

Millis Middle

January News

Winter 2019

*Everybody can be great because
everybody can serve.
You only need a heart full of grace
and a soul full of love.*

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Dear Middle School Families,

January 25 marks the midpoint of your child's school year! As we look back, we reflect on the progress made and, as we look forward, we know there is still work to be done.

As the world changes, and the skills and competencies required to be contributing members of a global society change, educators need to continuously adjust their practices. One of the changes we continue to work through in the Millis Public Schools is the shift toward focusing on learning standards as the driving factor in teaching, assessment, and grading.

Substantial research tells us that grading practices in public education haven't always accurately reflected learning and academic progress. Grading on a curve and including things like behavior and effort in grades are misleading. Accordingly, we are trying to do a better job of measuring student learning against specific targets or standards. In my seventeen years as a Millis educator, we have had some of the best conversations about teaching and learning during this transition and have made some very important adjustments to our practices, which benefit students. Yet, there is still work to be done.

We are in the messy middle of this transition, attempting to make continuous improvements based on feedback from parents, teachers, and students. Our goal is to have a clear and consistent system in place that ultimately is best for ALL students, including those who work at a faster pace and those who need different kinds of tasks and challenges. Therein lies the crux of personalized learning.

In the section below, you will find a brief summary of what is happening in your children's classes to help them meet priority learning standards in their courses in innovative ways!

Happenings - Project 351

On January 19th, 351 8th graders - one from each public school district in the state - gathered in Boston to celebrate the message of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Following a truly inspirational opening ceremony in Fanuel Hall, they disperse in groups to perform community service at locations around the city. This year, Millis was represented by our 8th grade Ambassador, Abena Ashiagbor and specially selected alumni, Joe Scolponeti and Teaghan LeBlanc, who were ambassadors in previous years. We are proud that they were able to represent our school community in the spirit of gratitude and service!



Student Shout-out!

Positive Office Referral

In an attempt to focus on the positive, notice the great things our students are doing, recognize exemplary work, effort, and progress, teachers are sending students to the office for good reasons! If you receive a call during the school day, don't assume it's from the nurse's office or for disciplinary reasons - it may just be a Shout-Out!

We appreciate the feedback we received on our parent survey. This, together with teacher reflections, can be summarized in four categories: confidence in traditional grading because it's what adults know, have experienced, and understand; a desire for more specific feedback and better tools to help parents know how students are doing; a feeling of inconsistency in implementation; and uncertainty around perceived outcomes, including the impact on motivation and students' transition to high school. We are addressing these areas through staff development and a working group of parents, teachers, and administrators. We also surveyed our students to have a complete picture and because the impact on students is what matters most. We will be sharing results with the School Committee on January 29 and will keep parents informed as we continue our work in this area.

As Millis parents and educators, we have the well-being of children in common. We have the challenge of making decisions that will meet the varying needs of all children. I invite you to contact your child's teachers or me to discuss the process of standards-based learning, assessment, and grading.

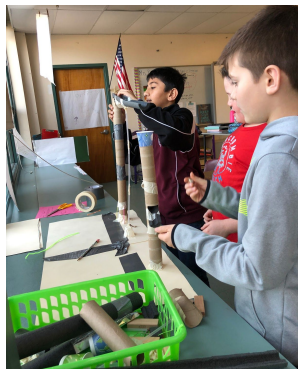
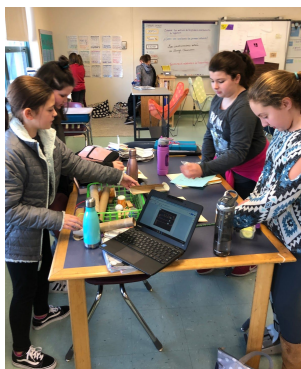
- Maureen Knowlton, Principal

Curriculum and Instruction -

Do you wonder what is going on in middle school classrooms? Ask your child about some of these learning experiences!

5th Grade

5th graders this year participated in the Global Read Aloud of Amal Unbound, which integrated ELA and Social Studies. They used online resources and technology to connect, communicate, and learn with classes in other states! During their Project Based Learning block they have worked through a Global Challenge, a Pollution Challenge, a Young Entrepreneur Challenge, and a Rube Goldberg Simple Machine Challenge. Their latest PBL experience involves creating their own civilizations. These challenges involve "just-in-time" learning, where children need to learn skills and content along the way as they work toward a culminating project. (Families are invited to come visit the 5th grade civilizations on February 6!)



Social-Emotional Learning

For many children, at different times during their Middle School career, the challenges of social-emotional development, relationships, social media, anxiety, and mental health overshadow their ability to focus on academic learning. Over the years, we have increasingly needed to support children in this area, while simultaneously ensuring their academic progress continues. Middle School has many SEL focused initiatives this year:

- School-wide focus on perspective-taking and empathy
- Targeted lessons on mindfulness/self-regulation in 6th grade
- Partnering with Millis High School to match middle school students with high school peer mentors
- Implementing a Big Sister/Little Sister program with MHS
- Small groups participating in Ashley Olafsen's MOVE program, which focuses on healthy body image, social media, and relationships
- Check-ins for well-being and Lunch groups with the School Adjustment Counselor
- 8th grade Social Justice group
- Visits with Harry, the new service dog in MHS

Student Council & Leadership -

The best events are initiated and organized by our students!

Mix It Up At Lunch Day

Led by a group of 8th graders, students were grouped at different tables for lunch based on their responses to a survey. Their task was to figure out what they had in common. The goal was to have conversations with people they may not usually interact with.



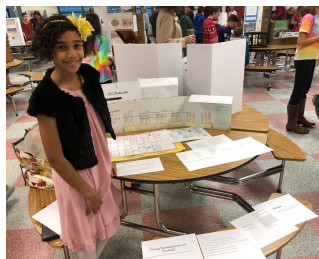
Dollars for Dom

In January, 8th graders planned week-long activities to support a classmate and friend and had a little fun along the way - a rock-paper-scissors tournament, a trivia contest at lunch, and voting on a costume for Mrs. Knowlton to wear on Friday! We are grateful for community support for helping to make this a huge success.



6th Grade

6th graders also experienced Project Based Learning this year through their 1960's Decade Project. They worked together to create a multi-layered story of America in the 1960's, which culminated in a museum exhibit for families. This is an example of interdisciplinary learning happening throughout our school. Standards and objectives from multiple classes are combined into one learning experience that includes differentiated activities and student voice and choice. This PBL project followed a deep dive into learning about immigration and the Civil Rights Movement in English Language Arts.



7th Grade

In 7th grade, interdisciplinary learning in Spanish and SS has students looking at factors that influence immigration today and throughout history. This will push their critical thinking, perspective-taking, and empathy skills as they discuss, collaborate, and gain valuable insight into global issues and American History. In ELA, a focus on identity and one's personal impact on others through analysis of literature will promote deep reflection and social-emotional learning. Interdisciplinary, project based learning is also happening in Science and Math and will culminate in a STEM Fair. While working through this, students will learn experimental design and execution, and how to analyze and communicate results. This kind of teaching and learning shows students how standards from different classes are connected and overlap, and it reinforces learning from one class in another. A new building project in the 7th grade STEAM Unified Arts class integrates specific math geometry standards and students need to solve real-life and mathematical problems involving angle measure, area, surface area, and volume. They work through the design process using a decision matrix and construct a prototype. Learning skills and content in isolation is quickly becoming a thing of the past!



5th / 6th Grade Dance

Student Council held their annual dance for 5th and 6th graders last Friday. Everyone had fun with the limbo, line dancing, hula hoops, and the chicken dance!



Committment to Tolerance, Respect and Kindness

8th graders developed these statements that express our ongoing efforts to maintain a positive school culture. They created a banner for all students to sign and plastered our hallways with a reminder. Students have the power to make positive change in the world and inspire others with their words and actions.

I will reach out and speak about things I believe in.

I will ask questions.

I will recognize and understand individuality.

I know one person can make a difference.



8th Grade

8th graders are involved in a Global Citizen Project to gain a greater understanding of the world around us, interact with the world, and to inspire them to make it a better place. Their just-in-time learning in ELA and Spanish involves exploring global issues, people who are trying to make change, and how they are doing it. They are connecting with individuals around the world using video technology and creating and interactive map. Through the creation of global citizen digital portfolios they develop self awareness, self management, social skills and social awareness. The goal is to extend students' thinking beyond themselves and gain a wider perspective as a global citizen. In History class, our online learning platform called itsLearning is the vehicle for self-paced learning. Through individual learning paths, students have access to text and videos to learn content as they move through the levels built in. This is blended with interactive group work and class discussions. History lessons incorporate work on ELA reading and writing standards and offer students choice of product to demonstrate their learning. In math, a generous grant from



MERIT has allowed students to experience block coding to program Sphero bots and they are using a program called Swift Playground to extend their learning. Through this work they develop skills connected to digital literacy, computer science, computational thinking and programming standards.

Clubs / Homework Clinic / Late Bus

Board Game Club - Tuesdays - Rm 216 - Mrs. Colwell

Yu-Gi-Oh Club - Tuesdays - Rm 228 - Mrs. Hickey

Art Club - Tuesdays - Art Room - Mrs. Degon

Pop Culture Club - Wednesdays - Rm 224 - Mrs. Monaghan

Scratch Club - Wednesdays - Room 230 - Mr. D

Chess Club - Fridays - Rm 212 - Mrs. Saccardo

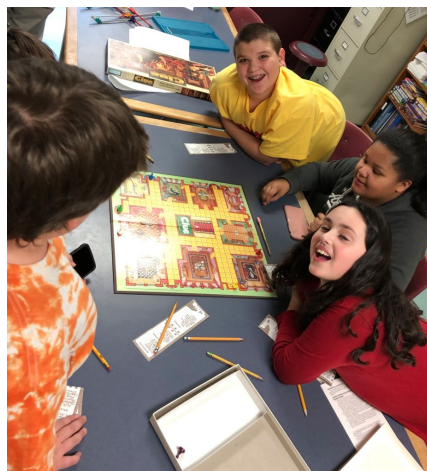
Biking Club - Weekends/Varies - Mrs. Monaghan

Book Club - Tuesdays - School & Public Library - Mrs. Divver
11/13 - Public; 12/11 - Public; 1/8 - School;
2/12 - School; 3/12 - Public; 4/19 - Public

Writer's Club - Wednesdays - School Library
Mrs. Divver & Mrs. Robinson

Homework Clinic - Tuesdays and Wednesdays - by grade level
Various teachers

Our late bus continues to run on Tuesdays and Wednesdays so that students may attend clubs and homework clinic. The bus leaves at approximately 3:30. All students must be with a teacher or involved in a club or sports if they stay after school.



Teacher News -

Do you wonder what happens on those days when children stay home and teachers go to school? Lifelong learning is happening! Passionate teachers pursue professional learning to make them better teachers. This year, middle school teachers have been learning how to infuse project-based learning, blended and personalized learning, and global citizenship into their classrooms. They have done research, collaborated intensely with each other, and created learning experiences for children that will engage and challenge them! Special education support staff have been learning strategies to develop students' social competencies and support social-emotional learning.

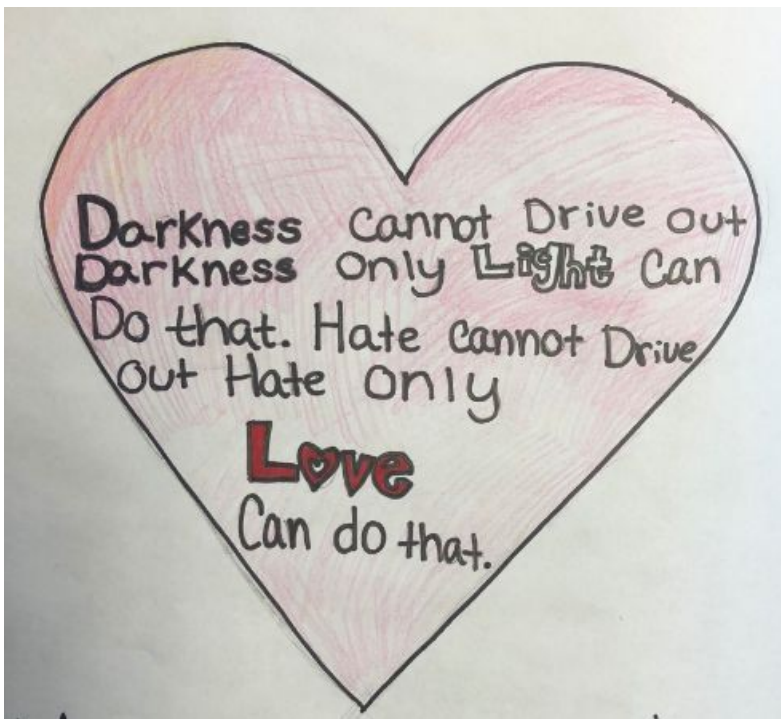


Upcoming Events -

- 2/6 Grade 5 Civilization Showcase
- 2/6 Harry Potter event - library 4-6pm/ Escape Room 6-8pm
- 2/13 MS Writer's Group Showcase - library 2:30-3:30
- 2/18-22 Winter Break
- 3/6 Early Release for Professional Development
- 3/13 Grade 7 STEM Fair
- 3/15 T2 Grades Close

We communicate in a variety of ways -

- Keep up with the learning on Twitter @MillisMiddle
- Check for announcements and sign up for our Listserve at <http://millispsms.ss9.sharpschool.com/>
- Follow us on our Millis Middle Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/millismiddleschool/>



Commitment To Tolerance, Respect and Kindness

I will reach out and speak out about things
I believe in

I will ask questions

I will recognize and understand
individuality

I know that one person can make a
difference



FROM MRS. DIVVER'S HS ADVISORY GROUP:

SOUP FOR THE SUPER BOWL

PLEASE BRING IN A CAN OF
SOUP OR OTHER
NON-PERISHABLE **ITEM** FOR
THE MILLIS FOOD PANTRY BY
FRIDAY, FEB. 1, 2019 AND
WEAR YOUR TEAM JERSEY 2/1!
(ITEMS MAY BE BROUGHT TO
THE **LIBRARY** ANY TIME)