



PantherPride NEWSLETTER

Spring greetings to all members of the Middle Township School District family:

It is hard to believe that we are just weeks away from the end of the school year!

Looking back, I am so grateful for the way our community continues to work together to reach our goals and to provide the best educational experience possible for our students. Thank you all: parents, teachers, school staff, friends, and neighbors.

This has certainly been a year of learning, growth, fun, and sharing. I have been reflecting on some past highlights, especially:

- *The dedication of the John Roberson Athletic Complex at Memorial Field during the Panther's season opener*
- *Students being honored by the National Merit Corp. and the College Board*
- *The excitement of media coverage for Mr. Herman's Kids reading initiative*
- *A number of students gaining early acceptance into colleges and universities*
- *The new dual credit program, Introduction to Esports, offered to MTSD students through Stockton University*
- *Elementary #1 receiving a \$5,000 donation from a new Burlington store to use towards school supplies*
- *The 56 eighth graders who signed up to learn more about our high school's Navy National Defense Cadet Corps program at our first-ever recruiting day*
- *Numerous excellent performances and athletic events*

As the year comes to a close and many students look toward the future, I am especially excited to mention how impressed I am by the seven students who have earned enough college-level credits to graduate from Atlantic Cape Community College (ACCC) this month, before they receive their high school diplomas! The Early College High School initiative began in 2019 and provides our students with an innovative way to earn both a high school degree and a two-year associate degree (or up to two years' credit toward a bachelor's degree), saving the students both time and money.

There are so many more things to be proud of this year, but I will always be most proud to be part of the Panther Family.

Enjoy the last few weeks of school and a wonderful summer. See you next year!

Sincerely,

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UPCOMING EVENTS

June 7 – High School Senior Awards and Scholarships Night

June 8 – Middle School Carnival

June 8 – Elementary #1 Preschool Graduation

June 8 – Board of Education Meeting

June 11 – High School Baccalaureate

June 11 – High School Senior Class Sunset Cruise

June 12-16 – Early Dismissal – All Schools

June 13 – Juneteenth Recognition

June 15 – Middle School 8th Grade Promotion

June 16 – Last Day of School for Students

June 16 – High School Graduation





Guidance Corner Shoutouts!



Junior Wins \$120K Scholarship

Congratulations to junior Justen Wen who has earned a \$120,000 scholarship to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute (Troy, N.Y.). School counselor Angelica Brown nominated him, and he is very excited. He will apply this summer when the Common App opens.



Early College Students Earn Degrees from Atlantic Cape Community College

Seven MTHS Early College students participated in commencement at Atlantic Cape Community College (Atlantic Cape) on May 18 – more than double the number of last year’s graduates.

Avery Campbell, Erin Cowan, Marissa Gardner, Emma Hoff, Greg Hrynowski, Hannah Price, and Kylee Rothmel accrued enough college-level course credits while attending MTHS to earn an associate degree from Atlantic Cape.

The partnership between Atlantic Cape and MTHS was established in 2019. The goal is to provide a way for Middle Township students to earn both a high school degree and a two-year associate degree (or up to two years’ credit toward a bachelor’s degree) while the students are still in high school, saving the students and their families both time and money. Congratulations to all!



Joelle Tenaglia, Director of Guidance

Coach John Leahy Inducted into the Basketball Hall of Honor



Middle Township girls basketball coach John Leahy was inducted into the Hall of Honor at The Basketball Reunion in the “Made in New Jersey” category. This event was held at the Prudential Center in Newark on Monday, April 3.

The Basketball Reunion’s mission is to celebrate the traditions and history of New Jersey basketball and to bring players, coaches and fans together to relive great moments in NJ basketball.

Leahy has had a successful history as both a player and coach. He played at Seton Hall University from 1991-1995, helping the team advance to the NCAA Tournaments for three years, 1992 to 1994. For a decade after college, he played overseas professionally, winning two Foreign Player of the Year awards (Ireland). In 2004, Leahy returned to NJ and became the Middle Township girls basketball coach.

During the 22-23 season, the Panthers finished 23-9 and won the South Jersey Group II title.

In Leahy’s career thus far, he has led the team to 371 wins, two South Jersey Group II championships and two Cape-Atlantic League titles.





MTSD Students Recognized for PSA Submissions, along with Bus Driver Who Received Partners in Prevention Award



Three Middle Township students were recognized during a county-wide Public Service Announcement (PSA) contest. Organized by Cape Assist and the Cape May County Healthy Community Coalition (CMCHCC), a total of 33 young Cape May County winners were recognized for the PSAs they submitted, along with two individuals who demonstrated their dedication to community, prevention and education during the Public Policy and Awards breakfast held at the Avalon Links on Tuesday, April 25.

Cape Assist is a substance misuse prevention and treatment agency in Cape May County, and this year's PSA topics were geared towards themes such as "Let's Connect," "Above the Influence," "Dear Me," and "Valuing Diversity." Student winners from 10 different schools submitted videos, posters, and short essays on their chosen topic.

Among the 33 winners was third grader Savannah Charles who submitted the PSA titled "Advice to My Future Self," and eighth graders Nathan McMaster and Michael Sherretta who submitted a video presentation titled "What is the One Thing You'd Like to Do to Improve Yourself?"

Additionally, two adults were honored with the Partners in Prevention awards, one being Middle Township's very own bus driver and reading mentor, Herman Cruse.

Winning PSAs will be highlighted at upcoming Cape Assist functions and workshops and may also be part of sponsored radio spots.

Elementary #1 and #2 Raise Record-Breaking Amounts During Annual Boosterthon Fundraisers

Elementary #1 families raised over \$18,000 alongside Elementary #2, who raised roughly \$16,000 during their largest Boosterthon fundraisers. Students and families raised money for activities like class trips, SEL supplies, support assemblies and other student needs by running laps and dancing.

This is the third year that Middle Township Elementary #1 and #2 have held the event.

A dance party was held at Elementary #2 to celebrate the students who met the fundraising goals. Their theme for the event this year revolved around US National Parks.





Mr. Herman's Kids Featured on the TODAY Show



Middle Township Elementary #1 bus driver Herman Cruse has been celebrated locally for the time he spends working with student readers, but he got national recognition on NBC's TODAY Show on Read Across America Day, March 2!

Pre-taped on February 13, the TODAY Show segment highlighted the program known as "Mr. Herman's Kids" in which students get one-on-one time with Cruse, who helps them with their reading skills.

Occurring between bus pick-up and drop-off times, the program has grown into a household name with students, staff and community members.

While Cruse was interviewed by the TODAY Show's host, Jenna Bush Hager, students gathered outside with "We Love Mr. Herman" signs. As Bush Hager and Cruse made their way outside, students cheered with pom poms and smiles to show the bus driver their appreciation.

The TODAY Show presented Cruse with a plaque for his reading corner and more than 1,000 books donated by Scholastic.



Jersey Cape Dance & Gymnastics Academy Awards 12 Scholarships to Elementary School #2 Students



Photo courtesy of Jersey Cape Dance & Gymnastics Academy

Stina Smith, owner of Jersey Cape Dance & Gymnastics Academy, attended an Elementary #2 school performance of "Aladdin" with two of her former students, Christine Sundstrum and Andrea Reder. Now teachers at Elementary #2 as well as directors of the Drama Club and Step program, Sundstrum and Reder explained that very few of their students took lessons. This gave Smith an idea.

"I reached out to the district to inquire about younger students who might want to attend my academy but who could not afford to pay the fees," Smith explained. "In just a few days, I had 12 names."

The students are girls in grades 3 to 5, and they signed up for Musical Theater, hip hop and gymnastics. Smith provides shoes and costumes, and she will continue this 100% scholarship as long as the students continue taking the lessons, potentially through high school. She asks only that they take the opportunity seriously.

"They have been terrific!" she added. "Their attendance and their attitude have been excellent. I couldn't be happier."





Middle School Students Sing National Anthem at Phillies Game

Middle School choir director June Camizzi applies to the Philadelphia Phillies each year for an opportunity to sing the National Anthem. For the third time, the group of 38 students and four teachers took to the field at Citizen's Bank Park. The April 26 game had a short rain delay, but it wasn't long until the Philadelphia Phanatic stopped by to "attempt" to direct the chorus as they sang before the game.

"He gave up quickly, gave us a big kiss and made all of the kids laugh," said Camizzi. "A lot of us were nervous, but it was such a cool experience."

Camizzi described the application process to be extensive considering so many groups apply. Middle has only been given the opportunity to perform three times - once every five years or so. She received an email from Philadelphia



Phillies representatives in February with seven dates that needed to be filled – responding to the request immediately knowing the length of the wait list for schools.

After the performance, the students and staff from Middle were able to join the crowd and enjoy the game – including a win from the Phillies.

Diversity Night Out was Held on April 18

More than 200 people attended the Middle School's Diversity Night Out on Tuesday, April 18.

The evening started with Dr. Salvo welcoming attendees. The Middle School choir performed a traditional African hymn, followed by student-created poetry about diversity. The Dance/Step team danced to Alicia Keys' "New Day" and to Kurt Franklin's "Revolution." Also Emma Ratchford performed an Irish dance. The Middle School's Performing Arts class sang one selection and performed a country-western dance and a Bollywood (Indian) dance. Performances were followed by dinner, dessert, and door prizes.

Thank you to Ms. Camizzi, choir director; Mrs. Holmes and Mr. Farrow, Dance/Step team advisors as well as teachers of the Performing Arts class.





Motivational Speaker Inspired MTHS Students



Jordan Toma brought his inspirational message to Middle Township High School and Middle School students, especially those with an IEP (Individual Education Plan).

Having experienced school as a student with an IEP, Toma is now on a mission to break the stigma some of these students feel. He told students that his confidence wavered, and he struggled to keep up. But, once he discovered his learning disability didn't define him, everything changed.

Toma's "ah-ha" moment came when he was accepted into Centenary University and into its "Step Ahead" program, a pre-college program for students with learning differences. "By using all the accommodations and people they had in place, I was able to maximize my academic success," he explained. "My mindset began to change."

As Toma's confidence grew, so did his academic skills, personal relationships and aspirations. After being asked to speak to a class about his journey, he realized how powerful and inspirational his story could be and wanted to share hope with students who struggle as he once did.

"I wanted to go back and find the kids that were like me, share my story, and motivate them to keep working hard and live up to their true potential," said Toma.

Middle Township Eighth Graders Sign Up for Cadet Corps

Fifty-six MTMS eighth graders signed up to learn more about the high school's Navy National Defense Cadet Corps (NNDCC) after the district's first-ever Recruiting Day on April 25.

Students were engaged and excited by the landing of a helicopter which they toured, a demonstration by the Sheriff Department's K-9 Unit, an opportunity to work the firehose by the Goshen Volunteer Fire Company and more.

This was the first "recruiting day" and brought many more students than the usual number. It was facilitated by the current Middle Township High School (MTHS) NNDCC cadets, who also led the prospective cadets in marches and drills.

The MTHS NNDCC is a leadership and character-development program available for students in grades 9 through 12. Cadets learn the Navy's core values of honor, courage, and commitment as well as the values of citizenship, service to our community, personal responsibility, and a sense of accomplishment.

Over the course of the fourth and final marking period, the interested eighth graders spend their "Panther Block" with the cadets to get a more in-depth look at the program before making a commitment. Students also learn the moral and mental strength to do what is right, with confidence and resolution, even in the face of temptation or adversity, as well as day-to-day duties to join as a team to improve the quality of their work, their people and themselves.





Two MTHS Seniors Receive Awards During Ocean City Pops Orchestra's Annual Young Artist Competition

This year marks the third year Middle Township High School students have won vocal categories during the Annual Ocean City Pops Youth Artist Competition held on May 3. Seniors, Rachel Miller and Michael Morris won first place in their respective categories, earning \$1,000 each and the opportunity to perform with the Pops at a future date.

Twenty-six students competed in four categories: Female Vocal Music, Male Vocal Music, Instrumental Performance, and Piano Performance.

Miller performed "Gooch's Song" from the musical, Mame, and Morris performed Rachmaninoff's Prelude in C# minor (Opus 3, No. 2). Both students have been active members of the MTHS Music Department over their four-year high school career, starring in musicals and band/choir concerts.

Previous winners included international opera singer Jarrett Logan Porter, winning the singular prize in 2011, the competition's first year. The current band director, Brinley Edwards won in 2014. Morris is the first winner in the piano category from MTHS.



Coastal Prep High School Held First-Ever Prom Night

Coastal Preparatory High School held their first ever Prom Night at Misty Meadow Sheep and Dairy Farm on April 28.

Almost a dozen Coastal Prep students enjoyed dancing, food and time with their fellow students. They were provided hair, makeup and even their dresses and tuxedos from local vendors.

We owe a special thank you to these organizations for making the prom such a special night.

- *Misty Meadows Sheep and Dairy Farm - Venue*
- *Hidden Beauty Hair Salon – Girls' Hair*
- *Axel Soto, Local Barber – Boys' Hair*
- *Cape May Tech High School Cosmetology Students & Instructor, Rosellen Dunning – Hair/Makeup*
- *At Your Service Tuxedo – Tuxedos*
- *Kensington Furniture - Dresses*
- *Bethel Commandment Church - Catering*
- *D.J. Michael Di Mauro – DJ/Music*
- *Robert Thomson-Photography*
- *Carrie Sinone - Floral*
- *Cape Assist-Decorations*



Coastal Prep High School is one of only three recovery high schools in the state. A partnership between Middle Township School District and Cape Assist, the school ensures that students recovering from substance misuse can also stay on track academically, thanks to special support. Their focus is on prevention as well as recovery.





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Spring Athletics Highlights



Congratulations to senior Sofia Jurusz, representing MTHS as the NJSIAA Scholar Athlete. Jurusz is the top student in the Class of 2023, as well as a three-sport athlete: cross country, swimming and track & field. She will attend Smith College, majoring in environmental science and education, and competing for Pioneers' cross country and track teams this fall.

Girls track and field made history on May 10, winning the National Conference in the Cape Atlantic League for the first time ever. Girls track and field also achieved an undefeated season.



A signing ceremony was held for 17 seniors headed to college with plans of continuing their athletic careers on Tuesday, May 16.



Junior softball pitcher Gabby Cruz threw her 300th strikeout less than a month after reaching the 200-K milestone.

Winter Athletics Highlights

February was an historic month for Panthers Winter Sports.



Boys swim won its first South Jersey Group C Championship in school history.

Wrestling won its first-ever Cape Atlantic League National Conference Championship.



Girls basketball won its first South Jersey Group 2 Championship since 2012.



Boys basketball won its first South Jersey Group 2 Championship since 2011.

Congrats to Panthers wrestler Adrien Laboy for qualifying for the state wrestling tournament, as well as swimmer Brandyn Acevedo for racing in the Meet of Champions!

