

The 2014-2015 school year is underway at Mystic Middle School. What a great start. As a school community, we are in the midst of transitioning into the new school year with whole-school and grade level team building activities, meeting families during school community events, and developing goals for the school year and beyond. The purpose of these activities is to provide our students, staff and parents with the foundational opportunities to foster relationships and open lines of communication. Friendship, school spirit and loyalty, and teamwork are some of the building blocks that we strive to instill through these endeavors.

These elements of success need to be reinforced throughout the school year. One of the ways we are doing this is by implementing our third year of Dens, a school-wide, multi-age advisory program. The mission of Dens is to build a Connected School Community by Establishing Trust and Fostering Positive Interpersonal Relationships. This year's themes will focus on school climate and team building, making connections with each other and the community, acceptance and diversity, and student leadership. The Dens' gatherings take place on Monday afternoons. The classes consist of twelve to thirteen students and one certified staff member. Other times we may take this time to have grade level or school-wide events or assemblies. Not only does the advisory program fulfill the requirements of the Secondary Educational Reform, it also helps us meet the guidelines of the state mandated college and career readiness initiatives.

Parental involvement and volunteerism are essential. All caregivers are encouraged to contact their student's teachers to solicit active participation in their child's life. One way to be engaged in our Mystic Middle School community is to join the PTO. Parents are invited to attend the scheduled meeting dates that are posted in our *Cub Chronicles* news publication. This is available for viewing on our MMS website. I would like to take a moment to acknowledge some of the kind acts parents have made in the first few weeks of school. Community members and volunteers have cleaned out our front garden, decorated the front of the school, offered to support a student group in rejuvenating the garden behind the school, cleared out the overgrown areas around the school, distributed fliers at community events, promoted parental participation, published the *Cub Chronicles*, opened the student store, and created a PTO Facebook page. This tremendous parental involvement is a testimony to the type of students and families we have in this town. Thank you all.

The *Cub Chronicles* is not our only school to home communication tool. The MMS staff uses websites, emails, social-media, phone calls, and parent meetings to share information. As this is MMS's second year in a row identifying communication to families as one of our building goals, the entire MMS community is charged with the task of improving the school to home connection from the prior year. My personal belief is that news and information can only be under-communicated; never over-communicated. With this said, we also need to be mindful of the delicate balance between fostering independence and accountability for the students while providing the essential communication resources for families.

One of our highest priorities is teaching and learning. We are determined to increase academic student growth through increased rigor and by embedding literacy across our curriculum. Student growth will be demonstrated through various types of assessment and assignments that align with the new Common Core State Standards.

The improved student performance will be the result of research-based instructional strategies, collaborative teaching and learning opportunities, and a school philosophy that all students can learn.

Safety and Security are also a very high priority. MMS has recently re-established the School Safety and Security Team. The role of this group is to review the new School Safety and Security Plan and align it to our unique building and student population. Not only do we need to offer a physically safe environment; we are also using all of our available resources to foster an emotionally safe place to grow and learn. School climate plays a big part in this. To this end, we are also strengthening our Safe School Climate Committee. Their task is to work in conjunction with the staff, community and our advisory program to implement programs to foster a better climate in the school community.

As a professional learning community, the staff and I are currently collaboratively developing a school vision, building goals, team goals, and individual goals for the 2014-2015 school year. Going beyond this, my aspirations are to be a forward-thinking progressive middle school aiming to prepare the students for the ever-changing world by equipping them with critical thinking skills, the ability to adapt and adjust, the confidence to take risks and be a leader, and to respect the core values of honesty, compassion and integrity with others. To accomplish this, we must share the vision and goals of the entire community and the Board of Education. The strengths of our current programs, staff, students and parents also play an essential role with this. If you wish to share your talents as a parent, please contact the school, your child's teachers, join us during a special event, or reach-out to any one of the parent organizations. We welcome your support.