

Kaleidoscope

A Publication of the Katonah-Lewisboro School District



LITERATURE CLASS PROMPTS GENDER ROLES DIALOGUE

Discussions in Dr. Marguerite Hefferon's new Advanced Studies in Literature: Women in Literature and the Arts course range from the psychology of self-identity to the effects Disney princesses have on young girls.

Dr. Hefferon heard several students engage in discussion about feminism and gender roles last year, which prompted the introduction of this new English elective. The course offers both regular credit and honors credit options, as well as the opportunity for students to take an Advanced Placement exam in May.

"The course explores images of the female in the literary and artistic traditions, considering texts from writers and artists across multiple centuries as well as across boundaries of culture, social hierarchy and race," she said.

But before the class's 17 students delve into dissecting literature and artwork, they are in deep discussion about gender roles in modern society, seeking

to answer questions such as "How does one develop a personal identity?" and "What are the developmental implications of living in a gendered world?"

Senior Matthew Salton is one of two males taking the course. "I wanted to focus on a new perspective," he said, likening the class format to that of a college course.

Leah Walsh, also a senior, said the class discussions have led her to step back and examine herself. "It's taught me a lot about social issues," she said. "It has made me aware of the things I do, and I am questioning my actions more."

Dr. Hefferon said the course will include a trip to the Museum of Modern Art, where students will view pieces through the lens of gender identity, and a close reading of several classic works of literature, including *Antigone*, *Medea*, *Jane Eyre* and *Wide Sargasso Sea*, along with an analysis of William Shakespeare's works and his female characters.

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How did WE get here?

Why is testing dominating so much of the conversation around education today? The use of assessments has always been integral to the educational process. Used effectively, assessments let us know how students are progressing, give us feedback on our curriculum and instruction, and don't have to disrupt learning. So what has changed?

At our first Board of Education meetings this year, I presented a history of education in our country and, in particular, of the standards movement of the last 30 years. The 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, claimed our public schools were failing. That report and others that followed point to the great discrepancy of educational opportunity based largely on where children live. Understandably, the national push has been to equalize those opportunities. As a result, we are familiar with the Common Core standards and with mandatory standardized tests in grades three through eight and high school. Both are direct outgrowths of that depiction of failing schools and the push for equity. The standardized

tests are part of an accountability system intended to identify those schools and districts most in need of reform. (Whether the standards movement has helped those most in need is another letter for another day.)

Standardized tests have never identified Katonah-Lewisboro as a failing district, but we exist within that larger system. Those pushing for equity across the state and nation believe that common expectations and standardized tests are the best way to measure the larger system's progress. We are granted no exemption, despite our outstanding graduation and college admission results.

Standardized tests have grown in number in other areas, too. The College Board's SAT, first administered in the 1920s, was also billed as a mechanism to achieve equity. The PSAT, a practice for the SAT, was added in 1960, around the same time as the ACT. Today the College Board also offers the various SAT subject tests, the PSAT 10, and most recently the PSAT 8/9. Colleges began requiring these tests for admission in the 1930s, but today a growing number of colleges

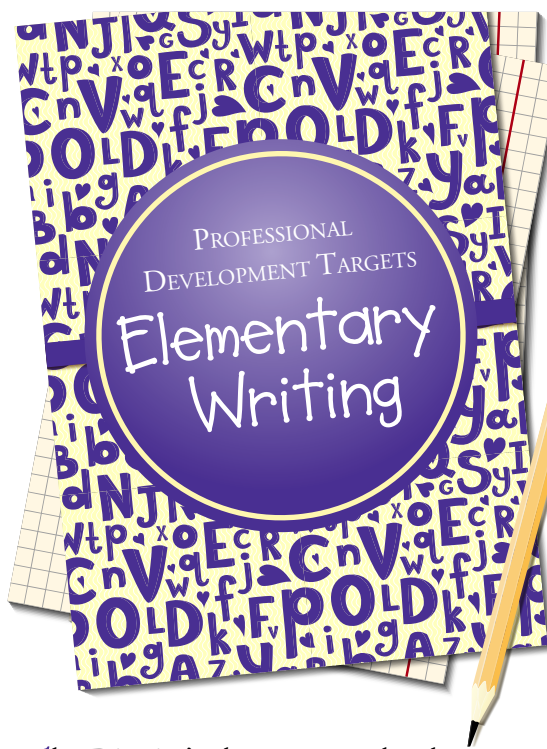
are becoming "test optional."

We can expect these trends around us to continue in one direction or another. Our Congress seems poised to reauthorize the No Child Left Behind Act (and give it a new name). It appears our political leaders may be ready to start de-emphasizing, at least to some extent, the reliance on standardized test results. Exactly how that plays out remains to be seen.

Here at home, our emphasis will remain on strengthening curriculum and instruction to best support the needs and interests of Katonah-Lewisboro's children, to provide experiences our students will find meaningful, engaging and memorable, and to help them develop the skills necessary for whatever futures they choose. If we do our work well, the standardized test results should take care of themselves and need not dominate our conversations or the daily lives of our students.

Sincerely,

Andrew Selesnick



A K-5 Literacy Committee was formed during the 2014-15 academic year, led by Increase Miller and Katonah Elementary School Principals Kerry Ford and Cristy Harris.

“The teachers had identified writing as an area of study where we needed to make some refinements to the curriculum,” said Ford.

Added Harris, “With the rollout of Lucy Calkins writing initiatives, we wanted professional development to support the implementation of these units of study.”

The discussions during the Teachers College visit focused on opinion writing. “We wanted the teachers to have a better understanding of how to teach opinion and persuasive writing,” said Ford. “With this better understanding, they will be able to



teach it more effectively and foster opinion writing in the classroom.”

During the school year, teachers will be focusing on a number of writing techniques and approaches, including targeting individual, small-group and whole-class needs; utilizing a Balanced Literary approach; creating a physical environment conducive to the workshop model; continually reviewing, analyzing and evaluating student writing and data; and implementing Foundations in kindergarten through third grade and Wordly Wise in grades four and five.

The District's elementary school teachers took the next steps in furthering the writing curriculum by participating in a professional development session on Oct. 23 in conjunction with consultants from Columbia University Teachers College.

Grades K-6 Pilot **NEW MATH UNITS**

The three elementary schools and the sixth-grade classes at John Jay Middle School are in the beginning stages of rolling out mathematics pilots from three different companies – Envision, Everyday Math and Math in Focus.

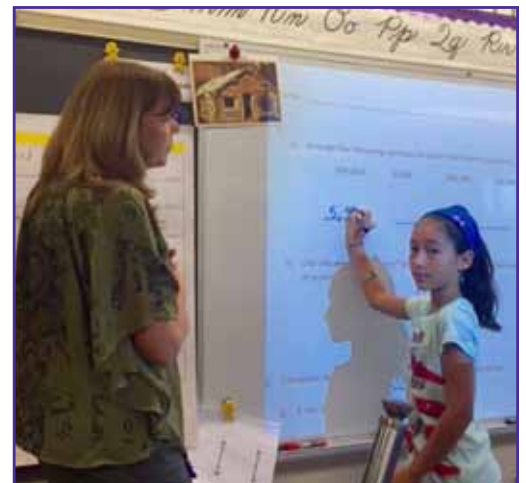
With few exceptions, the pilots will be taught in one class per grade in each school, with the other classes continuing to use EngageNY materials. The pilot materials were provided to the district at no cost from the three companies, and the teachers involved participated in a full day of professional development before introducing the units in the classroom.

“The teachers will administer an assessment at the end of the unit,

take a look to see if there were details that were not addressed with their students [in relation to the EngageNY curriculum], and make sure they teach the children those pieces,” said Meadow Pond Elementary School Principal Carolann Castellano, who spearheaded the effort. “The students in the pilot will not be missing anything that they are supposed to know.”

The teachers at each grade level were able to choose the unit in each of the pilot programs that they thought would be most appropriate for them to pilot between November and the end of January. “Wherever that unit falls in that grade level’s pacing guide for the year, that is where they will substitute the

pilot unit for the EngageNY unit,” Castellano said. “At the beginning of February, we will begin taking data from the pilots to evaluate strengths and concerns. We will then go to the Board of Education with our recommendations.”





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MS Students Embrace Healthy Eating

Seventh-grade students in Melissa Brady's Home and Careers class showcased healthy eating habits for a "Nutrition Challenge" contest judged by two dietitians from Northern Westchester Hospital.



Amy Rosenfeld and Elisa Bremner spoke with students last year about nutrition and the benefits of certain foods, and even demonstrated how easy and delicious homemade smoothies can be during an interactive lesson. The duo returned to John Jay Middle School on Sept. 11 to acknowledge the winners of the contest and present them with certificates of achievement.

"You all did a fabulous job, and it was really hard to choose [the winning projects]," said Rosenfeld.

Bremner and Rosenfeld recognized projects in three categories: Most Unique, Best at Conveying the "Better in Balance"

Message and Most Usable/Workshop Friendly.

The Most Unique group winners wrote lyrics for a rap song about nutrition, which they recorded and shared with the judges. The students recognized for conveying the "Better in Balance" message created a poster that depicted how to make a well-balanced wrap with ingredients from all of the food groups. The Most Usable group created poster- and placemat-sized sheets to help children understand how to build a healthy plate.

"You really showed all the components of what a healthy meal should look like," Rosenfeld told the students.

Save the Dates: Fall Productions

"A Murder Is Announced"

Thursday, Nov. 12 at 7 p.m.,
Friday, Nov. 13 at 7 p.m., and
Saturday, Nov. 14 at 1 and 7 p.m.
(Senior Citizens Luncheon at 12
p.m.) at John Jay Middle School

"The Cherry Orchard"

Thursday, Nov. 19 at 7 p.m.,
Friday, Nov. 20 at 7 p.m., and
Saturday, Nov. 21 at 1 and
7 p.m. at John Jay High School