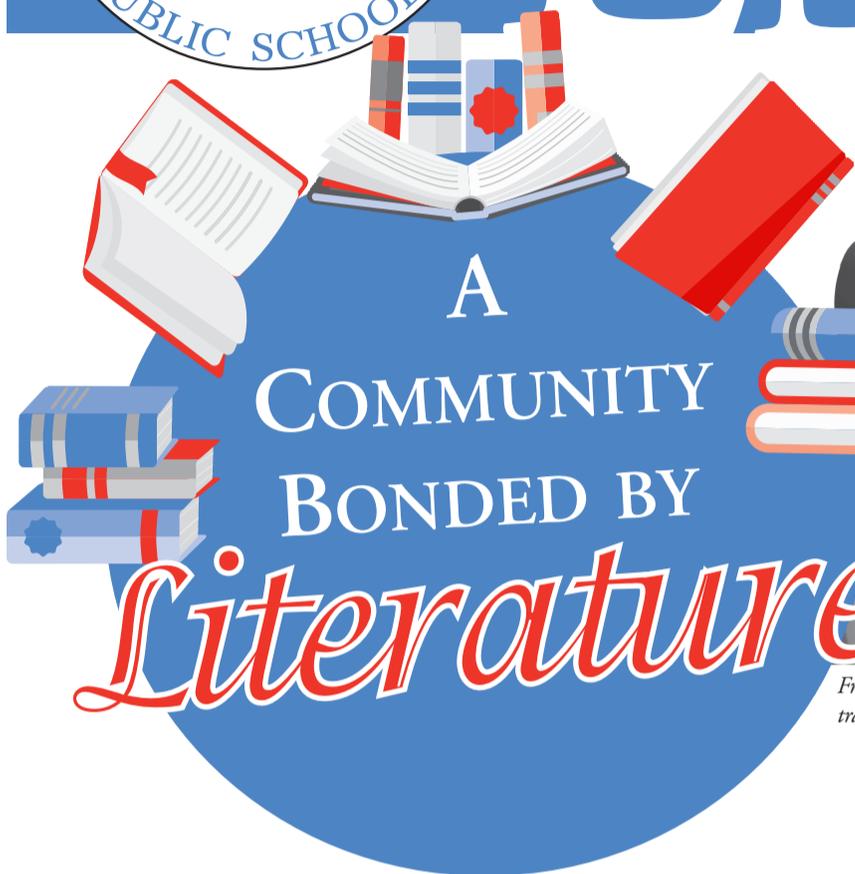




# Levittown LEADER



A  
COMMUNITY  
BONDED BY

*Literature*



From left: Northside fifth-graders Nevaeh Motes, Jada Errico and Matthew Silvestro worked on a character trait lesson based on their summer reading book, "Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library" by Chris Grabenstein.

From reading and writing to college preparation, English language learning is soaring throughout the Levittown Public Schools. Leading the initiatives is Kerin Slattery, director of English Language Arts, who joined the Levittown family in 2015, and her supportive team of educators. Ms. Slattery's passion for learning and enhancing student experiences in English both inside and outside of the classroom have not gone unnoticed, as she has spread her positivity and ideas to administrators, faculty and teachers, bringing together the Levittown community and creating a collaborative group of passionate educators who support student success.

Just this year, the district has been recognized for the exceptional work that is being done in the English department, as administrators

and teachers have represented the Levittown Public Schools at prestigious conferences and paved the way for other districts by sharing unique program and curriculum initiatives, such as the Summer Reading Extravaganza.

The Summer Reading Extravaganza is a collaborative program that the district takes pride in each year. Creating engaged readers is no easy task, and Ms. Slattery is determined to get students excited about books, particularly during the summer months when school is out. She established Levittown's Summer Reading Extravaganza in 2015 for middle school students entering grades 6-8, which expanded the following summer with a Summer Reading Extravaganza for incoming fifth-graders. The Summer Reading

Extravaganza celebrates literature and ties into the school curriculum, with fun activities and challenges along the way.

"We want students to engage in the text, have thoughtful discussions and be a reader," Ms. Slattery said.

The program, which prides itself on the motto, "One Book, One Family, One Community," not only connects students from the different schools in the district, but also creates bonds among administrators, teachers and members of the Levittown Public Library. The library's partnership with the district has blossomed since the Summer Reading Extravaganza was initiated, and the relationship between the public library and the district is stronger than ever.

As always, the district strives to find new ways for its students to flourish as they journey through their academic careers and look to the future. At the high school level, two new interesting and challenging courses, Monsters and Heroes in Literature and The College Writer,

were introduced at the start of the 2018-2019 school year to prepare high school seniors for college. Both Division Avenue High School and MacArthur High School also offer College Board's Advanced Placement Capstone Seminar and Advanced Placement Capstone Research for those who are motivated to challenge themselves with college-level work. These rigorous courses are co-taught by two different subject area teachers so students get the full academic experience and support that they need.

There is no stopping Ms. Slattery and her colleagues as they seek new ways to reach students and help them reach their utmost potential. The English department's newest initiative is to successfully instill the importance of grammar back in students and train teachers to teach grammar in new and innovative ways. There is no limit to what students throughout the Levittown Public Schools can achieve in the worlds of reading, writing and storytelling.

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## Building Readers at the Elementary Level

Similar to the middle school level, the elementary Summer Reading Extravaganza encourages fifth-graders to read the same book during the summer months. This past summer, incoming fifth-graders read "Escape from Mr. Lemoncello's Library" by Chris Grabenstein, a hit among many of the students.

Before summer recess, both elementary and middle school students participate in a book launch to kick off the extravaganza.

"I believe the launch helps in creating the buzz that leaves students very eager to get their copy of the book and begin reading, which is what our goal is - to create the desire to read and cultivate a culture of reading and discussions," said Michelle Kelly, elementary education director.

A committee of about 20 teachers, faculty members, administrators, social workers and guidance counselors read three book options, analyze them and conduct research to pick one that they feel will reach the most students and fit into the curriculum. The district provides the books the students are challenged to read.

Teachers at both the elementary and middle school level incorporate their respective books into their lessons once the new school year begins, and students reference the book throughout the year.

## The Freedom to Choose

At the high school level, students can enroll in English courses about which they are passionate.

"What we're trying to do in the English department is give more choices to students," Ms. Slattery said. "We want to give them more options to guide their own pathway of learning."

The College Writer and Monsters and Heroes in Literature are two new courses offered for high school seniors. The College Writer allows students to view themselves as authors as they dive into mentor texts and explore the craft and styles of great writers. With these skills, the students reflect on their own lives and prepare their college essay. For seniors who prefer to analyze and read literature, Monsters and Heroes in Literature is a unique course that enables them to examine these various characters and how they have evolved in literature.

The district also offers College Board's Advanced Placement Capstone Seminar for sophomores and Advanced Placement Capstone Research for juniors and seniors. To enroll in the research course, a student must first complete the seminar course.

Created for motivated students who are not afraid to challenge themselves, the AP Capstone Seminar course allows select students to tackle different tasks during the school year with the help of an English and social studies teacher. The AP Capstone Research course takes students to the next level, allowing them to conduct in-depth research on a topic of their choice and master writing a college research paper.

## A Tale for Two Schools

During the summer months, as part of the district-sponsored Summer Reading Extravaganza, middle school students are encouraged to attend book discussions at the Levittown Public Library. Librarians, teachers, building administrators and high school National Honor Society students volunteer to facilitate interactive activities related to the book. The discussion days also allow students to meet new friends. This past summer, the fourth summer for the program, incoming sixth- through eighth-graders read "Because of Mr. Terupt," by Rob Buyea.

"It's very thought-provoking, and what I love about it is that kids are meeting each other in the community," Ms. Slattery said. "Especially the fifth-graders that are going into sixth grade. It can be a scary time for them as they prepare to enter a new school in September."

Students receive raffle tickets for visiting the library and extra points if they complete tasks on the district's Summer Reading Extravaganza webpage. Each year, raffle winners are chosen in the fall to meet their summer reading book author. The authors visit the students to speak about their careers, writing process, books and more.



Wisdom Lane Middle School raffle winners with author Rob Buyea (middle) during a winners' luncheon.

## A Source of Inspiration

Ms. Slattery and Jonas E. Salk Middle School librarian Kirsten Anderson shared the district's successful Summer Reading Extravaganza with Board members and superintendents across New York State as part of the New York State School Boards Association Conference in New York City on Oct. 27. The pair's presentation, "Strengthening Community Partnerships Through Literature," took attendees behind the scenes of the extravaganza.

"We spoke about who our key partnerships are and the fact that it's a real team effort with the support of the Board, central office, teachers, parents, local and school librarians and students," Ms. Slattery said. "You need to have enthusiasm to make it an extravaganza. There are many pieces to the puzzle."

The interactive presentation allowed attendees to look at artifacts from the program and reflect on their own district, thinking about how they could instill their own extravaganza on a scale that is right for them. The following month, Division Avenue High School English teacher Kristen Stritzl also proudly represented the district by presenting at the 2018 National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention. She presented "Teaching Civil Discourse in Uncivil Times" with Andrea Darbee from the Long Island Writing Project and Nassau Community College.

In their presentation, the two shared strategies to encourage communication on textual analysis, careful listening and respectful discussion practices.



Division Avenue High School English teacher Kristen Stritzl (left) presented at the 2018 National Council of Teachers of English Annual Convention. Pictured (L-R) with her co-presenter Andrea Darbee from the Long Island Writing Project, Long Island Writing Project Co-Director Heidi Atlas and Director Darshma Katwala.

## Gearing Towards Grammar

While speaking with college professors about deficiencies in student writing, Ms. Slattery and fellow English teachers discovered that a further emphasis on grammar is necessary. The district invited Amy Benjamin, a nationally recognized grammar consultant, to give teachers the proper tools needed to bring grammar back into their lessons in new ways. Benjamin has helped the district design a curriculum fit for grades 6-12 and began working with fifth-grade teachers in January.

"We're bringing grammar back in fun ways and using existing literature and mentor texts to teach writing and proper use of grammar," Ms. Slattery said. "Students are never going to get better at grammar if we don't bring it to their attention."

Ms. Slattery explained that she is excited about the hands-on manipulatives that will be introduced into the classroom for the younger grade levels, including story sticks which students can apply to their own writing.

# School Snapshots



Brandon Smith (left) and Holly Dukacz from Division Avenue High School are two of the four outstanding seniors from the district who were selected as semifinalists in the 2019 Coca-Cola Scholars Program.



Summit Lane Elementary School fifth-graders wrote letters to deployed service members as part of the district's participation in Nash FM 103.3's annual "100,000 Thank You" letter-writing campaign.



Abbey Action News team members Matthew Kerr and Keira Quigley with advisors Melissa Boos (left), Siobhan Schneider and Principal Dr. George Maurer (right), during their visit to the Long Island News Radio station to speak about the Abbey Action News program.

- For the first time in the district's history, students from both Division Avenue High School and General Douglas MacArthur High School were recognized as semifinalists in the Coca-Cola Scholars Program. Holly Dukacz and Brandon Smith from Division Avenue High School and Kimberly Mestizo and Colin Wu from General Douglas MacArthur High School were selected for the 2019 program.
- Sophomores Natalie Chua and Danielle Tear from Division Avenue High School and Nick Bonavita and Emily Zhang from General Douglas MacArthur High School will represent the district at the Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Seminar, to be held at Adelphi University in June.
- General Douglas MacArthur High School junior Rosita Bohorquez was awarded

\$1,101 and recognized as one of 12 student winners whose artwork will be featured in the Volunteers of Shanti Fund 2019 Peace Art Calendar.

- Forty of Division Avenue High School's top achievers from the Class of 2019 were commended during the school's annual Blue and Silver Luncheon.
- Seniors enrolled in the Gerald R. Claps Career and Technical Education Center heard from admission representatives from various institutes and colleges as part of GC Tech's college days.
- Jonas E. Salk Middle School seventh- and eighth-graders in Michele Witte's classes participated in the Tyler's Teddies Movement and raised approximately \$300 for the nonprofit organization KID (Kids in Danger), an organization dedicated to improving the safety of

children's products. The fundraiser gave students the opportunity to "pay it forward" during the holiday season.

- Wisdom Lane Middle School student-musicians showcased their holiday spirit by performing holiday music in the hallways leading up to the district's holiday recess.
- Kindergarten students from each of the six elementary schools visited the Outdoor Learning Center to explore weather.
- Members of the Abbey Lane Action News Team were featured on LI News Radio's "Spotlight on Long Island Schools" radio segment.
- Fifth-graders at Summit Lane Elementary School furthered their research on cells with the help of General Douglas MacArthur High School science teacher Dr. David Friedman. The fifth-grade classes visited MacArthur High School to participate in a hands-on lab with both plant and animal cells.

- Fourth-graders at Gardiners Avenue School learned how the Native Americans used nature and natural resources to meet their needs and wants.
- East Broadway Elementary School fifth-graders put on their dancing shoes for the school's third annual Dancing Classroom residency.
- Members of Lee Road Elementary School's Community Service Committee collected new and unwrapped toys to support the John Theissen Children's Foundation, brightening the holidays for sick and underprivileged children across Long Island.
- Northside Elementary School students in grades K-5 perfected their own circus acts with the help of the National Circus Project. With the support of the school's PTA, the National Circus Project allowed students to get involved in circus workshops while strengthening movement skills, patience and self-discipline.