

Focus on the Middle Schools: Points of Pride!

Citizens For Education recently toured each of the district’s three middle schools to chat with the principals and discover what makes each school a unique and special place of learning for our community’s 7th and 8th graders. While staff members in every school work diligently toward the academic preparation of their students, certain aspects of the middle school experience stand out. This is due to the top-level vision of the administration and/or the excellence of the teachers, staff, and parent community. A brief comparison of school statistics is shown in the table and a summary of five Points of Pride for each school follows.

	Newtown MS	Richboro MS	Holland MS
Year Built	1955	1964	1974
Current # of students	863	510	517
# of teams for 7th/8th	3/3 + 1 Arts team	2/2	2/2
# of Professional Staff/ Support Staff	68/31	47/32	50/19
Sending Elementary Schools	Newtown Goodnoe Sol Feinstone Wrightstown	Richboro Rolling Hills Maureen M. Welch Churchville (approx. 10 students)	Holland Hillcrest Churchville
Destination High School	CR North (12 students go to South)	CR South	CR South

Newtown Middle School Principal Tim Long and Assistant Principal Terry Stoertz identified the following points of pride:

- 1) Student and faculty sponsored community service projects, including an overnight lock-in volleyball tournament to support Autism Cares, making sandwiches for local food banks and soup kitchens, volunteering at Newtown’s Chandler Hall assisted living center, and gathering backpacks for The Synergy Project (<http://www.vyhphila.org/locations/bucks-county/street-outreach-program/>).
- 2) Full utilization of the school’s proximity to Tyler State Park, which includes a spring reenactment of the Battle of Bunker Hill, riding bikes in the park during gym, and an innovative team-building program called Crossroads. Crossroads teaches each grade level how to work together to overcome physical obstacles and challenges while enhancing the middle school experience. The curriculum requires teams to communicate and work together in small groups to solve specific challenges, such as how to cross an imaginary body of water using a limited number of wood planks. In this exercise, the team starts on one side of the water and must navigate all of its members to the other side, requiring that some students have to wait to cross over in addition to ensuring the planks span the water.
- 3) Excellence in the theatre and music program, where typical annual musicals draw 100+ cast members and feature a full orchestra. NMS was the first middle school to implement a guitar program in which every 8th grade student participates.
- 4) Strong parent involvement via the PTA, which sponsors programs such as a Holocaust speaker series, Go for the Green assembly, and a Getting To Know You picnic for incoming 6th graders and their families. In addition, they have funded a theater production of Anne Frank, the purchase of a new piano, and a new book cart and reading chair for the library, among other projects. The PTA has been actively participating as a nonprofit organization since 1997.
- 5) Facility distinctions: NMS includes a huge theater seating 600+ and tennis courts behind the school.

Richboro Middle School Principal Rich Hollahan spoke highly about these points of pride:

- 1) Administration, student, faculty, and PTO involvement in beautifying the school, including indoor and outdoor landscaping, painting murals and signs, new gym scoreboard, new floor tiles, and a sports display case with rotating electronic photos and athletes of the week. A new mural will add thumbprints of every 8th grader who graduates from the school, providing a lasting reminder of each student's imprint on the hearts and minds of the school staff.
- 2) Staff enthusiasm for piloting new district technology, such as the use of surveillance cameras and security key fobs to allow teacher access. The Pennsylvania Value Added Assessment System (PVAAS) Student Growth Reporting, "analyzes available data from previous years to help districts and schools evaluate how much groups of students have gained academically in a school year."
- 3) An annual floor hockey tournament which involves 80 students and is held during the Resource Activity (RA) period over the course of six weeks in winter.
- 4) Substantial school pride, evidenced in the Blue & White nights, team scavenger hunts, team BBQ lunch, and the extreme leaf rake-over service project, in which student teams volunteer to rake lawns for the elderly.
- 5) Facility distinctions: Outdoor courtyard funded by the PTO which includes tables, benches and landscaping. Students enjoy their lunch outside during warmer weather. The indoor cafeteria includes a TV, also funded by the PTO. The theater seats 360.

Holland Middle School Principal Dan Greenland proudly discussed the following points of pride:

- 1) Staff willingness to promote new initiatives to push the leading edge of instruction. One teacher is currently testing a "flipped classroom" in which, instead of traditional homework, students watch a 4-minute Khan Academy instructional video about a specific math concept at home and complete several related math problems via Quia, an online questionnaire. The teacher can review the students' understanding through the Quia results, and also lead the class in practice problems, while verifying that all students have understood the lesson before moving on.
- 2) Use of the Mango online language program in 7th grade to allow students to hear an introduction to all offered languages (French/German/Spanish) before deciding which to take in 8th grade. Eighth graders use Mango during class and have access to home use to enhance understanding of their selected language.
- 3) A huge, open library with 80 computers which allows large groups to take the Keystone Exams online, thereby eliminating the need to secure paper copies. The computers are also used by teachers and students to enhance classroom learning, and the numbers allow multiple groups to be accommodated at one time.
- 4) Active community service clubs such as Kids In Community Service (KICS) and Student Council. HMS has been the top March of Dimes donor in the state for the last 5 years.
- 5) Facility distinctions: HMS is the only middle school with no trailers, which provides enhanced safety for students. Large, open rooms facilitate student movement and involvement in Tech Ed, Art, and Family/Consumer Science classes. Color coded "houses" enable students to quickly identify what part of the building they are in, and teachers of the same subject area are located within a given house to encourage collaborative practices.

While the students are in the middle school for a brief two years, these and many other points of pride create lasting memories for students, teachers, and staff members. Citizens For Education would like to thank all of the administrators for their time and enthusiasm in showcasing their respective schools.