

News From Reaching Heights

Noble

Art Helps Students Understand Academics

by Florence D'Emilia

"Art isn't limited to studio projects or public spaces," explained Noble art teacher Nancy Eisenberg. "It has a relevant place in the broader world." According to Ms. Eisenberg, art has a unique way of allowing students to understand other academic subjects. Every fall, she has fifth graders explore the relationship between math and art when they decorate nets with line designs and patterns. They then take the nets and build decorative solids such as cubes, square pyramids, hexagonal prisms and more. This year, Ms. Eisenberg's interdisciplinary perspective brought new relevance to social studies and anthropology by introducing kindergarten through fifth graders to traditional Yoruba life through storytelling, ritual, music and dance.

When students entered the auditorium, they immediately caught sight of a tall African man dressed in a traditional caftan and hat. Ethnographic objects were on display: a colorful mask as tall as a kindergartner, beautifully decorated drums and shakers, fierce-looking spears, a huge heart-shaped fan woven from leaves.

Nigerian artist and drummer Bodunde Motoni and Case Western University professor and director of art education Tim Shuckerow told the story of Motoni's village. Students learned about the village's governing structure, traditional religion and typical jobs. As stories were told, students from the audience took on the roles of village king, advisors, bodyguards and market women. They were outfitted in authentic masks and clothing, and given drums, spears and fans to act out their parts. The entire audience joined in songs



Nigerian artist Bodunde Motoni with Mackenzie Johnson and Dae'Mere Angel-Dozier dressed in traditional attire.

and chants.

In the afternoon, the fourth and fifth graders returned to the auditorium where the artist spoke to the children about different African animals and their facial features. Art and anthropology took on personal relevance as each student created a clay mask of an African animal's face. 🎨

Oxford



Oxford first grader Brooklynn Johnson rates her level of engagement.

by Florence D'Emilia

As the morning lesson came to an end, Oxford first graders lined up and anonymously placed a piece of colored paper in a box to rate their level of engagement in the morning's learning activity. According to first grade teacher Betty Miller, "Asking students to rate their level of engagement is a

Want to Know How Engaged Students Are? Ask Them!

concrete way for us to ask students to take ownership of learning."

Many chose green chips that represent "Authentic Engagement," indicating that they felt a genuine enthusiasm for their work, and didn't want the activity to end. Others chose "Ritual Engagement," which meant that the work itself did not excite them, but that they understood the value of doing the work well. Of the five choices, no one chose Rebellion—an option for someone who refuses to work, perhaps because the work was too hard, too easy or of no interest.

"Student engagement is tied to student achievement," said Denice Leddy, Oxford's new principal. When Mrs. Leddy was a classroom teacher, she used a model of student engagement developed by educational researcher Paul Schlechty. Now she is helping Oxford teachers implement it in their classrooms. "As

instructors, we want to be more aware of the degree of student engagement and how that relates to the design elements in a lesson," Mrs. Leddy added.

At a recent Professional Learning Community (PLC), the first grade team met with the principal to discuss how monitoring the class's engagement has been guiding their instruction. One teacher commented that she is more conscious of incorporating choice into her lessons since she noticed that students rate themselves with a higher level of engagement when lessons include choice. Another said she believes student engagement will have a tremendous positive impact on student achievement. Asking students to rate their level of engagement helps them become more aware and better at engaging themselves in learning. 🎨

REACHING HEIGHTS

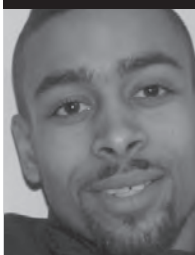
Our Passion: Excellent Public Education

Reaching Heights Neighborhood

Newsletters take you into classrooms to give you a glimpse of the important work of teaching and learning happening every day in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights Public Schools. In words and pictures, Florence D'Emilia and Krista Hawthorne describe the rich learning environments, progressive teaching techniques, and community connections that work together to educate all of our children.

If you have questions, suggestions, or corrections, please contact Reaching Heights at rh@reachingheights.org or 216-932-5110.

Heights Graduate Profile



Wael ElHalaby
Oxford '01
Monticello '04
Heights High '08
Junior at Kent State
University

What's your major?

I am majoring in nursing with a minor in music.

What do you hope to do in the future?

I see myself running a business, working a steady job, being a personal trainer, maintaining a great family and making time to play my violin for gigs here and there.

Do you have a favorite memory from elementary school?

I remember a really fun field day with competitions against other schools. I took first in the running competition.

What did you learn at Heights High that prepared you for college?

I learned how to prevail in a stressful environment with a hectic work load. Between AP classes, music and sports, my life was busy. But those long hours set me up to handle a busy college schedule.

What did you enjoy most at Heights?

I enjoyed the out-of-state trips I went on with orchestra and singers. Running track was amazing. I didn't start running until my 10th grade year and I became Heights' fastest sprinter. My greatest memory of all was when I starred as the fiddler in Fiddler On The Roof in 2007.

What advice would you give current Heights High students?

Don't be ashamed that you are different. People want to see uniqueness. I learned how to stand out in an already diverse environment by just accepting my true self, flaws and all and just letting it shine. I played violin, ran track, sang, graduated with a 3.86, took care of my sister, and still had time to maintain a steady girlfriend for four years. Anything is possible if you put your mind to it. Believe that you can do it and it will happen. 📌

Noble

Celebrating History Through Drama

By Florence D'Emilia

As fifth graders head for the cafeteria at Noble Elementary, several girls take a different route. They eat lunch at large tables in Nancy Eisenberg's Art Room. The girls, members of the Young Ladies of Noble, have given up their lunch hour to rehearse a play that they will perform at the school's celebration of Black History Month. After cleaning away crumbs and pushing tables aside, they retrieve scripts in brightly colored folders and get their pencils ready to make notations.

The catalyst for all this activity is David Hansen, father of Noble second grader Zelda Thayer-Hansen. The playwright and theater educator has written "The Lady," a 10-minute play that merges personal narrative with history. In telling the story of Michelle Obama's family history, Mr. Hansen has transformed daily life into myth.

As Mr. Hansen runs through the play, the audience is drawn into a series of vignettes that present historic moments. The girls portray an enslaved woman and her young son at the moment of emancipation, a railroad porter who notes the differences that exist



Noble fifth grader Jayla Blackmon rehearses for a performance celebrating Black History Month.

between the North and the South during the early decades of the 20th century, and a working couple from Chicago who marvel that their children are studying at Princeton University. One lucky girl plays First Lady Michelle Obama.

"I wanted to write an educational play that celebrates the Black middle class," said the playwright. "The progress of one African American family over the history of the United States provided an excellent blueprint for achievement." 📌

Designing Lessons to Meet Student Needs

By Florence D'Emilia

Monday morning finds Sharon Riley's fifth graders in the computer lab at Noble Elementary, playing spelling and vocabulary games for this week's spelling words. Word lists vary in difficulty, and judging from the smiles and friendly competitions, students are fully engaged. The "games" are actually practice exercises, and Mrs. Riley is getting immediate feedback on her computer based on the students' scores on the various "games." As the information appears on her screen, she uses it to direct her attention toward students who are having difficulty with the exercises. She sits down with individual students and works with them. In education-speak this process would be described as "data informing instruction."

The same process takes place in the classroom. After Mrs. Riley engages the entire class in a whole group lesson, students break into groups of three and four. They purposely move to learning centers around the room where prepared

lessons await them. Students settle in quickly and begin working independently. This is not a "one-size fits all" education. Lessons are tailored for students working at different levels.

One small group joins Mrs. Riley at a cluster of desks. They begin reading a book and pause to make predictions and to discuss what they can infer from the text they just read. When the signal sounds students move to another center and a different group joins Mrs. Riley. This group is reading a higher level book and their discussion reflects a deeper understanding of the skills and concepts.

As the day unfolds, multiple lessons take place. All have been informed by data collected through benchmark tests, short cycle assessments and teacher observation. "The groups change often depending on student needs," explained Mrs. Riley. "By differentiating instruction I am meeting students where they are and challenging them to achieve." 📖

Thanks to Data, No More Teaching to the Middle

By Florence D'Emilia

One cold winter morning, Oxford kindergartners joined teacher Millie Litten at a u-shaped table for one-on-one learning assessments. She asked each child the same questions to help evaluate skills that predict reading, writing and spelling abilities. Once analyzed, the collected data will help her identify each student's needs and assist her in planning lessons.

Past generations of teachers prepared lessons for the whole class and taught to the middle with little time to focus on students with remedial needs or those who were gifted. Dividing students into tracks didn't work much better because expectation and lack of opportunity kept students performing at about the same level. They rarely moved from one track to another.

Now, teachers collect and use data in a more dynamic way allowing for targeted instruction and flexible grouping. At the beginning of the year, Oxford teachers spent a day looking at data on returning students and planning strategies for the coming year. Teachers continue to assess student progress, differentiate instruction, and form and re-form groups of students so that all students meet their



Kindergarten teacher Millie Litten does a one-on-one learning assessment with a student.

potential. Frequent assessments help teachers recognize academic need, plan interventions, monitor progress, and modify lessons.

All incoming kindergartners are assessed for their readiness to learn, as are students who transfer into the district mid-year. Ms. Litten recalled with pleasure a student who came to kindergarten not knowing her letter shapes and sounds. Ms. Litten worked with this student and she mastered her letters in record time.

In the past, that child might have been misunderstood as one with limited ability. "Some children simply haven't been exposed to literacy before coming to school," she said. "Students can make rapid progress when they receive lessons that have been targeted to meet their needs." 📖

Heights Graduate Profile



Ashley Guy
Noble '01
Monticello '08
Heights High '08

Junior at The Ohio State University

What's your major or degree? Double major in International Relations & Diplomacy and African Studies, minors in Spanish and Arabic.

What would be your dream job after graduation?

I'd like to be a diplomat or ambassador to the United Nations. I would love a job that allowed me to see the world and experience foreign cultures.

Do you have a favorite memory from Noble Elementary School?

My favorite memory from elementary school would have to be the fifth grade "Mars-ville" at Noble Elementary. We constructed planets and giant plastic bubbles that we could go in and out of while learning about the solar system.

What did you learn at Heights High that prepared you for college?

At Heights High, I learned how to work effectively with diverse groups of people. Heights High also prepared me academically for rigorous college courses.

What did you enjoy most at Heights?

I enjoyed the supportive and enthusiastic teachers at Heights. Heights High offers numerous classes and electives so I made sure to take advantage of classes like Symphony and advanced Spanish. I absolutely loved field hockey, lacrosse, AFS Club, and East Asian Club.

What advice would you give current Heights High students?

Stay focused and take advantage of the tools Heights High has to prepare its students for their endeavors after graduation. It is up to each student to utilize these tools and have good relationships with teachers and other students. Enjoy your high school experience and continue being successful so you can have a good time in college and beyond! 📖

Oxford's Energy and Generosity are Contagious

By Florence D'Emilia

"Energy is contagious," said Sean Sullivan, an elementary science resource teacher. "We have a great group of outgoing children who create a lot of spirit." At Oxford Elementary, Mr. Sullivan and fellow Student Council advisor Karen Rego look for ways to get the entire school community involved in celebrations and service projects.

Members of Student Council and Dance Club thoroughly enjoyed rehearsing and then performing at the 2011 Black History Month Celebration. Students took their positions on stage as Michael Jackson's "Billy Jean" filled the auditorium. Mr. Sullivan called out instructions and students began dancing. As that song ended, a student slid a desk center stage, put on a pair of sun glasses and readied himself to portray Ray Charles at the piano. Three girls took their places as backup singers and dancers. Next, Mr. Sullivan joined the students on stage and began showing them the steps for the disco hit "Car Wash."


The celebration attracted so many families to Oxford that additional tables and chairs were needed. The event also included a performance by the Honor



Oxford Student Council and Dance Club students rehearsing for the Martin Luther King Celebration.

Choir, trivia games and prizes. "Oxford brings families closer together through events like the Black History Month Celebration and the annual Mother-Son and Father-Daughter Dances," said Carolyn Algee, co-president of PTA.

The Oxford community is known for its generosity, and was recognized last year with a Blue Ribbon Award for its commitment to Providence House,

Cleveland's emergency shelter for infants through 5-year-olds that Oxford has supported since 1997. This year, Student Council spearheaded an effort that resulted in two truckloads of supplies (diapers, baby formula, and clothing) and raised more than \$300 for Providence House. "I knew Oxford was special when our family first came here eight years ago," said Mrs. Algee "and that's why I'm happy to volunteer." 

Mighty Males Pursue Excellence


By Florence D'Emilia

Teens seldom treasure neckties, but the Mighty Males of Monticello are an exception. Each new member receives a simple black tie with the golden M³ at an induction pinning ceremony. This year, one third of the male students at Monticello Middle School are proud members of this organization, started in 2003, to encourage excellence in academics, civility, and service.

"We want all of our male students to apply and participate," said Brian Williams, Assistant Principal and one of the Mighty Males' advisors. Strong academics are an essential prerequisite to attending events. New members are eligible to apply each quarter if they are earning A's and B's in all classes. "Once a Mighty Male, always a Mighty Male, but students whose grades drop below our minimum cannot take part in our next quarter's activities," Williams explained. "When grades come out we have students rushing up to us excited to

say 'I'm active again!'" said Mr. Nobles, health teacher and advisor of Mighty Males.

In December, Mr. Brad Sellers, retired NBA player who graduated from Warrensville Heights High and Ohio State University, spoke to the Mighty Males about the importance of their education and the respect that one receives when they give their best effort.

The Mighty Males will mentor fifth graders at Noble, Oxford and Boulevard elementary schools once a month in February, March, April and May. This service project has a dual purpose: to boost achievement among the fifth graders, and to encourage them to join Mighty Males when they attend Monticello next year. "I enjoy being a Mighty Male because I am respected by my friends and teachers. I also understand that I am a leader and that much is expected of me," said Jamarius Davis, Monticello eighth grader. 



Mighty Males Jonathan Jackson and Miles Hawkins flank former NBA player Brad Sellers after Sellers spoke to the Mighty Males of Monticello about earning respect by working hard.

Don't Laugh – LOL Teaches Leadership

By Krista Hawthorne

What do you call a group of young women from Monticello Middle School who meet to do service projects, go to cultural events, and gather to hear speakers and to discuss issues of self-esteem? Ladies of Leadership (LOL)! Started in 2006 under the name Leading Ladies, LOL focuses on civility, leadership, and service.

Open to all girls at Monticello with a GPA of 2.5 or higher and positive attitudes and behaviors, Ladies of Leadership has 25 members this year. New members are welcomed each quarter.

"The girls lead this organization, not the advisors," explained Anna Gregory, Monticello teacher and an LOL advisor. For a service project, the girls chose the "Share-a-Night Campaign" and raised \$400 to help families who need to be near a critically ill child at a local hospital but cannot afford the \$20 cost of an overnight stay at the Ronald McDonald House.

A concert that LOL members,



Two Ladies of Leadership with club advisor and Monticello teacher Anna Gregory are welcomed to Ronald McDonald House to be recognized for their efforts to raise funds for the Share-a-Night Campaign.

advisors and parents attended provided an opportunity to dress up and practice formal social behavior. Recently, LOL invited a successful businesswoman to talk with them about operating her party planning business. At another meeting the group discussed their personal strengths and weaknesses, filling

out a worksheet and creating a graphic display of their character traits.

"Ladies of Leadership is a place where girls can be leaders and not be afraid to lead," explained Kyra Germany, 8th grader at Monticello. "It's about independence and helpfulness, and it's fun." 📌

Three Big Changes Boost Achievement

By Krista Hawthorne

Three big changes in the CH-UH middle school curriculum have made "improvements in teaching quality and access to learning," says Brian Sharosky, Principal of Monticello Middle School. Block scheduling, additional foreign language courses, and daily teacher meetings are producing better prepared students and a more unified team of teachers.

This year, middle school students were offered four new options to explore foreign languages: Introduction to Spanish and French I and II, which expand access to foreign language study and prepare students to succeed in high school foreign language courses.

During these foreign languages classes, core subject teachers meet with their content area peers. In the past, teachers would squeeze in occasional quick meetings during lunch or after school. Now, with daily meetings, teachers have time to discuss the depth of knowledge students need on each concept and how to present the material at the required level. "Then we can come back together to discuss student responses, including any data we've gathered from practice problems, and appropriately design our next lessons," explained Monticello math teacher Brad Hallam.

In addition to the daily teacher meetings, block scheduling leads to more effective class time. Previously, 42-minute classes made it difficult to teach a complete lesson. Each interrupted lesson required a re-introduction of the new concept leaving less time for students to make progress. This year, with 87-minute blocks for English/Language Arts and Math, teachers have time to introduce a new concept, give several examples, ask students questions to assess their understanding, and allow time to practice the new concept in the same class period.

Each of these three changes is positive on its own. Together, they create opportunities that have substantially improved the learning opportunities for our sixth, seventh and eighth graders district-wide. "The combination of adequate time for authentic collaboration and more classroom time to implement a common and viable curriculum has allowed us the opportunity to demonstrably increase student achievement" said Mr. Hallam. "These are very positive changes." 📌



Members of the Heights High Jazz Ensemble perform at Severance Hall as part of the Reaching Musical Heights concert April 11.

AVID Students Determined to Succeed

cleveland heights high school

By Krista Hawthorne

"AVID is a college prep class," explains Heights High freshman Shailynn Strowder. "It helps me stay on track." Advancement Via Individual Determination (AVID), an elective class for credit, gives support to students with mid-range GPAs (2.0 – 3.5) to improve their academic record and prepare for college. Students sign a contract accepting responsibility for their learning by taking rigorous college prep courses, using a daily planner and maintaining a well-organized AVID binder.

AVID teachers Shawn Washington and Mark Sack work together to support their students. "Some students face daily challenges that distract them from their school work," explained Ms. Washington. "One student is frequently absent due to a chronic illness. Others just need extra support to work to their potential."

Classrooms are stocked with textbooks from most classes. On the blackboard are reminders of upcoming tests or project deadlines. Walls feature samples of student work and diagrams of interests, life goals, and plans for achieving them. "They have a lot to read each night, papers to write, and projects to do. If they get behind it's easy to get discouraged. We help them



Tuesdays and Thursdays AVID students work with college tutors for academic support.


figure out how to make it all work," added Mr. Sack.

On Mondays and Wednesdays, AVID classes follow a curriculum of learning and study strategies, advanced reading and writing skills, higher level inquiry and thinking processes, collaboration, and time management skills. Tuesdays and Thursdays, AVID students work in small groups with tutors who are college

graduates. On Fridays, students do service projects, listen to speakers, or tour college campuses.

College is continuously discussed. A student recently explained that her parents thought a college degree in fashion would not lead to a good job. Her tutor, who minored in fashion merchandising, discussed the realities of building a career in the fashion industry. "Don't think you'll graduate, jump into a job with a major designer and go to New York and Paris," she cautioned. "It takes a lot of time drawing, sewing, and doing basic work before you get a good job."

One hundred students are enrolled in AVID at the high school and grades 7 and 8 at Roxboro Middle. In its fourth year at Heights High, AVID will have its first eleven graduates in June 2011, and all are headed to college. AVID will expand next year to include more students from the high school and students at all of the three middle schools.

Mary Catherine Swanson, a high school English teacher in California, began developing the strategies of AVID in 1980. AVID is currently in more than 3,600 schools in the US and 15 other countries. 

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