Parents of our current sixth-graders I want to give you a heads up that prior to entering grade 7, I will need copies of updated physicals as well as immunizations. I will be sending more information by the end of the second trimester about what is specifically needed.

As always, it is a pleasure to care for your children and please contact me at egartman@longmeadow.k12.ma.us with any questions.

Stay well and enjoy the upcoming winter break.

Ms. Gartman, RN

RELATED ARTS NEWS

Technology:

Cyber update: Check out the recent statistics about

cyberbullying. <https://www.dosomething.org/facts/11-facts-about-cyber-bullying>

Just in case you haven't heard about the new Yik Yak app taking center stage with teens, please read about it. There is a lot of controversy surrounding this app. It is rated 17+ but many young teens are using this. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yik_Yak and <http://www.cnn.com/2014/03/07/tech/yik-yak-app-high-school-problems/>

We live in a world surrounded by technology. And we know that whatever field our students choose to go into as adults, their ability to succeed will increasingly hinge on understanding how technology works. But only a tiny fraction of us are learning computer science, and less students are studying it than a decade ago.

That's why our technology class is joining in on the largest learning event in history: The Hour of Code, during Computer Science Education Week (Dec. 8-14). Last year, 15 million students tried computer science in one week. This year, we're joining students worldwide to reach 100 million students!

Our Hour of Code is a statement that Longmeadow, MA is ready to teach these foundational 21st century skills. To continue bringing programming activities to your students, we want to make our Hour of Code event huge. I encourage you to volunteer, reach out to local media, share the news on your social media channels and consider hosting additional Hour of Code events in the community.

This is a chance to change the future of education in Longmeadow, MA

See <http://hourofcode.com/us> for details.

Update:

Coding week through <https://code.org/learn> was a huge success. All grade levels that have technology class participated. All students created their own Flappy Bird game. This process involved programming a game with many variables, problem solving, and even some creativity thrown in! In addition to programming a game, students were able to explore tutorials that teach JavaScript, HTML, CSS coding, app creation for phones and tablets, and drawing using coding. All students logged in over an hour's worth of programming as a way to get students interested in the computer science field. I even throw out a challenge to students. If they created a game, app, or drawing, they would be able to demonstrate how it works using the Smartboard recently purchased from LEEF.

Band: (Band Website- tinyurl.com/longmeadowbands)

6th grade Concert Band: We are diligently working on our winter concert selections and learning how to practice efficiently. Students should be practicing their instruments a minimum of 10-15 minutes a day to have steady growth on their instruments. [The 6th grade winter concert is scheduled for Monday, January 12, 2015 at LHS Auditorium.](#)

7th & 8th grade Symphonic Band: The Symphonic Band has 3 before school rehearsals where the 7th and 8th grade band combine. During these rehearsals we focus on ensemble playing and actively listen to other sections. All rehearsals are extremely important to perform a successful winter concert! Please visit the band website for rehearsal dates and announcements.

(tinyurl.com/longmeadowbands) [The 7th & 8th grade winter concert is scheduled for Tuesday, January 13, 2015 at LHS Auditorium.](#)

Chorus

We are also diligently working to prepare for our upcoming concerts (Grade 6 on Monday, January 12th and Grades 7 & 8 on Tuesday, January 13th). Both concerts will be at LHS at 7 pm. Boys should wear black dress pants, white shirt and tie. Girls will wear black skirt/pants with a white top. Please no sneakers.

Women's Chorus rehearsals will be: Monday, December 15th from 2:55-3:20 and Tuesday, January 6th from 2:55-3:20.

Men's Chorus rehearsals will be Wednesday, December 17th from 2:55-3:20 and Thursday, January 8th from 2:55-3:20.

It is VERY IMPORTANT that everyone attends these rehearsals.

Visual Art

All of the Trimester 2 students are currently working on animal art.

6th Grade: The sixth graders are working on scratchboard assignments, using crayon and black tempera paint. They're emphasizing line, shape and space (negative & positive). They will also create tessellations, ceramic pots, ceramic picture frames and other projects.

7th Grade: The seventh graders are working on decorative animal masks. They're working with clay and plaster cloth. Their focus is on shape, focus, and color. They will also practice on the pottery wheel, create linoleum prints, and use acrylic paints.

8th Grade: The eighth grade students are building paper mache' animal sculptures using cardboard and newspaper. Their emphasis is primarily on form. They will create pots with handles, and make ceramic rainsticks.

Health

6th Grade

We have just begun trimester 2 and are working on understanding the mind-body connection and the Health triangle. Our next units will focus on communication and goal setting/ decision making.

7th Grade

We have just begun trimester 2 and are in the middle of a unit on mental health and stress. Students are presently working on their playlist project. Our next units will study the digestive system and nutrition.

8th Grade

Students are now studying first aid and working on their projects. They will be introduced to, and practice, CPR at the end of the first aid unit. After that we will look at relationships in a unit called “Flirting or Hurting”.

Physical Education

We have just wrapped up our Volleyball unit for all grades this week. Every student will complete their quizzes via [Google Classroom](#).

We'll begin Team Handball when we return from the holiday break which is one the students favorite units. We'll also will have the 8th grade classes use the new bluetooth heart rate monitoring system for the whole unit. The monitoring system tracks their heart rate levels throughout the whole lesson. It also displays on the whiteboard to motivate the students throughout the lesson.

INTRAMURALS

We're currently in the middle of our basketball season that has 63 students participating. Colin Lockhart and Joaquin Camacho have done a very nice job as co-commissioners organizing the referees and scorekeepers while solving any league issues that arise. All the information regarding the league can be found here (<http://tinyurl.com/wmsintramurals>)

STUDENT COUNCIL NEWS

Our annual pasta supper was a huge success! We raised over \$900.00 for Hero Dogs. Thanks to all who participated. The next fund raiser will be for the ASPCA. We will have a Pajama Day on December 19th, and we're asking that students and teachers donate at least one dollar. Please help our furry friends.

Math Counts

Math Counts students solve thought-provoking, non-routine, and fun problems that will engage and challenge your child and make them a better problem solver.

Math Counts meets every Friday from 2:50-3:30. All are welcome!

Math Lab

Ms. Amaral

Math Intervention provides hands-on learning and extra practice for 6, 7, & 8th graders. Students are also participating in an exciting new online program this year. Ascend Math uses assessments to benchmark each student's strengths and weaknesses. Then Ascend Math creates an individual study plan for each student. I encourage all of my students to work on Ascend Math & IXL at home.

Literacy Lab

Mrs. McSheffrey

Literacy lab students in grades 6-8 recently completed a rigorous assignment that required them to read and analyze two to three articles, watch a related video clip and synthesize the information in an argument essay. Sixth grade students read and wrote about classroom pets, seventh grade about bottled water in schools, and eighth grade about funding high school sports. Literacy lab students routinely engage in reading, talking, writing, and thinking about fiction and nonfiction text.

Drama Club

There are 39 talented students currently in the Drama Club program. The play we chose this year is "Night at the Wax Museum" by Craig Sodaro.

Here is the synopsis of the play from the Pioneer Drama Company:

"The hysterical meets the historical in this comic romp through the wackiest wax museum in history! School's out for summer, but not for six unlucky students who don't know much about history — they have to re-take the class in summer school. First year teacher Heather Fairchild has arranged for them to help her two aunts set up a new wax museum as a class project. Though the students' eyes glaze over with boredom, there's a twinkle in the wax figures' eyes when a mysterious incantation from the back of Cleopatra's bracelet brings them to life! King Henry VIII finds himself smitten with Cleopatra, making his queen, Anne Boleyn, furious. If she can just not lose her head, John Adams is there to serve as her divorce attorney! When Butch Cassidy, the Sundance Kid, Blackbeard and a bevy of lady pirates show up, everybody's out for one thing — treasure! Supposedly, there's a mighty valuable one hidden in the museum! It's a wild goose chase to find it, with a greedy museum landlord and her bumbling son joining in the mad search. And why is Lizzie Borden lurking in the shadows, since the aunts say they never had a wax figure of her?! Join the hilarious fun as treasure-hungry outlaws, pirates and royalty mount the greatest siege since Vicksburg! Wax historical in this mad-cap comedy adventure where the magic of history comes alive... literally! "

Already, we are having great fun with the characters and it should be a wonderful production in April.