

District Highlights

VOLUME 2-ISSUE 3 SEPTEMBER/OCTOBER 2022

NEWTOWN ATHLETICS

DEAR NEWTOWN COMMUNITY,

As the 2021-2022 school year ended, preparations began for the school year 2022-2023. We have really had a unique time of transition in the areas of staff, facilities, and services. Not the least of which, our new Superintendent, Chris Mellilo took the helm from retired Superintendent Lorrie Rodrique on July 1, 2022. Other central office and building level administrative positions were filled along with the appointment of Alison Plante to the Board of Education to replace the veteran Board of Education Member, Rebekah Harriman. Although we will miss the talents and dedication of those who have left us, we embrace the potential of new leaders to inspire innovative approaches toward excellence in all facets of our school system operation; especially those that directly influence the quality of teaching and learning in individual classrooms all across the schools in our district.

Over the unusually hot and humid summer, activities were bustling with both students and staff within the schools and the community. A great deal has happened in the area of professional development and curriculum development projects in preparation for the 2022-2023 school year. Along with herculean custodial and maintenance activities associated with intra-school setups and inter-school classroom transitions with the Hawley School HVAC Project, so many have contributed to make the schools "spit shine" ready for students. By this publication, students have experienced the all-important first days of school. As all this was going on during the summer, so many of our students were engaged in athletic activities in preparation for competitive sports programs this fall. Indeed, we have chosen focus on sports related activities that help build the mind, body, and spirit in the context of team work and leadership for this edition of District Highlights. We hope the reader enjoys the articles in this addition of our newsletter that highlight certain individuals and programs that position our district as a leader for competitive and intramural sports programs.

Don Ramsey, BOE Communications Subcommittee Chairman

DEDICATED TO SUCCEED

By Chris Melillo, Superintendent

Many of our families take time during the summer months to rest and relax. Our Newtown scholar athletes are using this time to work to be the absolute best they can be. Our athletes share the determination to win and compete, which is vital to the competitive spirit and joy of playing sports. Many of our student competitors spend their vacation improving their strength and cardio, while all of our fall sports teams begin practice before the start of the school year. Success at a high level requires focus and dedication to their sport.

Our student athletes have to manage work responsibilities, academic demands, and social pressures and yet, a study conducted by the Minnesota State High School League in 2007 and reported by the NFHS found that the average GPA of a high school athlete was 2.84, while a student who was not involved in athletics had an average GPA of 2.68. The survey also showed that student athletes missed less school than their non-athlete counterparts, with a total of 7.4 days missed and 8.8 days missed, respectively.

Taking part in school athletics has long lasting-benefits. According to the National Federation of State High School Associations, three of the most important participation takeaways that students continue to practice after graduation are: 1) a stronger sense of self-confidence in building relationships with others and having an expanded capacity for empathy; 2) developing a better sense of self and, understanding how their actions affect others; and 3) construction foundations for lifelong fitness habits.

Over the summer months, our NHS student-athletes have been hard at work conditioning, working out and getting ready for the season. Our field hockey team has conditioning workouts 2-3 times a week in the mornings, girls, and boys cross-country have scheduled morning runs, while our cheer unit has been hard at work in the gym and the tumbling gym. The NHS volleyball players and girls and boys soccer players are playing for various club teams and competing in a local summer league, as members of the NHS Dance Team have been working out at their local studios. Our swimmers/divers are honing their skills and getting their mileage in the pool, while the NHS football team has been weightlifting and conditioning all summer at the stadium and in the NHS weight room.

As we begin our fall sports season, I would like our families to recognize the dedication our student athletes give to their teams and their studies. In sports and in academics, our student athletes establish goals that will guide the path to success. Their devotion and commitment to these goals is essential for them to excel at the highest levels.



NEWTOWN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS

"Recently the athletic department won the Michaels Cup which is a CIAC award for outstanding athletic departments. And in 2021 NHS was awarded the Fred Balsamo CIAC Sportsmanship Award, which is given to only 4 schools in the state who demonstrate extraordinary sportsmanship in their programs."

DISTRICT UNIFIED SPORTS PROGRAM

"It is such a beneficial program due to it's ability for students to make connections and the strong bond which is created between the athletes and partners. We have created so many social opportunities through unified sports for all of these students to be together and connect." - Matt Memolli, Athletic Director

A CLOSER LOOK

"Anna Malkin, World Language Teacher, Ken Kantor, Physical Education Teacher, and Andrew Tammero, Health Education Teacher, have developed an athletic program that combines the elements of interscholastic and intramural sports competitions at Newtown Middle School."

NEWTOWN HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS

By Dan Cruson

Sports has long been considered a big part of the High School experience, and Newtown High School is not any different. Currently NHS has 55 teams across 32 sports, creating a large variety of choices for every interest and skill level. Across 3 seasons, NHS sees a lot of students taking advantage of the different programs offered. According to the Matt Memoli, the Newtown Public School's Athletic Director, the Fall season sees 400-500, the Winter season sees 200-400, and the Spring season sees 350-450 students participating in sports. This includes students participating in not just "traditional" sports like Football, Basketball and Baseball, but also the school's Unified Sports Program which was started in 2014 by Kathy Davey (see our Unified Sports article to learn more).

With so many sports and teams running throughout the year is a huge effort and takes a lot of people. Mr. Memoli is assisted by an Administrative Assistant, Debi Modzelewski in organizing the entire department. The school district also employs two Athletic Trainers, Doug Michlovitz and John Juniet, to work with the students on a full-time basis. Beyond that there are over 110 coaches, both paid and volunteer, that lead the individual teams throughout the year. Community members play a big part in filling these coaching roles, but also help in other capacities including running the Booster clubs for sports like Football and Hockey. The

district is always looking for more volunteers to help assist with athletic events, if someone is interested, they can reach out to Matt Memoli at memolim@newtown.k12.ct.us.

All of this work has been recognized over the years by a number of awards and championship wins. Individual sports such as Field Hockey, Girls Indoor Track, Baseball and Dance have won SWC championships in recent years. There have also been state championships won by teams such as NHS indoor and outdoor track. In addition to these individual sports recognitions though, the athletic department and school have won awards. Recently the athletic department won the Michaels Cup which is a CIAC award for outstanding athletic departments. And in 2021 NHS was awarded the Fred Balsamo CIAC Sportsmanship Award, which is given to only 4 schools in the state who demonstrate extraordinary sportsmanship in their programs. However, one of the biggest points of pride the community can have in the NHS sports program is the focus on education based athletics and that many student athletes leave Newtown to continue competing at the collegiate level.

I would like to thank Matt Memoli for answering my questions about the NHS sports program, along with his continued hard work running the entire athletics program for Newtown Public Schools.

NEWTOWN UNIFIED SPORTS PROGRAM

By Janet Kuzma

Back in 1992, Connecticut Special Olympics formed a partnership with the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference (CIAC) to bring Unified Sports to Connecticut's schools in effort to reach school-aged athletes. Unified Sports is a registered program of Special Olympics that combines athletes with and without intellectual disability (or other developmental delays) on sports teams for training and competition. While the positive impacts and benefits from participating in a unified program were undeniable, it wasn't until 2014 when Newtown High School P.E. teacher Kathy Davey began the program here in Newtown. Soon after, this program rose to become one of the best in the state of Connecticut, and even traveled internationally to Canada to compete in the Unified Games.

Currently, Newtown's unified program runs in grades 7-12, as well as a unified program started by Laura Cooper at Middle Gate for elementary students. Our district offers Unified soccer, basketball, and track & field, with basketball being the most popular among students. There are also opportunities for various games such as wiffle ball, volleyball, and kick ball. Newtown High school has roughly 40-50 athletes and partners per season and Newtown Middle school has between 20-30 each season.

When asked why he feels this program is beneficial to Newtown students, athletic Director Matt Memolli said:

"It is such a beneficial program due to it's ability for students to make connections and the strong bond which is created between the athletes and partners. We have created so many social opportunities through unified sports for all of these students to be together and connect. We have practices and games, recognition ceremonies at halftimes of other sporting events, playing at halftime at Mohegan Sun during the state basketball championships, along with other social opportunities. The family-like atmosphere is what separates this program."

Unified sports programs are known for creating ties that develop into friendships on and off the athletic field. Many benefits have been seen among communities who participate in these programs, such as new friendships, improved self-esteem, positive behavioral changes, and help to foster inclusive school communities. Our district encourages students, as well as community members, to get involved and volunteer in our unified program. If you can't commit to assisting with the teams consider showing your support by going to a game!

MORE INFORMATION ABOUT NEWTOWN HIGH'S ATHLETIC
PROGRAM

~ A CLOSER LOOK ~

TEACHER VOLUNTEERS FOR UNIFIED SPORTS



By Don Ramsey

In recent years educators have been awakened to the benefits of collaboration in the form of team teaching, not only across subject areas, but across special needs and regular educational settings. That is particularly true with respect to diversity and inclusion. We are evolving in significant ways when it comes to combining talents and cultural sensitivity into teaching and learning in both curricular and extracurricular activities. A great example is this “Closer Look” at three teachers who carried the baton from Newtown High School to Newtown Middle School with the Unified Sports Program. Anna Malkin, World Language Teacher, Ken Kantor, Physical Education Teacher, and Andrew Tammero, Health Education Teacher, have developed an athletic program that combines the elements of interscholastic and intramural sports competitions at Newtown Middle School. Joining them at various times is Liz Gallo, Paraprofessional (not pictured). In doing so, they have provided an open invitation for more experienced student athletes to mentor other students with special needs or specific disabilities in an atmosphere of relationship building and positive athletic skill development. According to Andrew Tammero, “The mission is...” Unified Sports joins people with and without intellectual disabilities on the same team. It was inspired by a simple principle: training together and playing together is a quick path to friendship and understanding”. Ken Kantor adds in his letter to parents, “We encourage our partners to be a resource for our athletes. This is also an opportunity to create meaningful relationships and friendships. The program consists of practices one to two times per week. We will be playing other schools to allow our student athletes a chance to experience some competition.” Networking with the Fairfield County Interscholastic Athletic Conference (FCIAC) has enabled our middle school students to compete with area schools in Danbury, Brookfield, Bethel, Oxford, and Monroe in soccer,

softball, tournaments have been held in Waterbury and our own Newtown Youth Academy. Matt Memoli, Athletic Director for the Newtown Public Schools celebrates the seeds for the program being planted at Newtown High School and continuing to grow at Newtown Middle School. He is hoping for even greater participation in a post pandemic atmosphere where things return to normal.

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBER - ALISON PLANTE



Alison Plante was recently appointed to the Board of Education after the resignation of Rebekah Harriman. We would like to take this opportunity to let Ms. Plante share a little bit about herself.

1. How long have you lived in Newtown?

12 years

2. What is your educational background?

I attended Brookfield Public Schools from K-12 and then graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia, where I majored in Political Science and minored in Sociology.

3. Why were you interested in being a part of the Board of Education?

I believe that one of the most important things a community can do is educate its children well, and the Board of Education plays a critical role in making sure that happens by setting policies, budgeting, and providing oversight. More generally, I love this community and it's important to me to contribute in any way I can.

4. What do you feel the school district does well?

The school system does a lot of things well, but the one for which I'm most grateful as a parent is the District's dual focus on not just academic achievement but also social-emotional skills and well-being. It shines through all the way from the Board's policies and committees and down to the lessons that my elementary school-aged children are hearing in their classrooms, and it's a critical ingredient in cultivating kind, well-adjusted young adults.

5. What do you feel you can help the district do better?

I want to help the District continue improving its process and communication around prioritizing capital projects to maintain our school buildings via the town-wide Capital Improvement Plan (CIP). The District is responsible for maintaining quite a large real estate footprint and I'm looking forward to understanding how we can leverage the work done by the Town Building Inventory and Planning Work Group to further optimize our capital projects process.

6. What do you feel is the most valuable skill you bring to the Board of Education?

I hope that the Board and the community will come to know me as someone who remains composed under pressure, is open-minded to different perspectives, and makes decisions based on facts and logic.

7. Anything else you want people to know about you?

My husband and I have three children (ages 8, 6, and 3), so we will be the proud parents of Newtown Public Schools students for the next 15 years. I'm honored and humbled by the opportunity to serve on the Board of Education.



NEWTOWN BOARD OF EDUCATION

📍 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, C...

✉️ newtownboe@newtown.k12.ct...

☎️ (203) 426-7600

🌐 newtown.k12.ct.us

