

# MR. GALELLA'S OCTOBER NEWSLETTER

Dear DEC Families,

Students enter our classes with many skills, abilities, competencies, educational goals, and future plans. We continually try to unearth and understand the complexity of students' experiences and development.

*Having clarity about our students' strengths allows us to make thoughtful decisions about what we need to teach in a given year and keeps us focused on specific goals. It also helps students to find value in what we are doing, as they are able to see how our teaching is aimed at developing their abilities in an explicit way.*

Schnellert, Dato, Ediger, and Panas, *Pulling Together*, 2009.

We as parents and educators continue to experience changes and initiatives (sometimes drastic or even radical) within our educational system governed by PDE (Pennsylvania Department of Education). It's important for us to stay abreast of these changes and state initiatives so schools and families may work together. For example; **just think about this** ... we now live in a day of education where academic rigor must increase within our classrooms, local and high-stake testing measures mastery of skills being taught and learned, PDE recommendations and mandates causes on-going changes rather than allowing schools to implement a mandate with fidelity and quality before making more changes causing frustration and a feeling of never seeing things through from start to finish within a realistic and practical timeline for educators, students, and parents. The day has been long gone where teachers may pull from their "hidden curriculum" in order for learning to be engaging for ALL learners, reteach skills without worrying about meeting deadlines and timelines. Rather, all teachers must align their lesson plans to the new PA Common Core Standards (CCS) that contain much more rigor and high expectations beginning with an objective/goal(s) and ending with adequate assessments aligned to the goal(s), CCS, and PSSA exam or Keystone exam for high school students. No matter what functioning level a student may be at, PDE requires that we must assess students at their specific grade level in order to reach targets and show growth in accordance with the SPP (School Performance Profile) model. PDE mandates that we administer grade level standardized testing to students, once again; no matter what level a student may be at. Is this fair to our students? Schools consisting of such a diverse population of students, learning taking place at all different levels no matter what age or grade BUT the governor and PDE legislates less funding to schools with more stringent mandates and requirements, causing for all of us to do much, much more with having less pertaining to staffing and resource needs such as technology, while trying to encourage, motivate, and inspire a student population that is not as encouraged, motivated, and inspired as we and our parents were as students. So, AGAIN... **just think about this** ...as everything around us in our educational system continues to increase pertaining to graduation requirements beginning with our current sophomores (class of 2017), testing, student growth, expectations, PDE requirements - funding, student -motivation, resources, societal needs, and staffing decrease.

In the upcoming weeks, we will be administering Diagnostic tests in the ELA (English Language Arts) subject areas to all students in grades 3 – 6. In order to accomplish this, there is a lot of preparation that goes into the administration of these tests pertaining to computer uploads within our SIS (Student Information System) and creating a computer lab schedule for all four grades to participate in these online assessments.

The Pennsylvania Classroom Diagnostic Tools (CDT) is a set of online assessments, divided by content area, designed to provide diagnostic information in order to guide instruction and remediation offered to students in grades 3-12. The CDT reporting system is fully integrated in the Standards Aligned System (SAS). It assists educators in identifying student academic strengths, and areas in need of improvement, by providing links to classroom resources. The diagnostic reports feature easy-to-follow links to targeted curricular resources and materials, including units and lesson plans found within the SAS system. The CDT is available to districts at no cost.

The purpose of the CDT is to provide information that will help guide instruction by providing support to students and teachers. The CDT reports are designed to provide a picture or snapshot of how students are performing in relation to the Pennsylvania Assessment Anchors & Eligible Content and Keystone Assessment Anchors & Eligible Content. The CDT goes beyond focusing only on What students should know and be able to do at a particular grade and/or course. It also provides a snapshot of How and Why students may still be struggling or extending beyond the grade and/or course Eligible Content. This valuable information is typically not identified through other types of assessments. Teachers, through the use of CDT reports, may access additional information through the Learning Progression Map. The Learning Progression Map allows teachers to pinpoint where students are struggling along or extending beyond the learning continuum. The CDT helps identify, and provides suggestions, for "next steps" in student academic development.

Benefits for STUDENTS include the following:

- Moves students along path toward career and college readiness
- Promotes teachers partnering with students to set learning goals
- Provides descriptive and timely feedback to students while in the process of learning and creating
- Builds efficacy bringing students into the process of their own learning
- Promotes goal-setting
- Supports ownership

Benefits for TEACHERS include the following:

- Access to immediate, detailed diagnostic reports
- Understand the strengths and needs of each student
- Provides tools needed to group students for different mini-lessons throughout the school year depending on their needs and goals set for learning
- Gain insight into students' strengths and needs during the school year, as well as focus their teaching for classes and grade level
- Provides immediate access to available SAS (Standards Aligned System) resources at students' instructional level

Visit: [www.pdesas.org](http://www.pdesas.org) to learn more about what's occurring in our PA schools.