

Our Schools

The Community Newsletter of the Farmingdale Public Schools • Fall 2013

The goal of the Farmingdale public schools is to establish ourselves as a high-achieving school District, as evidenced by high levels of student performance in all areas, including New York State assessments and Regents exams.

Districtwide Assessment Program at Farmingdale

Testing, as it relates to the public school system, has become to many a controversial issue. Many parents, and even some educators, wince at the mention of it, resistant to the notion that the ability and education level of a student can be adequately determined from a series of standardized tests. This growing perception, especially since the introduction of the Common Core Standards, needs to be tempered against the benefits of these tests. Assessments can lead to more appropriate, student-specific curriculum. Uniform testing can help identify students with specific learning and behavioral needs, ensuring that these students receive the proper, individualized attention.

In order to provide the best possible education for our students, the Farmingdale School District is putting in place a Districtwide assessment program. The results of this program will enable us to more easily recognize common problem areas for students, and then create a curriculum tailored to these problems.

One of the central arguments against standardized testing is that it often monopolizes weeks of class time and causes considerable stress for students. This is certainly a legitimate concern. To reduce substantial disruptions to regular class time, we have designed many of the assessments in our program as short, stress-free tests. However, the benefits of even these short assessments are significant; a few minutes to gauge a student's reading level can provide a starting point from which to develop an appropriate and rewarding reading curriculum.

Assessments are essential because without them what we would have is a one-size-fits-all education. This is exactly what the educators in Farmingdale do not want, and we recognize that it does not provide the education you expect for your children. Assessments allow us to remedy this by identifying learning differences among students. When a child is opted out of these tests, which is certainly a parent's right, our ability to deliver the most effective educational program for that student is compromised.

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How do these assessments benefit students?

- The Mathematical Concepts and Applications (M-CAP) test, a ten-minute assessment that gauges the general mathematical problem-solving skills expected in grades 2-8.
- An oral reading fluency test, in which students read aloud for one minute while the teacher records the number of correct words read per minute.
- K-2-specific lessons such as letter-naming fluency, letter-sound fluency, number identification and number comprehension.

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Seeking Nominations for the 17th Annual Wall of Fame Induction

The Wall of Fame was established to honor distinguished Farmingdale High School alumni. Located in the FHS lobby, the wall displays the plaques of all honorees.

Candidates for the Wall of Fame must have graduated from FHS at least 10 years ago and been successful in their academic pursuits. They must also be role models to our current students, as evidenced by their achievements.

A nomination form may be obtained from the District website, www.farmingdaleschools.org, or picked up in the main office of any of our District schools, as well as in the Farmingdale Public Library. The deadline for the receipt of applications is Monday, January 6, 2014. The induction ceremony will be held on April 28 at Farmingdale High School's Thomas W. Guilford Lecture Hall.

Join Us for Parent Workshop

In December, the District will hold two workshops for parents of elementary students. The workshops will focus on what children will be learning in mathematics this year, and will include hands-on application of the new strategies aligned to the Common Core Standards. Take home resources for parents will be provided. Both workshops will be held at 7 p.m. at the Howitt Library; parents of children in grades three through five will meet on December 4, and parents of children in kindergarten through second grade will meet on December 10.

For Important STAR Exemptions Info See Back Page

A Message From Your Board of Education

The 2013-14 school year is well underway, and the holiday season is already fast approaching. Our students have been hard at work, and we can all be confident that this will be another exciting school year.

In the 2012-13 school year, the state introduced new assessments for ELA and mathematics. As with all change, the introduction of the Common Core standards and the new state tests presented significant challenges. From the start, the State Education Department (SED) advised school districts across the region that the assessment scores were likely to decrease before they increase. The reason for the temporary dip, explained SED representatives, is that there was insufficient time between the implementation of the new standards and the administration of these assessments for students to prepare adequately.

These predictions were accurate; however, we know that these results do not accurately reflect our students' knowledge and abilities. While we will use this information to enhance preparation in our classrooms, it's critical to remember that new Common Core standards were implemented because *the former standards did not adequately prepare students for the 21st Century*. We are confident that Farmingdale students are continuing on an upward path to success, and we are committed to doing everything possible to ensure that this is so.

The 2012-13 academic campaign was a landmark year in terms of implementing new programs, and we saw several important academic advancements as well. The Response to Intervention Program was expanded to the middle school level, and the new evaluation system was applied to all administrators, teachers and pupil personnel. In addition, math teachers Districtwide began utilizing the new *Math in Focus* program in kindergarten through grade two. The program, which is aligned with the new Common Core standards, is a series of math lessons designed to develop higher-level thinking and help students better understand difficult math problems. The program was successful in helping our students grasp, and apply, the real-world applications of mathematical concepts.

Another achievement last year was the District's full implementation of the Dignity for All Students Act. Dignity Act coordinators were present in each school to hold staff training and listen to questions and concerns from students and families. We also developed progressive student bullying prevention and intervention programs. Furthermore, to promote good nutrition and healthy lifestyles, Farmingdale joined districts all over the nation in offering a new and improved student lunch menu. The revised menu, available in all cafeterias throughout the District, offers a broader variety of healthful meal options that align with the U.S. Department of Agriculture's school meal regulations. Programs such as each of these underscore a major tenet of the Farmingdale School District and your Board of Education: unwavering commitment to student health and safety.

During the summer, several areas at the high school were entirely reconstructed. They include both cafeterias, the health office, the adult education office, the office of the director of academic and technical studies, the wrestling room, as well as a room for our robotics team, a graphic arts room and 10 other classrooms. Also, the much-needed renovations in the high school bathrooms were completed for the opening of school. At our elementary and middle schools, we have refurbished and/or installed computer labs in preparation for the upcoming electronic assessment requirements. A majority of the work was completed by our own in-house staff, saving our financial resources for other student programs.

We value your involvement and input, and we ask that all parents and other community members become and remain active in District meetings, committees and events. We encourage you to get to know your children's teachers and participate in monthly PTA and Board of Education meetings, all of which are listed on the District calendar. We continue to believe that a major strength of the Farmingdale School District is our ability to work cooperatively and respectfully together. In that spirit, we wish each of you a successful and rewarding year.

Very truly yours,

Farmingdale Board of Education

New Faces in the District

The Farmingdale School District is very excited to welcome 17 new teachers and administrators to the District. Their experience, dedication and skill will be a wonderful addition to Farmingdale schools.



(L-R) **Bottom row:** Teachers Erin Garvey, Isabella Buttler, Rachel Vikingstad, Yan (Jessica) Zhu, Kristie Kalkhof; **Second row:** Janine Wulff, Andrea McCann, Christine Marino; **Third row:** Kelly Wiegmann, Jacqueline Clark, Jacqueline Darby, Kathleen Dean, Leslie Routh; **Top row:** Kathleen Duffy, and administrators Jennifer Olsen, Kristen Cummings, Jessica Santarpia, and not pictured Stanley Pelech.

2013-14 Board of Education Meeting Schedule

All Board meetings are open to the public, and we encourage all District residents to attend. Regular monthly meetings take place in the Weldon E. Howitt East Cafeteria, 70 Van Cott Avenue, at 8:00 p.m. Shari Bardash-Eivers is our Board president for the 2013-14 school year, with Steve Wilson serving as vice president. Serving as trustees are John E. Capobianco, Russ Catanzaro, Michael Goldberg, Kathy Lively and Rick Morrison.

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| ■ December 4 | ■ May 7 |
| ■ January 15 | ■ Tuesday, May 13 |
| ■ February 5 | Special Meeting – public hearing |
| ■ March 5 | ■ Tuesday, May 20 |
| ■ March 12 | BUDGET VOTE |
| Budget Workshop | Howitt East |
| ■ March 19 | Gymnasium |
| Budget Workshop | 6 a.m. to 9 p.m. |
| ■ March 26 | ■ May 28 |
| Budget Workshop | Special meeting - recognition |
| ■ April 2 | FHS Auditorium |
| Regular Meeting / Budget Workshop / Public Input | 7 p.m. |
| ■ April 9 | ■ June 4 |
| Special Meeting – adopt Farmingdale budget for voter approval | ■ July 9 |
| ■ Thursday, April 24 | Organizational Meeting |
| Special Meeting – adopt BOCES administration budget | ■ August 27 |
| | Special Meeting - tax levy |

Note: All meetings are on Wednesdays unless otherwise noted.

What's Happening in Our Schools

Albany Avenue Elementary School

With schools across the District focusing on the math element of the Common Core Standards, kindergartners at **Albany Avenue Elementary School** worked on their number fluency. Children in Bonnie McClelland's class worked on number names and how to properly write numbers. The goal of the lesson was to be able to identify certain numbers and clearly write them down. By practicing their number work at a young age, students build a foundation that gives them an advantage when they learn more challenging math in later grades.



Northside Elementary School

Building relationships and giving back to the community are important aspects of the school experience. To that end, **Northside Elementary School** recently held its fifth annual welcome back picnic, with proceeds of the event going to the St. Jude Children's Research Hospital.

On a Friday in late September, over 650 children, parents, teachers and administrators joined together to enjoy one another's company and have a picnic. Highlights included an appearance by Class of 2013 alumni; a demonstration by the local fire department; and a performance by Rock Study, a band led by Northside gym teacher Dave Stein.

Congratulations to all those involved with the welcome back picnic for raising over \$1300 for the St. Jude Hospital!



Saltzman East Memorial Elementary School

Throughout the year, students at **Saltzman East Memorial Elementary School** will learn about a different character trait each month, as part of the schoolwide character education program. The theme for the first month was "one," and it stressed the importance of community and togetherness. Children read *One* by Kathryn Otoshi, a book that teaches kids about accepting everyone's differences.

The entire school came together to create a rainbow mural comprising hand traces of every child. The mural, which is displayed prominently in the school, is a clear depiction of the community spirit at Saltzman.



Woodward Parkway Elementary School

From September 16 through 20, **Woodward Parkway Elementary School** celebrated *Friendship Week*, an event aimed at making sure that every child feels a part of the school community. Every classroom received and read a copy of *Yo! Yes?* by Chris Raschka. This acclaimed children's book stresses the importance of making friends and underscores the character trait of responsibility. Tuesday was a highlight of the week; children were encouraged to sit with a new friend at lunch and play with him or her at recess.



Howitt Middle School

To encourage new friendships and build a comfortable environment for students, **Howitt Middle School** recently held a meet-and-greet in the cafeteria and library. The PTA provided snacks for the event, which featured parents, students and teachers. The annual meet-and-greet is a great opportunity for children to get to know one another, while giving parents the chance to talk with teachers and other moms and dads.



Farmingdale High School

In September, more than 700 people from **Farmingdale High School** participated in forum on driving safety titled *Choices and Consequences*. Representatives from the Nassau County District Attorney's Office and the Nassau County Police Department discussed the dangers of texting and driving, as well as driving while intoxicated. To understand the impact of irresponsible driving, high schoolers heard personal accounts from convicted motorists who were devastated by the consequences of their actions. Students also engaged in a mock arrest and trial, and took a field sobriety test while wearing special blood-alcohol goggles. The event was mandatory for any senior who wishes to drive a car to school.



FHS Musicians Will Perform at Prestigious Music Conference

All-State Music festivals showcase the talents of only the most skilled and proficient student musicians in New York. It goes without saying, then, that selection to these events is a tremendous honor. This December, Farmingdale High School will send nine accomplished students to compete at the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) Conference in Rochester.

The musicians were selected based on every aspect of performance, including tone quality, technique, musicianship, interpretation, musicality, dynamics and sight-reading ability. The students ultimately chosen — six ensemble students and four alternates — will have less than two months to master the pieces. In Rochester, the musicians will complete three days of intense rehearsals, culminating in the annual state performance.

Congratulations to all the students selected for inclusion in the NYSSMA Conference: Matthew Mackenzie (Band); Tyler Belo and Matthew Carlin (Chorus); Cole Szilagyi (Jazz); Michael Fernandez (Mixed Chorus); Anthony Kathreptis and Sabatina Mauro (Symphony Band); Ellyn Eivers (Symphony Orchestra); and Tom Eustaquio (String Orchestra). And a very special thank you to the faculty who helped guide these musicians to such an accomplishment.



FROM THE SPORTS DESK

FHS Named Scholar-Athlete School of Distinction

The New York State Public High School Athletic Association (NYSPHSAA) recognized Farmingdale as a 2012-13 Scholar/Athlete School of Distinction. To achieve this accolade, all varsity teams maintained a combined grade point average of 90 percent or better during the 2012-13 school year. The District's athletes displayed their talents both in the classroom and on the field. Farmingdale is one of only a handful of schools across the state to have received this distinction.

Juggling the diverse commitments that face all varsity student athletes is a very difficult task. It's all too easy to let academics slip when students are distracted by the challenge and thrill of athletics. Distinction as a scholar-athlete school clearly demonstrates that the Dalers are up to the task. It is an incredible honor for the Farmingdale School District and the entire community.

FHS Dalers' Football Off to a Great Start

At press time, the Farmingdale High School football team was ranked number one in the conference, having just come off an impressive victory over preseason number one Massapequa. FHS began the season with four straight wins.

The game versus Massapequa was part of the Marine Corps' Great American Rivalry series, which honors high-achieving student athletes all over the country. At the game, senior Dallas Creamer was awarded with a certificate and an academic scholarship to the college of his choice. Dallas leads all Farmingdale football players with a 98.7 GPA. Congratulations to Dallas and our undefeated Dalers!

Reminder: Register for Basic STAR Exemption

The Farmingdale School District reminds residents of the new Basic STAR exemption registration procedures established by the New York State Department of Taxation and Finance. Residents who currently receive the exemption must register with the state's tax department in order to receive it again in 2014 and beyond.

The new registration procedures are designed to protect residents against inappropriate and fraudulent STAR exemptions. Fortunately, Farmingdale residents need not reregister every year; the tax department will confirm a homeowner's STAR eligibility for future years.

The state will mail instructions on how to register to every resident who currently receives an exemption. The easiest way for homeowners to register is to log on to www.tax.ny.gov or call (518) 457-2036. Residents may continue to register through December 31, 2013.



Districtwide Assessment Program

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What Are the Assessments?

Students in kindergarten through second grade will also be taking the *Foundations* language assessment, a program that focuses on print knowledge, alphabet awareness, phonological awareness, vocabulary, fluency and spelling.

Additionally, elementary students will be taking a reading benchmark assessment. Students are assigned reading-level-appropriate books for individual reading. This assessment will help determine students' reading comprehension, while providing teachers with valuable feedback regarding which books are most appropriate and beneficial for each individual student.

Farmingdale is joining with districts across the country in utilizing the innovative and award-winning *Aimsweb* program to administer several of these tests. *Aimsweb* is a complete, web-based solution for universal screening, progress monitoring, and data management for grades K-12. *Aimsweb* tests are specifically designed to provide accurate, continuous and direct student assessment. The results of these tests can be used to modify curriculum, as well as tangibly demonstrate student improvement.

Farmingdale is committed to utilizing emerging technology to accentuate the testing program. Students in grades 3-8 will be using a state-of-the-art computer testing system called Measure of Academic Progress, or MAP, that adapts to the student in real time as the test progresses. MAP works by asking an initial age-appropriate question, and then adjusting the questions based on the student's response. All questions correlate to Common Core Standards.

These assessments help us ensure an education that meets each individual student's needs. Rather than a one-size-fits-all curriculum, students will receive a comprehensive, multifaceted education that reflects the diverse skill levels found in each of our classrooms.