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## **Ardsley leads the way in active learning environments and engineering**

Throughout the Ardsley School District, active learning has been a guiding principle and has driven significant enhancements in our curriculum and programs. Active learning strategies, which facilitate independent, critical and creative thinking, encourage effective collaboration and increase student investment, motivation and performance, require changes not just to teaching methods but also to physical environments.



Active Learning Classrooms provide environment for collaborative projects and facilitate critical thinking.

Over the years, we have built “smart classrooms” with investments in iPads, Chromebooks, smart boards, workstations, software and wireless campuses. These resources have allowed us to implement many active learning units, expand our curriculum offerings and extend learning beyond our walls. Furthering this work, last year we piloted two new Active Learning Classrooms (ALCs) for the first time, which combined technology with room design and flexible furniture to support more active learning. These new environments proved highly effective in increasing student engagement and collaboration.

This summer Ardsley High School (AHS) has seen interior upgrades which expand our ability to provide active learning environments. Three adjacent rooms on the first floor of AHS have been combined into a large engineering lab providing design space, materials management and the “dirty / shop space” necessary to physically implement engineering projects. A second ALC has been added for Latin and some of our technology clubs. Additional interior work has

been done throughout the district to support student services, guidance, and programs such as MakerSpace and Project Lead the Way. We are currently working with an architect to redesign the high school library to include “conference room style” spaces for students to work effectively on group projects and to house additional media services and technology resources. We thank the community, the PTA and the Ardsley Education Foundation for the budget support in helping make active learning environments available throughout the district.

### **New Engineering Programs and Standards in Social Studies and Science**

Last year we committed to Project Lead the Way<sup>™</sup> (PLTW), a rigorous engineering curriculum, and offered initial units in grades 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 10. This year, we will be expanding the program and all grades, K-12, will have dedicated PLTW units. In Concord Road, *Pushes and Pulls* will be taught in Kindergarten; *Light: Observing the Sun, Moon and the Stars*, Grade 1; *The Changing Earth*, Grade 2; *Variations of Traits*, Grade 3; and *Energy: Collisions and Conversions*, Grade 4. In addition, PLTW coding units will be added to grades 1-4. At Ardsley Middle School, students in Grades 5 and 6 will complete units on *Green Architecture*, and *Flight and Space*, respectively, and a second engineering class, *Principles of Engineering*, has been added to the high school.

The new NYS standards in social studies and science have added emphasis on skill development particularly around critical thinking capacities and sourcing. The goal is to have students think more like historians and scientists by researching various points of view versus simply memorizing facts. Over the summer, teachers have worked to enhance these curriculums to be student-driven and encourage our students to think critically about history and science.

In addition, to the new programs, we look forward to the continuation of our Thinking Maps program. All teachers in grades K-8, as well as some in the high school, have been trained and are currently using Thinking Maps. We now have almost 70 certified trainers and our focus this year will be to tailor the program to the unique and specific needs of each department.

### **Welcoming New Faces Throughout the District**

Our learning community continues to grow. Thus far, 172 new kindergartners will join our district and begin their school careers in Ardsley. An additional 72 students will be joining our learning community, 33 at Concord Road, 27 at the middle school, and 12 at the high school. In addition, a number of new staff members will be greeting our students. As of the writing of this article, at Concord Road, Kindergarten-grade teacher, Kelly Fonatine, 2nd-grade teacher, Julia Nichols, 3rd-grade teacher, Elizabeth Donisan, Art teacher, Pamela

Casagrande, Special Education teacher, Nora Kelly, Literacy Coach, Nicole Schmitt, Guidance Counselor, Michelle Stavrou, as well as a Part-time Physical Education teacher who will be announced soon, will be joining our CRS staff. We also welcome Science Teacher, Sarah Hastings, and Social Studies teacher, Stephany Olivieri, to Ardsley Middle School as well as English teacher, Alison Grabe, and Spanish teacher, Erin O'Leary, and who will divide their time between CRS/AMS and AMS/AHS respectively. At Ardsley High School, English teacher Genevieve Jaffe, Science teacher, Sage Kim, Guidance Counselor Leah Gorzhansky and Part-time English teacher, Jessica Caquias, join our team. Welcome all to our learning community

Two newly-elected Board of Education members, Pamela Epstein and Hrishi Karthikeyan, join Nicole Minore, Frank Hariton, and Matt Bonney in leading our district this year. We invite the community to attend Board of Education meetings, which will continue to be open to the public on Tuesday evenings at 7:00pm. Every month we discuss a specific aspect of the curriculum or new initiative within the District. We will make the agendas clear to the community in advance so that parents may attend meetings of particular interest. The continued building of our partnership with District families and community stakeholders is vital to our success and your active participation at board meetings and in school/district-wide committees is both encouraged and very much welcomed.

On behalf of the Board of Education, the District Office staff and the teachers and faculty in the district, we welcome all our new and returning families to the 2017-2018 school year. We know this will be another year of great learning highlighted by many student achievements. We hope you have enjoyed a happy and healthy summer and we look forward to reconnecting in the coming weeks.