



Preston Plains Middle School

Second Marking Period Newsletter - December 2019

Happy Holidays!

'Tis the season! The fall has been busy at PPMS, and now that the holiday season is here, things are even busier! PPMS Jazz Band and Chorus will be spreading holiday cheer this December around town and at both schools. The Jazz Ensemble will perform at the Preston Public Library on Thursday, December 19th. Both the Jazz Band and the PPMS Chorus will perform at PVMS on December 20th. During November and December, PPMS students were able to work with a visiting artist, Craig Norton, thanks to a Community Foundation of Eastern CT grant. Mr. Norton engaged students in visual storytelling workshops using digital cameras. The 7th grade class raised over \$2,000 at their Pasta Dinner Fundraiser on November 14th. Proceeds will be applied to the cost of the class trip to New York City in the spring. Planning for more fundraisers to benefit the 8th grade class are already underway.

Wishing our Preston Plains families a joyous holiday season and a very happy New Year!!

NEWS FROM PPMS DEPARTMENTS

Superintendent's News:

By Dr. Roy Seitsinger

Education is not an expense. It is an investment! LBJ

During this holiday season, we always remind ourselves of our *Palm* philosophy remembering those we love and our desire to create a learning environment for all students that allows them to “skip” down the hallways of our schools engaged, comfortable, and ready to learn. To achieve this goal we must defend our capacity to provide learning experiences that encourage the best in our students.

As we move forward into the New Year, we will be focusing on several important areas. (1) A budget that supports the educational standards of our community. This year the budget process has begun a month earlier. We hope that our continued transparent process will build voter support. (2) A focus on science district-wide, and especially on successfully remodeling our science rooms at the middle school. (3) We are encouraging students to participate in the School Culture survey starting in December. In the New Year, there will also be staff, parent, and community surveys regarding school climate and culture.

We always welcome and need your support. Look for ways to get involved. Watch for information about this coming year through our web page, Blackboard Connect messages, Kitchen Table talk opportunities, newsletters, and new Facebook Fan page coming after the holidays.

We wish you and all those you love the very best of the holiday season. Happy New Year!

Stay warm. Be safe.

PPMS Main Office News

by Dr. Ivy Davis-Tomczuk, Principal

The second marking period encompasses the winter months (December, January, February). As a result, we can have many weather-related interruptions. When school is cancelled, we maintain the schedule we would have if school had not been cancelled (i.e., when school is cancelled on a B day, we will have a B day schedule when school resumes). As a result, teachers plans and student expectations for assignments and assessments are not interrupted. If homework was due on a day when school is cancelled, it will be due the day we return to school.

Speaking of weather-related cancellations, the recent three days when school was canceled will come out of the Storm Day Options included in the 2019-2020 school calendar. At this point, school will be in session on Tues., February 18th, Thurs., May 21st, and Fri., May 22nd.

We started a new dismissal procedure recently. Instead of dismissing students to their buses through the cafeteria, students are dismissed from their last period class. We still assemble in the cafeteria in the morning on arrival where students put their cell phones and other electronics into envelopes that are now secured in the office for the school day. Students pick up their devices at the end of the day in the school entryway as they pass through to board their buses. A staff person monitors students as they pick up their devices, and it has been noted that many students are not retrieving phones. While it is possible that students are not bringing their devices to school, it is also possible that students are not placing their phones in the envelopes at the beginning of the school day. Should your child carry a cell phone to

school, please encourage him or her to follow our school electronics policy (included in the Student Handbook at the front of each student's agenda book). If students access their cell phones during the school day, they risk having the phone confiscated and held for parent pick-up.

Lastly, we began implementing a new school-wide schedule on Monday, December 16th (notice went home to parents on December 9th) when we welcomed Mrs. April Abrantes to our staff. Mrs. Abrantes now teaches Spanish at PPMS while serving as a coordinator for English Learner students. This new position enables all PPMS students who participate in Spanish to have three Spanish classes per week; it also enables additional academic support classes for students who are exempted from Spanish instruction by PPT or 504 plan. The letter provides more specific information and is posted to our school webpage. We are grateful for this new position and what it offers to all students, and we are excited that Mrs. Abrantes is now part of the PPMS Team!

Nurse's News

By Ms. Jacquie Burzycki, PPMS Nurse

What is Child Health?

We all want nothing more for our children than to be healthy and happy, but how is health achieved despite the increase in independence of the middle school child? The World Health Organization defines Child health as:

"Child health is a state of physical, mental, intellectual, social and emotional well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. Healthy children live in families, environments, and communities that provide them with the opportunity to reach their fullest developmental potential".

Achieving and maintaining health requires continuous efforts in promoting a healthy lifestyle. Middle school students are generally in control of what they put in their mouths, however, they don't always know how to make healthy choices. Your middle school child is growing faster than ever and will require vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants, from a variety of nutrient-dense foods, including fruits, vegetables, lean protein, dairy, and whole grains. Some helpful ways to achieve these goals include:

1. **Go to the grocery store together.** Read labels and nutritional information. Make it fun. Staples in the kitchen should include 100% whole grains, fruits and veggies, low fat dairy, poultry, fish, and nuts and nut butters.
2. **Keep healthy options on hand.** Snacks may include whole grain crackers, popcorn, string cheese, hummus dip and cut veggies, Greek yogurt with apple slices, nuts and dried fruit.
3. **Involve your child in cooking and planning meals.** Middle school students still respond well to hands on learning activities. For more information go to: www.childrens.com/health-wellness/4-meal-planning-tips-for-busy-parents.
4. Last but not least. **Lead by example.**

Have fun and enjoy your good health!



Tips for parents to help their child manage Anxiety...

Part II.

A lot of kids say they get anxious during certain social situations. It may be when speaking up in class or making a phone call or just trying something new. If anxiety is getting in the way, there are some things you can do to help your student manage their anxiety.

(Following information is gathered from <https://childmind.org>)

1. **The goal is not to eliminate anxiety, but to help a child manage it.** The most helpful way is to help them learn to tolerate their anxiety and function as well as they can. Only then will anxiety decrease over time.
2. **Don't encourage them to avoid things** just because it may make them feel better in the short term. Removing things that they are afraid of, can encourage that coping mechanism.
3. **Express positive but realistic expectations.** A parent can't promise that their child's fears are unrealistic, that they will always be successful, but you can let them know that they will be ok, and that they can manage. Facing your fears, builds confidence over time.
4. **Respect their feelings, but don't empower them.** It is important to understand that validating someone's feelings doesn't always mean agreement. You want to listen and be empathetic, help your child understand what they are anxious about, and encourage them to feel that they can face their fears.
5. **Don't ask leading questions.** Example, "Are you worried about the Gym test?", rather "How are you feeling about the Gym test"?
6. **Try to keep the anticipatory period short.** When we are afraid of something, the hardest time is really before we do it. So a rule of thumb for parents is to try and eliminate or reduce the anticipatory period.
7. **Think things through with your child.** For some kids having a plan can reduce the uncertainty in a healthy, effective way.
8. **Try to model healthy ways of handling anxiety!**

(In the next Newsletter, Part III, I will address "How we can help here at school")

Department News:

[English/Language Arts](#)

By Ms. Melissa Durkee, Mr. Christopher Pickett & Mrs. Heather Wolf

In Ms. Durkee's 6th and 7th grade classes, we will continue to work with Informational Texts as we transition to exploring similar standards related to Literary Texts. Students will once again examine Key Ideas and Details, Craft & Structure, and Integration of Knowledge & Ideas but this time with an emphasis on reading fictional pieces. Simultaneously, students will further develop their understanding of both informational and literary text through reading assignments posted on *Readworks.org*, as well as maintain their practice of grammar skills using *NoRedInk.com*. Students will also advance their writing abilities, applying techniques they learned while writing narrative pieces to both informational and argumentative essays. Throughout the year, we will continue to utilize the online program *Amplify ELA* to integrate all the reading, writing, speaking, and listening standards associated with ELA.

In review of the first marking period, Mr. Pickett's 7th grade completed units studying character development, author's craft, and prediction skills through our model texts of *Red Scarf Girl* and *A Raisin in the Sun*. Students have balanced their studies between Amplify, our online ELA program, as well as *NoRedInk.com*. In the coming marking period, 7th graders will be analyzing works that study the human brain and developing their non-fiction comprehension and annotation skills. Following that, students will be shifting gears into poetry and the study of Edgar Allan Poe.

8th graders in Mr. Pickett's classroom have studied several autobiographical and biographical accounts through the first marking period. Beginning with Roald Dahl and ending with Benjamin Franklin, students have studied non-fiction narrative skills, as well as compared both the biography and autobiography of Benjamin Franklin. In addition to studying the life of Franklin, students analyzed his style of argumentation and have applied it to several pieces of work. Following those studies, students will be first seeing how literature and science collide in science writing as well as science fiction writing. After that, students will be reading about the works of Frida Kahlo and how art and language often intersect.

In Mrs. Wolf's 6th and 8th grade classes, students will delve into many of the same features as explained above. Students in 6th grade started Amplify ELA, which is helping them focus their writing. The new year will bring persuasive writing and using excerpts from Roald Dahl's, *Boy*, to enhance their writing and reading. Students have accounts in Readworks and NoRedInk with assignments to complete. All of their assignments will be posted to the Google Classroom page.

Mathematics

By Ms. Melissa Durkee & Mrs. Laila Griffin

In Ms. Durkee's 6th & 7th grade classes, we are finishing up our work with calculating percentages before moving on to The Number System unit which will further develop skills with fractions and decimals, working with integers, and understanding how these rational numbers relate on number lines and the coordinate plane. This unit will transition into an Algebra Unit where students will write and simplify algebraic expressions, as well as learn how to apply algebraic properties to write and solve equations and inequalities. Throughout the year, students are encouraged to practice these and other math skills through related assignments posted on *Prodigygame.com* and *Aleks.com*.

Mrs. Griffin's 7th & 8th grade classes have been focusing in on the Real Number System. The main focus of this unit in 7th grade is on understanding the relationships between the multiple forms of rational numbers. They've been working diligently converting fractions to their equivalent terminating and repeating decimal values and vice versa. The students have also become quite experienced at plotting these values and locating them on number lines. Going forward, they will extend calculating to all rational numbers, maintaining the properties of operations and by viewing negative numbers in terms of everyday contexts, all very valuable skills.

In 8th grade, students have expanded their understanding of the real number system to include square roots as rational numbers and estimating non-perfect squares in the irrational subset. Furthermore, they will learn how to classify all real numbers into the many subsets that exist. As the trimester continues, students will extend this knowledge to working with radicals and integer exponents with a focus on making sense of real-life applications of the Pythagorean Theorem and how to compute numbers when written in scientific notation.

Science

By Mrs. Pia Perry & Mrs. Jenny Sevigny

In 6th grade science, we are practicing and honing our observation skills and learning how to formulate questions about phenomena we observe. Being able to ask and design questions will prepare them to challenge the conclusions they draw from their models or scientific investigations this school year. Our first unit explores the sun-moon-earth relationship in order to learn about the forces that keep the parts of our solar system together.



In 7th grade science we are wrapping up our unit on Thinking Like a Scientist and will be delving into characteristics of living things and determining what living things are made of!

In 8th grade science we are catapulting our way through the scientific method and will begin our investigations into the Forces of Flight. We will be working together to figure out how and why planes fly!

Social Studies

By Mrs. Pia Perry, Mr. Chet Stefanowicz & Mrs. Vicky Spicer

In Mrs. Perry's 6th grade Social Studies class, we are beginning a unit on the vast continent of Africa. We will study Africa's physical geography, environment and resources, and human geography in order to gain an understanding of some of the intricate political systems in Africa today.



In 7th Grade Social Studies with Mrs. Spicer we just wrapped our unit on Ancient Greek's early beginnings, and Greek Mythology. We are also completing small group projects where we are reading several of Aesop's fables (stories with a moral/ lesson) and then working to adapt that story into modern times. Upon return from Winter Break we will begin our unit on Rome where we are covering topics such as geography and the rise of Rome, including its legendary origins of twin brothers, Romulus and Remus. We are covering the early republic, making connections between government and society of Ancient Rome and the modern day American three branches of government.

In 8th Grade Social Studies with Mrs. Spicer we are full force into our unit on American Government, understanding how the government functions under the 3 Branches, our rights and responsibilities as citizens, including taking a citizenship test and seeing if we could pass! From the return after Winter Break we will begin our unit on Westward Expansion, starting with a detailed understanding of Lewis and Clark and their great journey to discover uncharted territories. Then we will begin debating Manifest Destiny—was it our “god given” right to conquer the land from coast to coast, or did we just “bully” our way to the Pacific? We'll be discussing the difficult topics of slavery, and the unfair treatment and removal of natives in this section.

Student Support Services

By Mrs. Jennifer Foltz and Mrs. Heather Wolf

DID YOU KNOW?

- Missing 10% (or about 18 days) increases the chance that your child will not read or master math at the same level as their peers.
- By 6th grade, absenteeism is one of three signs that a student may drop out of high school.
- By 9th grade, regular and high attendance is a better predictor of graduation rates than 8th grade scores.

These and many other facts can be found at www.attendanceworks.org. While illnesses are bound to happen this time of year, we ask that you work to ensure your child makes every effort to attend school regularly.

Instrumental Music & Band

Mr. Joe Durfee

It has been my privilege to teach instrumental music to all band students! Throughout the first half of this school year, students have used their class time to thoroughly practice their music. I strongly encourage students to listen to themselves and make decisions that will increase skills and develop their

tone quality. It is a joy to give one-on-one instruction to each student during lessons. I am able to either listen to their performance and give helpful feedback or play along beside them and encourage healthy goal-setting. As the year progresses, the Concert Band will analyze and perform intense musical repertoire while also balancing the agenda with lighter selections for the Spring Concert.

General Music & Chorus

By Miss Emma Lotreck

I have had the privilege, in the last weeks of the first trimester, of beginning to learn about the students in general music and chorus! As we start the second trimester, students are developing their rhythmic skills, the first steps in understanding and reading music. Throughout the semester, we will be working on students' listening skills as it applies to music. What are you hearing? Do you enjoy what you hear? What do you think makes the sounds you're hearing?

Español

By Mr. Chet Stefanowicz

In 6th grade Spanish I am having a great time getting to know my new students. We are delving into the human body at the moment and will be working on that through much of the first trimester. We will learn the parts of the body as well as bones, muscles and organs. We have lots of fun games, songs, and activities to help us through this process.

In 7th grade Spanish we did a quick review unit and are currently working on our five senses. We are reading a science packet explaining how our senses work and doing fun activities to work through how our senses work.

In 8th grade Spanish we have begun working on some traditional conjugation processes to help prepare students for high school language classes. We are learning the present indicative tense and will continue with this for most of the first trimester.

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Preston Plains Middle School
1 Route 164, Preston, CT 06365
860-889-3831
