

# VERONA

## “SCHOOL NOTES”

### Special points of interest:

- District Budget Hearing and Regular BOE meeting March 22, 2022
- April BOE meetings: April 5 & April 26, 2022

### Inside this issue:

Math Coaching in Our Schools	2
Moving Up	2
Hoops for Hope	2
Read Across America at Brookdale	3
Celebrating the Year of the Tiger	3
Learning Through Play at HBW	3
VSEA Summer Enrichment Academy	4
Honoring the Past	4
Where We Were, Where We Are, and Where We Are Going.	4
Exciting Changes to the 7th Grade Curriculum	5
Dimensions Math Parent Nights a Huge Success!	6
B.A.B.E.S. Program	7

Volume I, Issue I

Newsletter Date: March 2022

### Superintendent's Corner

by Dr. Furnari, Interim Superintendent

This is an exciting time for our students and staff here in Verona! As Winter comes to an end, we anticipate warmer weather, and spring activities. We also take this time to reflect and celebrate the great things that are happening in our schools. I am so grateful to have had opportunities to read to students at both Forest Avenue School and FN Brown School during Read Across America. Sharing stories about friendship, perseverance, curiosity and kindness was a rare treat for me.

Our teachers and students are engaged in exciting learning opportunities, some of which you will read about in this issue of Verona "School Notes". The District's referendum is coming to a close and the improvements are numerous and notable. Mental health and well being has been a clear focus for us, and the feedback from our

Mental Health Speaker Series is very positive. We are looking forward to our Mental Health Fair scheduled for May 2022.

In an effort to ensure that all of our students are provided a learning environment where they feel a sense of belonging, through dignity and respect, administrators and staff are engaged in our own professional learning on such topics as "The Innocent Classroom" and empathy in leadership.

In this issue of Verona "School Notes" you will read about the very popular V-SEA summer program, Math Coaching in our schools, Read Across America, the Holocaust presentation at HBW, as well as other engaging activities going on in our schools. I hope you enjoy this issue of Verona "School Notes"!



### Footloose at Verona High School

The VHS Spotlight Players wowed the crowd on March 3rd-5th with their spectacular performances of Footloose the Musical! Congratulations to all of our talented students. Musical theater is certainly alive and well at VHS!





## Math Coaching in Our Schools! by Mr. Freund, Laning Avenue School Principal

The Verona schools are excited to introduce Ms. Kaitlin Kober as the District Elementary Math Coach! This is a new position and program in the Verona schools and Ms. Kober will be supporting both teachers and students at the elementary level as we continue to implement our new Singapore Math program. For the remainder of the 21-22 school year, Ms. Kober will be pushing into all of the second and third grade classrooms in the district

to work directly with students and teachers in that setting and will also be available as a resource to all elementary teachers with all things math related. Additionally, through the use of federal ESSER (Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief) funds, Ms. Kober will be cycling through the elementary schools as an after school math interventionist for first grade students who are identified through our I&RS process as needing some support in math.

Welcome to the team Ms. Kober!



***"It is critical to build self-efficacy skills in our children..."***

## Moving Up !

by Dr. Mauriello, Director of Special Services

On February 23rd, Dr. Mauriello met with incoming 9th graders and their parents. In addition, on March 2nd, he met with parents of incoming 5th graders. The goal of these transition meetings is to reassure community members that the district has a continuum of programming to fulfill the individual needs of each student. During these discussions, parents were able to ask questions about district programs, ex-

press their concerns about their children entering new environments, and receive information on how to effectively support their children at home. It is critical to build self-efficacy skills in our children throughout these transition years. As parents, this can be difficult since our role must shift to that of a coach rather than telling children what to do. Allowing our children to learn from the process they

develop to navigate their daily activities is a priceless lesson that will help them in all facets of their lives. If you were unable to attend the presentations, you can find them on the district website under Special Services/Parent Presentations or by contacting Dr. Mauriello directly.



## Verona Athletics:

***"We strive to provide an athletic experience that will help our student-athletes learn valuable lessons such as sportsmanship, determination, perseverance and teamwork."***

## Hoops for Hope

by Ms. Palmerezzi, Director of Athletics

Our Hoops for Hope game was held on February 22nd. Two communities came together in support of Verona's own, Daria Gebbia, in her battle against Osteosarcoma.

Verona girls' basketball team got the victory over Cedar Grove, but the real victory was the \$2944 that was raised during this event.



## Read Across America at Brookdale by Mrs. Stuto, Brookdale Avenue School, Principal

Read Across America Week is a week-long celebration of the love of books and engagement in reading at our elementary schools. During the first week in March, students at Brookdale Avenue School engaged in shared reading experiences combined with some spirit week fun! Each day, teachers read a different picture book to students which was paired with a dress up day. On the day that *The Day the Crayons Quit* by Drew Daywalt was read, students were invited to wear as much of their favor-

ite color as possible. In celebration of Dr. Seuss' birthday on March 2nd, students read *The Cat in the Hat* and wore crazy hats to get in the spirit.

Brookdale partnered with the Verona Police Department to have police officers join each class as special guest readers throughout the week. The students were so excited to have members of the VPD read some of their favorite books to their class. This was a great opportunity for students to see adults who they already look up to serve as role models in

their reading lives as well.

Fostering a love of reading is essential for the success of our students. Special celebrations of reading such as Read Across America Week can often make the difference in building enjoyment of reading for children. We can only hope that by helping them build this love and appreciation for reading early on, that they will continue to grow as readers throughout their lives.



*Celebrating a Love of Books during Read Across America Week*

## Celebrating the Year of the Tiger

by Mrs. Peter, Supervisor of Humanities

Students in the Mandarin programs at H. B. Whitehorne Middle School and Verona High School came together at the township's first annual Lunar New Year Celebration.

"Without cultural contexts, students are robbed of a full and engaging language learning experience. It shouldn't be this way. Effective world language instruction merges language and culture" (Edutopia 2020). Verona's World Language Department knows this and seeks

to create cultural experiences for students that are both engaging and promote language acquisition.

At the township's first annual Lunar New Year Celebration, Ms. Qin's middle school students performed several songs and raps in Mandarin. Ms. Hou's Mandarin II students displayed their Lunar New Year research projects, while Mandarin III and IV students shared bookmarks with Mandarin characters and pamphlets

about the township of Verona. Several of Mrs. Hou's Advanced Placement (AP) students set up an Origami-making station. Attendees of all ages stopped to make traditional paper cranes. The audience cheered as Yee's Hung Ga International Kung Fu Association shared a traditional lion dance, which is performed to bring prosperity and good luck in the upcoming year. The performance was followed by a Kung Fu demonstration.

Ms. Shihong Zhan, NJCTA Founder and President, spoke on behalf of the New Jersey Chinese Teachers Association (NJCTA). The organization recently awarded Ms. Qin, Verona's middle school Mandarin teacher, a \$1,500 grant to support future school-wide cultural activities. Congratulation, Ms. Qin!



## Learning Through Play at HBW by Mr. Lancaster, H.B. Whitehorne Principal, Olmsted House

In addition to research that supports the benefits of providing children with time to play and physical activity, any adult can reflect on the enjoyment that playing offered him or her during his or her childhood. Consequently, Henry B. Whitehorne Middle School students enjoy both structured and unstructured playtime during the school day. Our physical education teachers create opportunities for each student to participate in physical activities and to apply skills that are embedded in the curriculum. Our teachers focus on creating opportunities for each student to build confidence,

to learn the value of teamwork, to gain greater insight into the benefits of a healthy lifestyle, and to have fun. These structured experiences can be extended beyond physical education class, which offers even greater opportunities for each student to grow.

During outdoor recess, each student is encouraged to disconnect from some of the structures that manage academic exploration and the resources of contemporary life and, instead, simply enjoy student-driven playtime that includes basketball, four square, soccer, football, and unique, crea-

tive improvisations of sports or games. One of the great lessons of unstructured play is learning to work together with others to negotiate procedures and to interact responsibly so the activity continues. These opportunities may at first appear minor, however, the life skills they offer can strengthen a student's ability to manage the more significant challenges that await him or her as he or she journeys further into the complexities of his or her academic experiences. In addition, running around and playing allows each student time to simply have fun. We hope

each student will continue to play during recess and we plan to continue to create opportunities for our students to be physically active each school day. It is our hope that we can build upon the smiles and laughter we see at lunch when each student returns to the classroom to continue exploring the exciting information within each course. We also hope our students will enjoy playing after school and enjoy the wonderful opportunities that childhood offers.



## V-SEA Summer Enrichment Academy! by Mr. Monacelli Forest Avenue School, Principal

Verona Summer Enrichment Academy (V~SEA) is about to celebrate season 17. The V~SEA program began in 2005 as a way for students to continue their academic experience during the summer by participating in a host of enrichment activities designed to expand their knowledge base, build on their interests and encourage creative thinking.

At V~SEA elementary students are encouraged to use problem solving skills to "think outside the box". Students learn in an

environment which features hands-on, materials-based learning. During the 3 hour daily session, teachers at each level work as a team to lead theme-based lessons that are explored through literacy, math and science. Thematic strands are presented as a means to build the students' curiosity in each subject area. In the past some areas that students have explored include the water cycle, insects, rainforest, dinosaurs and the middle ages. All Incoming K (students entering kindergarten in September 2022) through current 4<sup>th</sup>

grade students are invited to participate in the elementary program.

Middle school students can join the STEM program where they will learn about scientific and engineering concepts and principles in a fun, engaging and hands-on environment. Products and procedures in engineering will be reflected in the design models the students create. The goal is to develop inquiry and problem-solving skills while working collaboratively on activities and engineering design challenges that go beyond what students learn during the school year and have fun at the same time. For middle school students who would like to work on their math skills, V~SEA offers two 1 ½ hour math classes. The topics presented in **Algebra I Readiness** include integers and their operations, rational numbers, simplifying expressions, solving equations and inequalities, functions, graphing in the coordinate plane, writing and graphing linear equations, and solving systems of linear equations. (Continued on page 5)

## Honoring the Past: Holocaust Survivor Speaks to Students at HBW

by Mrs. Peter, Supervisor of Humanities

On Wednesday, March 2nd, eighth grade students at H. B. Whitehorne Middle School had the unique opportunity to meet Sally Frishberg. Mrs. Frishberg shared with students her memories of having lived through the Holocaust as a Jewish child in Poland.

Sally Engelberg Frishberg was born in 1934 to the only Jewish family in the rural village of Urzejowice, Poland. Students listened intently as Mrs. Frishberg described her family's

experience defying Nazi orders to report for resettlement. Instead, Sally's family hid in the fields of Poland. A close family friend, Staszek Grocholski, found nine-year-old Sally and her family hiding in fields outside of the village and convinced his wife to allow the family to stay in their attic. Mrs. Frishberg and 11 of her family members hid there for two years before liberation.

After settling in the United States in 1947, Mrs. Frishberg

became a teacher at Fort Hamilton High School, where she taught until 1991 and was responsible for establishing one of the country's first Holocaust courses. In 2005, Sally was awarded the Yavner Award for Excellence in Holocaust Education by the State of New York. Sally was a Gallery Educator at the [Museum of Jewish Heritage – A Living Memorial to the Holocaust](#) for many years and now works as an active member of the Museum's Speakers Bureau. Mrs. Frishberg's message to students? We're counting on you to make the world a better place.

Organized by HBW English teacher, Jackie Miskinis, this assembly followed the grade 8 *Intolerance: Being an Upstander unit of study*. Leading up to the event, students studied *Elie Wiesel's Night* and the story of Anne Frank.

## Where We Were, Where We Are & Where We Are Going

By Mr. Cogdill, Principal and Mr. Merkler, Assistant Principal, Verona High School

March of 2020 came as a surprise to everyone. Society and schools were thrust into a situation with no experience or playbook to speak of. Friends, neighbors, and family members came together to support each other, teachers and students adapted to new ways of teaching and learning, and businesses shifted to meet the changing needs of consumers. Those days were filled with great uncertainty and the best solutions to problems were com-

promises based on circumstances present at that moment in time. As the 2020-21 school year began, there was much uncertainty as to how our school would operate in a new normal. At points throughout the year, and as conditions improved, our school went from fully virtual, to cohorted, to fully in-person. By the end of 2021, we were able to piece together small wins such as an in-person graduation ceremony,

a return to athletics, and a senior banquet where our graduates could celebrate their accomplishments together. Thankfully, the summer of 2021 brought with it a low transmission rate. Our society caught a glimpse of returning to normal as people filled stadiums, restaurants saw the return of patrons, and our schools planned for full, in-person learning. Verona High School implemented open lunch privileges for all students and the students thrived under the freedom and autonomy of this new privilege. (Continued on page 6)

## Exciting Changes to the 7th Grade Curriculum

by Mr. Galbierczyk, H.B. Whitehorne Principal, Carnegie House

In July 2021, legislation was signed into law mandating civics education equivalent to one half of a school year for students in New Jersey's public middle schools beginning no later than the 2022-2023 school year. The bill was nicknamed "Laura Wooten's Law" in recognition of Mrs. Wooten's 79 consecutive years of service working polls on election days in New Jersey. Since the announcement of the civics education legislation, HBW and district administration and staff have worked closely to discuss how to best support this exciting new initiative for its students. There are sufficient components of civics that currently exist in the HBW social studies curriculum that place our school in compliance with the new legislation. However, it was ultimately determined that a targeted commitment to civics education and a more meaningful learning experience would be attained by dedicating the first half of students' 7th grade year at HBW to civics education.

Mrs. Julia Peter, who serves as the district's

Supervisor of Humanities, has been collaborating with 7th grade social studies teachers Mr. Peter Foster (7O) and Mr. Christopher Haines (7C) to identify ways to revise the 7th grade curriculum in a manner that provides an expansive civics education while maintaining adherence to important topics and curriculum standards currently contained in the Social Studies 7 curriculum. Although HBW has not required students to take a course specifically geared toward civics education, 7th grade students have had the option to take a marking period-based cycle class in recent years. The current cycle course curriculum provides students with an understanding of the rights and duties as citizens in a democratic society, the functions and limitations of government, and the principles of the United States' constitutional democracy by examining local, state, and federal topics through the close examination of primary source documents.

While it is a work in progress at the time of this writing, the vision for the civics component

of the revamped 7th grade social studies course is to expand upon the concepts and topics currently covered in the current 7th grade cycle so that student learning experiences are more robust and a deeper understanding of responsible citizenship in a democratic society is established. Replacing the Civics cycle will be an exciting new 7th grade option for interested students entitled, *Global Storytelling: Gods, (Super Heroes, and Monsters)*. In this course, students will focus on the many myths and legends woven into cultures throughout the world, including Greece, Norway, Egypt, South America, Oceania, and Japan. Students will be exposed to the stories of specific heroes in order to further their understanding of global storytelling, cultures, and traditions.

We are looking forward to the exciting learning opportunities awaiting our students with the revised civics-based grade 7 social studies curriculum and the new *Global Storytelling cycle class*!

**The bill was nicknamed "Laura Wooten's Law" in recognition of Mrs. Wooten's 79 consecutive years of service working polls on election days in New Jersey.**

## VSEA Summer Enrichment (continued from page 4)

The Algebra I Readiness Course is designed to assist students in mastering target standards with a primary focus on developing students' mastery of arithmetic concepts and skills.

The second offering, **Fundamentals of Pre-Algebra**, isn't your typical math class. Students will explore integers, rational numbers, simplifying

expressions, solving inequalities, functions and graphing and also learn to apply these concepts to their own life.

V~SEA also offers an opportunity for our upper middle school students to volunteer to assist in the K-4 classrooms. Our younger students enjoy interacting with the middle school students while the older students begin to develop skills

as student leaders and even earn community service hours when needed.

The summer 2022 program brochure will be emailed to all Verona K-8 families during the month of March. A parent information night is scheduled for Monday, March 21st via Google Meet to give parents an opportunity to learn more about the program and ask any questions.



## Dimensions Math Parent Nights a Huge Success!

by Dr. Miller, Director of CIA and Mr. Stevenson, STEM Supervisor

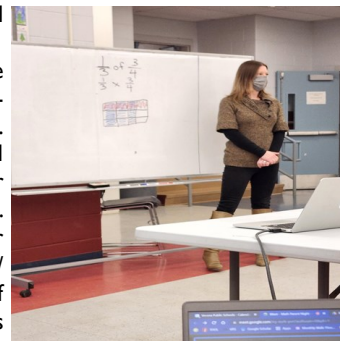
Over the past several years, our elementary and middle school mathematics teachers have been exploring alternative approaches that will allow our students to experience and understand mathematics conceptually. Our teachers, principals, STEM supervisor, and Director of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment have been working with our math trainer, Mr. Bill Jackson, using a lesson study approach to create lessons that are more student-centered and where the students take charge of their own learning by constructing meaning and working individually, with a partner, or a group of students.

This year, our first, second, and fifth grade teachers and students have formally begun teaching and learning *Dimension Mathematics*. The series follows the principles outlined in the Singapore Mathematics Framework. The *Dimensions Mathematics* series has a pedagogical approach and methodology that emphasizes a **Concrete-Pictorial-Abstract (CPA)** approach that allows students

to view the same concepts over time with increasing levels of abstraction. Thoughtful sequencing creates a sense of continuity. The content of each grade level builds on that of preceding grade levels. Similarly, lessons build on previous lessons within each grade. Group discussion of solution methods encourages expansive thinking. Interesting problems and activities provide varied opportunities to explore and apply skills. Hands-on tasks and sharing establish a culture of collaboration. Extra practice and extension activities encourage students to persevere through challenging problems. Variation in pictorial representation (number bonds, bar models, etc.) and concrete representation (straws, linking cubes, base ten blocks, discs, etc.) to broaden student understanding. Each topic is introduced, then thoughtfully developed through the use of a variety of learning experiences, problem solving, student discourse, and opportunities for mastery of skills. This combination of hands-on practice, in-depth exploration of topics, and mathematical

variability in teaching methodology allows students to truly master mathematical concepts.

We created the same hands-on learning experiences for our parents. Our math trainer, Mr. Bill Jackson, and one of our grade 5 teachers, Mrs. Jacqueline Dilkes, led our parents through addition/subtraction and division of fractions lessons. Parents experienced “aha” moments saying “So that is why I get that answer when I take  $\frac{1}{3}$  of  $\frac{1}{4}$ !” Overall, we had over 80 grade 1 and 2 parents and over 30 grade 5 parents attend the meetings, in person or virtually. Thank you to all who made these two nights really special!



## Where We Are Going... (from page 4)

Other than students wearing masks in the school building, things looked like they had completely returned to normal. As December 2021 brought the Omicron variant, a surge in positive cases resulted in staff and student absences and the canceling or postponement of a few events. Thankfully, that wave of the virus was short-lived and our school quickly returned to normal. As we sit

and write this piece, our school stands just a few days away from students and staff having a choice on whether or not to wear a mask in school. The school musical, Footloose raised its curtains allowing us to celebrate the arts once again as a community. Our sport teams and marching band participated in their competitions this year, and the graduation, prom, senior banquet and oth-

er milestone events are planned and ready to go. In fact, we were able to not just get back to normal, but also add to our school. For example, our school recently started a video gaming team where our team competed, in-person, against West Essex High School...proud to say that our team won! Also, our Model UN students went on a field trip to Washington DC and DECA competed in Atlantic City; to name just a few. (Continued on page 7)

**“Where are things headed? It is truly difficult to say. Hopefully, we are officially turning a page and returning to normal.”**

## VERONA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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## Beginning Awareness Basic Education Studies (B.A.B.E.S.)

by Dr. Lanzo, FN Brown School, Principal & Mr. Chierici, Gr. 3 Teacher / Admin. Intern

Verona Municipal Alliance Committee (VMAC) continues to support our elementary schools. As per the VMAC website "The mission of VMAC is to work toward community wellness through the celebration and cultivation of the compassion, character, and confidence that individuals, especially our youth, need to make good choices in all aspects of their lives." VMAC funding is through a grant from the Governor's Council on Alcoholism and Drug Abuse as well as matching funds from the Township of Verona. The Verona Board of Education continues to collaborate with VMAC to support its mission.

Our next VMAC sponsored program will be the Beginning Awareness Basic Education Studies (B.A.B.E.S) program targeting

our second grade students throughout the district. The B.A.B.E.S. program focuses on preparing children for a lifetime of drug and alcohol prevention. The program has been proven to decrease risk factors and further develop the protective factors that result in an increased healthy lifestyle. The vendor will be joining our schools in the spring. It will be a series of puppet show skits that encourage students to make positive and healthy choices. There are seven puppet characters with clearly defined personalities representing various prevention concepts. The storytelling enhanced through puppetry delivers a concrete message for students on topics that are applicable for the age group. Concepts include but are not limited to: self-image and feelings, deci-

sion-making, peer pressure, coping skills and information about alcohol and drugs. The program will teach students in a developmentally appropriate manner to resist drugs and alcohol. Each student will receive a B.A.B.E.S completion certificate and information packet at the conclusion of the program.

This initiative is being fully sponsored by VMAC and has been approved by the district. We are excited to be introducing this program to our students and think it will be informative and thought provoking.

***"The Verona Board of Education continues to collaborate with VMAC to support its mission."***

## Where Are We Going... (from page 6)

Where are things headed? It is truly difficult to say. Hopefully, we are officially turning a page and returning to normal. As we write this, the people of the Ukraine are fighting for their existence and their patriotism and bravery is inspiring. Their unity reminds us of times that our Nation has come together during adversity.

These last few years have been polarizing and as educators, we hope the next chapter is about healing, about coming together to support our students, teachers, and school, and about strengthening the bonds within our community. We have much to be proud of and thankful for, the future is bright for Verona.



**Verona High School Graduation Ceremony**