



The Hawkeye

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Inside the NJSLA

By Simon Santamaria

Overview

The New Jersey Student Learning Assessments for English Language Arts (NJSLA-ELA) measures student proficiency with grade level skills, knowledge, and concepts that are critical to college and career readiness. The New Jersey Student Learning Assessment for Mathematics (NJSLA-M) measures student proficiency with grade or course level skills, knowledge, practices, and concepts that are critical to college and career readiness. These tests were made to measure how well schools are teaching their students and to see how teachers have helped their students to improve. It is also used to measure a school's performance. The NJSLA was first taken in 2019 replacing the slightly longer PARCC. The PARCC was a test in 31 states and the District of Columbia that was meant to assess problem solving and critical thinking and was introduced in the spring of 2010. The NJSLA is similar to the PARCC, having similar standards and both are created by Pearson Learning.

Student Views

Most students say that, while annoying, the NJSLA is not a hard test, and it gives you too much time for each section. Some students, however, think that the NJSLA is not a bad test and has its reasons to be around because it helps teachers see how well their students are doing, and it gives time for teachers to relax and get caught up on work. Most students say the time allotted for each test should be shorter, but there were some students who either said it was the right amount of time or that they liked having so much time because it gives them time to check, gives them the feeling that they don't need to rush. Also, if a certain student finds a test hard, they have a lot of time to work on it. Despite all those facts, the same students also say that PCS should allow them to read earlier if they are done.

Teacher Views

The teachers' views are mixed. Most teachers say that they don't mind the NJSLA but some say they hate it. One such teacher says the NJSLA wastes class time that could be used and that carefully supervising the students as the state requires is hard. The teacher that doesn't mind them says the test gives them time to relax, watch the students

in a quiet environment, and gives them time to catch up on work even though towards the end of the testing time it is hard to keep the students quiet.

The Facts

The Hawkeye interviewed Ms. Eckstrom as well as some senior teachers to find out the background and the facts behind the NJSLA. Ms. Eckstrom explained that the NJSLA demands a lot of time in coming up with a schedule that works and doesn't disrupt any lunch periods.

She also explained that the precursors to the NJSLA were the NJASK and the PARCC. Both the NJASK and the PARCC needed more physical space for document storage as they were on paper that needed to be under double lock and key. The NJSLA, on the other hand, only demands that the tickets with the passwords be placed under double lock and key, which takes up a fraction of the space as before.

When the PARCC was switched to an electronic version, schools were not prepared for it, having not been helped by the state to install a better network. The PARCC was a bandwidth-hungry test, and most schools didn't have the network to support the PARCC causing it to crash.

Another issue with running the electronic test was that sometimes a nervous student would change the position of their computer, which would momentarily lose internet connection and cause the test to crash. That issue was carried over to the NJSLA, but recently that issue hasn't been occurring.

The NJSLA added the science test, which this year was extended by twenty minutes and contained video. This was a

new development that surprised many students, and the addition of the videos made the NJSLA the first New Jersey state test to include videos. The evidence for the video being experimental is video had never been used on the PARCC, so Pearson didn't know if a question based on a video would work. Also, some students would notice that they sometimes had a video but their neighbor didn't, which caused a panic.

One thousand seven hundred forty seven tests are given out to middle school PCS students alone. However, the results of this test are less informative than the ERB's are for the school. The ERBs break down every section done so teachers can see how someone did on a certain section.

However this test is required at PCS because we are a charter school, which, like any public school, must prove it is teaching its students well in order to have its contract renewed.

PCS Sports Wrap-Up

By Alexander Gu

Although sports aren't really the main focus of the Princeton Charter School, we still have some amazing and varied team sports. Students are allowed to participate in basketball, cross country, lacrosse, soccer, field hockey, and volleyball. *The Hawkeye* interviewed the coaches to see how the year went.

Basketball: Mr. Papp and Mr. Gonzalez

Mr. Gonzalez said that the PCS basketball team had a great season this year with some major changes to the style of play and team roster. One change was that there were two

teams for boys and girls this year, varsity and junior varsity. All eighth-grade students were put on the varsity team while most sixth and seventh-graders were chosen to play junior varsity. *The Hawkeye* interviewed Mr. Gonzalez to learn more about the season.

Overall, he said, all of the teams played well and to the best of their abilities. They competed hard every game and kept each game close. Some goals Mr. Gonzalez set for both the girls' and boys' teams were to improve their basketball skills in general including teamwork, dribbling, shooting, and other important abilities.

The main struggle the basketball team faced was that the players were too harsh on themselves. Everyone tries to play their best, but the Hawks started to lose confidence when they made a mistake. The coaches tried to constantly motivate their players even through discouragement. The team goal was to have fun, win games, and take advantage of playing together with friends.

A highlight of the season for the boys was during a close game with The Hawks trailing by two points. With a minute left, Kyle Carr was able to help The Hawks regain the lead through rebounds and free throws and win the game for Charter. On the girls' side, in one game the team was losing by five points at half-time, but they were able to come back and win the game by ten points through teamwork, determination, and a never-give-up mentality.

Cross Country: Mr. Burt and Ms. Trenholm

The PCS cross country team had arguably the best season ever. The team consisted of 50 students containing students from grades

6-8 and three coaches, Mr. Burt, Mrs. Trenholm, and Mr. Morris.

Occasionally, practices featured Mrs. Wilbur.

A goal the coaches set for next season is to add pre-season sessions during the summer for the new runners so that they can work on their team building and skill training. Another possibility is optional weekend running-themed activities.

Like the other sports, cross country had problems with runners who had to make a choice to either attend an extracurricular activity or the cross country practice or meet. Ms. Burt, Mrs. Trenholm, and Mr. Morris tried to make it as flexible as possible, but they also knew the importance of the runners showing up for practice, attending meets, and, most importantly, building a strong team. The coaches resolved this problem by assigning them individual practice schedules.

The team had lots of fun in those practices in which the runners showed the most grit and determination. The team ran in neighborhoods, parks, trails, and even in the school during a rainstorm. The coaches also tried new things as well such as a Halo Pub fun run.

The Hawkeye asked Mr. Burt and Mrs. Trenholm about their motivation throughout the season, and they said, "As coaches, our motivation was to provide all of our runners with a positive experience where they felt like they were part of a team and were able to challenge themselves and improve. While we love having athletes who are already runners, we also love having kids who have never run before coming out and participating."

The season started strong with their first meet in Newtown (6 teams, 120 runners) where the girls finished first and the boys finished second. In October, both teams placed first in the PCS invitational at Smoyer Park where the coaches spent a lot of time preparing and setting up this PCS-sponsored race with nine teams and more than 200 competitors.

In late October, the PCS Cross Country team had a historic race at Stuart Invitational (10 teams, 200 runners!) with both PCS teams taking the first-place trophy.

The season ended with the top seven boys and girls participating in the Mercer County Invitational, where the girls won first place twelve points ahead of second place. The girls' team consisted of Eowyn Deess (1st place overall), Phoenix Roth, Madeleine Tsai, Kathleen Xu, Charis Chien, Angelena Gonzalez, and Jiayi Li.

Soccer: Mrs. Miller and Mr. Gonzalez

The Hawks' soccer season went well with a record of four wins and three losses. It was led by Mrs. Miller, and Mr. Gonzalez. The team mainly consisted of sixth-grade players with a sprinkle of older students.

The Hawkeye interviewed Coach Miller.

A goal Ms. Miller set for next season was to have a larger age range of players because of how many sixth graders were on the team this year. She also wished for more girls on the team.

A major struggle of the season was players who played for outside clubs and teams and dedicated more time to these outside soccer teams. The coaches also struggled to learn how to help the students improve at their level. There was a wide variety of experience throughout the team

from beginners to those who wanted to chase their dream of being a professional. The team addressed these issues through patience, team-bonding activities, movie nights, and breathing exercises.

The coaches were able to create effective training sessions with drills dedicated to specific skills such as shooting, dribbling, or passing that could benefit the whole team.

Everyone played well, but there were two leaders, Kyle Carr and Phoenix Roth. Both players modeled for the younger students leadership, grit, and determination. They were never arrogant or cocky and helped the other students improve.

One highlight of the season was the first game of the year against Newtown Friends. The team played with so much energy, which helped them win the game.

Field Hockey/Lacrosse: Ms. Burd

The Hawkeye interviewed Ms. Burd who coached field hockey along with Mr. Gonzalez. The season went well, and everyone did an amazing job with their hustle, hard work, and sportsmanship. Ms. Burd said it was a "privilege" to watch the student-athletes improve throughout the season.

Some improvements Ms. Burd would like to make is to have a couple of "interest practices" for the younger students so that they don't hesitate to try out a new sport when they get to middle school. This way, all of the sports will grow year after year.

A major struggle during the field hockey season was the lack of players. Ms. Burd needed 11 players to build a full team, and Charter had 12. For many games, the team had no substitutions on the bench because of injuries.

In lacrosse, the biggest struggle was the lack of experience, for the majority of the team had only been playing lacrosse for one year or had never played.

Both teams were motivational and positive to each other, and the athletes supported each other and never blamed or hurt each other when someone made a mistake during practice or in games. Ms. Burd said, "I couldn't have asked for anything better."

The coaches' motivation this season was the athletes because they gave the teacher-coaches their "all" and put in their best effort.

Every game was great and contained amazing moments, and players were able to improve their skills and teamwork with each game.

Volleyball: Mr. Gonzalez

The varsity volleyball team had nine wins and just one loss. There were two teams, junior varsity and varsity, with most eighth-graders on varsity. *The Hawkeye* interviewed Mr. Gonzalez, Jasmine Li, and Lily Cao to gain further insight on how the season went.

One major struggle in the season was the lack of experience, for many players on the team had little to no experience playing volleyball on a team or even in backyards or on beaches. Another problem was a lack of communication on the court in the beginning because most people hadn't played with each other. This caused many late decisions and lost point opportunities. To overcome these struggles, the team worked on basic skills during practice and started to build teamwork after each practice and game.

Overall, the team was able to improve their skills by a lot at the end of the season. They had a near undefeated season, and showed fantastic teamwork.

Motivation plays a big role in sports. The *Hawkeye* asked team members Lily Cao and Jasmine Li what they thought was their fuel to succeed, get better, and win during the season. Lily said, "My motivation was being able to play with friends and classmates and to, in the end, win." Similarly, Jasmine said, "Volleyball is a sport that I enjoy very much and it's just the energy of my teammates and the thrill of it that keeps me going."

Although the team wasn't able to win against the Chapin School, they considered it a great game because they were able to learn and grow from the game as the opposing team pushed them outside of their comfort zones and helped them grow as athletes.

Old PCS Versus New PCS

By Madeleine Tsai

Overview

We recently had the opportunity to sit down with four veteran teachers to gain insight on the differences between PCS many years ago and PCS now. Mrs. Serxner, Mrs. Nahan, Mme. Toma, and Mr. Myers all have unique perspectives and were able to give firsthand accounts since they have been with the school since its earliest years.

Mrs. Serxner

When Mrs. Serxner considers the main differences between when the school first opened and now, she commented that the

size of the student body grew from 74 to 500. There were very few teachers, so the teachers all had to perform multiple duties. For example, Mrs. Serxner taught science, history, and one PE class. There were no substitutes, so if a teacher was absent, the other teachers would have to cover for it. She recalls, "I missed one day the first year, and I felt horrible because all of my colleagues would have to give up their free periods. It was a very tight ship." In addition to the growth of student body size and teacher staff size, she also reported that the facilities have changed drastically. When asked about the facility back then, she said, "When I started here, half the 5-8 building was shared with an office filled with workers, so the students would see men and women going to work on the other side of the building all the time. There used to be a bank that burned down where the lower school building is." One thing she says is the same is that the school is academically rigorous. Another thing that has been consistent is, according to Mrs. Serxner, "The commitment the families make to this school...In terms of the spirit and commitment of the families, I have found that remarkably consistent. And that's why I love working here. The kids are amazing but their families are also amazing."

Mrs. Nahan

Mrs. Nahan recalls PCS with extremely few resources and small space. After the remodel of the first K-4 building, she was supposed to be on the second floor of that building. She says, "When I went in there the head of school said, 'You're sharing it with art.' That's half the size of the music room. I said, 'No, let art have it.'" The extensions of

the buildings have had enormous impacts on the school. As a music teacher, Nahan has always found herself with a mixture of students. She remembers that up until about 8 years ago, "We used to have everybody sing. We had music all year long. We still had the concerts and all but everybody sang." She notes about the students in the chorus, saying, "It's playing together, so that requires not just smarts, but caring about others. So I've always found that the chorus students become close knit and care for each other. It's not who does it best; it's who blends." For her, finding students who are compassionate for each other has continued to be true. Learning from her long experiences at PCS has taught her that change is a good thing. "It's okay to have new traditions. You don't have to do what I did. It's nice to recreate, but it's also nice to create things. You don't have to be stuck in the past. Every year there are a couple of things I do the same, but there's always something new. I never stop learning."

Mme. Toma

Mme. Toma remembers PCS at a time when there were no supplies, and they got their desks from Princeton University. They only had two classrooms when they started at the Nassau Presbyterian Church. There were only five teachers for three grades. She believes the most striking difference has been the physical structure of the campus. She says that, "Before, we had a gym on the playground, and we would go ice skating in the winter and bowling in the spring. Everything was outside before we had a gym." The addition of the gym was a huge improvement as the school grew. She also remembers the school going from one class

per grade to more than double with two classes per grade. When asked what type of student is attracted to PCS, she replied, “They base their choice on the fact that the curriculum has always been very strong. The type of student would be one that likes to learn and is very curious about learning.”

Mr. Myers

Mr. Myers recounted the time when, “[PCS] used the basement of a church as the school for the first year, and every time there was a church service, they would have to take out all the stuff from the school on Friday.” Mr. Myers remembers when the school first moved to the current location when there were 6 trailers outside because the previous K-4 building was burned down. Some of those trailers had broken pipes, unworking toilets, and mice infestations, so, “They weren’t the most pleasant classrooms.” He remembers when, “In summer we had a pool day at the community pool, and we also had a school ski trip.” Of course, he remembers the population has become so much bigger with more than doubling in population. When asked about his hopes for PCS in the future, he commented, “I hope that the school will develop the ability to really serve kids who struggle academically more than we already have. We’ve gotten much better at it, but I know we can do much more.”

Conclusion

The perspectives of these four veteran teachers reveal many aspects of the school that have changed in addition to many things that have remained the same. While it is obvious to most that the school has undergone major physical changes in recent

years, we learned from interviewing these teachers just how far it's come when we consider the fact that the school started out in two rooms of a church basement before even moving to the current location. Even more notable, there has been remarkable growth of the school in terms of students and teachers. However, a few key aspects of PCS have remained the same: dedicated teachers, eager students, and supportive families.

Students Respond to School Lunch

By Kaianne Mark and Gabby Poynter

The Hawkeye interviewed people about what they think about the school lunches. In order to collect the data, we asked some of the students who took the school lunch in K-4 and compared it to the data we collected in 5-8.

We first asked, generally, if people even liked the school lunch. You can guess that many people said NO, for an answer, yet the polls were very close. The interesting part of our research, though, was that the students who said no were mostly in the 5-8 building. Most kids from elementary school said “Yes, the lunches were delicious.” This means that far more students from the younger age group enjoyed the school lunches rather than did the older students.

Almost every single student in the K-4 division said that the school lunches were delectable.

After we asked the general question, who liked the school lunches, and who didn’t, we asked students what their favorite school lunch was. The vast majority of middle-school students said that their

favorite was the chicken nuggets. We took the survey again, now focusing on much younger students. They all agreed that they liked the tamale the best. Then we realized that when we first took the survey, we surveyed more older students than younger pupils. We can confidently make a statement that older students liked the chicken nuggets and younger students liked the tamales.

In the 5-8 building, we asked people who did not like the school lunch to provide two words to describe it. The most common words used were “disgusting” and “uneatable”. Other kids also decided to describe the lunches as “A ball of mush and boogers”. When we surveyed the K-4 students, one kid described the food as, “The best food ever”. Other kids in the K-4 population described it as good, and perfect. This shows that there is a significant difference in older and younger students' tastebuds.

The last question we asked students who did not like the school lunch was what they would do to improve the lunch? The answer most commonly provided was to find a better source for food that was “actually edible.”

In conclusion, we have enough data and evidence to comfortably state that the younger kids at Princeton Charter School enjoy the school lunch much more than older students. We can only speculate about why that could be!

8th Graders Bid Farewell to Charter

By Eowyn Deess

As this academic year comes to a close, the eighth graders at Princeton Charter School prepare to embark on the next part of their educational journey: high school. *The Hawkeye* interviewed six departing eighth graders to reflect on their experiences at this school and their path ahead.

For these students, leaving PCS is a bittersweet experience. They have grown so much as a part of Charter's close community. A student who has spent eight years at Charter mentioned how they really enjoyed “being with some of those [classmates] for eight years already and even some for only two years.” “Going into high school,” they said, “is really going to be a big change from seeing the people [they] know almost every day.” Another student felt sad at their departure from Charter because PCS “gives me a sense of community, and it's my family. I have my friends and so many teachers who are really nice to me.” Students also feel gratitude towards PCS for helping to develop their time management skills. One student remarked that they have “grown a lot in confidence.” They were also grateful for their time on the cross country team because they “made a lot more friends after that” and became more socially confident.

When asked what they would miss the most about PCS, the students gave varying answers. A number of students spoke about how Princeton Charter School's teachers are so interested in learning and interested in helping students learn. They have had so

many good teachers. Students also spoke about missing the close sense of community that is Charter. They will miss their friends who may not be attending the same high school. One student mentioned extracurriculars at Charter as something they will miss a lot. The broad ranges of options and opportunities for students to participate in extracurriculars and the number of students signing up for them were things students will miss.

When asked what they would miss the least or less about PCS, a few students mentioned that the academic pressure sometimes presented by Charter could be overwhelming. A few students also mentioned the small size of the school to be a point they wouldn't miss as much as some others.

Students had nervous feelings and excitement about their paths into high school. Exploring and navigating high school will be stressful and nerve-racking, but the new adventures and people they will encounter are causes for excitement.

Also asked of the eighth graders was "What are some hopes/aspirations you have for the future?" "What do you want to do?" There was a broad variety of answers, as this query can be taken in different ways.

In terms of jobs and professions, students had many different answers: acting on Broadway, becoming a K-pop star, or becoming a radiologist. A few people said they'd like to be fashion designers!

Some answers were geared towards hopes for high school: To stop procrastinating, to attend Science Bowl in Washington, D.C., all four years in high school, to make new friends, and to start to

shift extracurriculars to just a few that they really enjoyed versus many different activities.

Finally, *The Hawkeye* asked the eighth graders if they had any advice for next-year's eighth graders and younger students. The answers for this question were very similar among the interviewees: savor and appreciate your time at PCS. There are so many opportunities that this school gives its students, especially to the eighth graders (a shout-out to the fantastic D.C. and world language field trips!). And spend lots of time with your friends, as some or many of them may not be going to the same school as you in the future.

As the departing eighth grade Class of 2023 says their goodbyes, they prepare for their futures. With knowledge and skills, many of which they have developed at Charter, they will go out into the world and hopefully help change it for the better.

Eighth Grade's Trip to Washington D.C.

By Patrick Song

At the end of every year, the eighth grade class goes on a three-day civics field trip to Washington D.C. After three eighth grade classes came and went without this signature experience because of the pandemic, the class of 2023 was able to go. The trip included an evening tour of monuments and memorials, a viewing of historical documents ranging from the Magna Carta to U.S. plans for an invasion against the Soviet Union, a visit to the United States Capitol, a special "meet and greet" with New Jersey

Senator Booker, a tour of the Arlington National Cemetery, visits to many Smithsonian Museums, and finally a play at Ford's Theater (where Lincoln was assassinated). Before the trip, eighth graders were asked to divide into groups to conduct research and prepare presentations on different monuments, museums, and sites in Washington D.C.

We left Charter at around 7 A.M. in late April, and arrived at our first stop at the National Sculpture Garden, where we enjoyed lunch. There was a large fountain surrounded by a circle of benches, and we were able to view different sculptures there. After lunch, we had the first presentation discussing the history of the garden and its famous sculptures. Our first destination that afternoon was the National Archives, where we split into groups and viewed historic documents like the Magna Carta, the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, and more. We then walked to the Hart Office Building, where we met Senator Booker for a Q&A. He asked us about our experiences at Charter and how we would improve the United States, and we took turns asking questions regarding school safety, gun regulations, and more. Our visit continued with a walk to the United States Capitol, where we were led on a tour through the whole building. We were introduced to the various paintings and sculptures along the wall and the old House of Representatives and even saw senators passing by. Then, we walked along the National Mall where we started at the WWII memorial and traversed to the Korean War Memorial, Lincoln Memorial, and Vietnam Veterans Memorial.

On the second day, we started off touring Arlington National Cemetery and watching the Changing of the Guard ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. We were planning to visit the Marine Corps Memorial and various Smithsonian Institutes, but had to cancel the plans due to extensive delays at Arlington Cemetery. Instead, we headed straight to the National Gallery of Art, where we had lunch at a cafe. We then visited the National Museum of African American History and Culture, which houses many artifacts depicting the African Americans' struggles to gain civil and human rights in our country's history. The day concluded with a tour of three more memorials: the Jefferson Memorial, the Franklin D. Roosevelt Memorial, and the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial.

On the final day, we had a rainy visit to Lafayette Square and took a picture outside the fences of the White House. Unfortunately, we did not have the opportunity to tour and explore inside the White House. Afterwards, at the Ford's Theater, we watched "One Destiny," a play discussing the aftermath and recollections of President Abraham Lincoln's assassination. Following the play, we stopped at Panera to pick up our lunches before returning to Princeton.



The Washington D.C. trip helped me strengthen my understanding of the functions of different branches in the United States government. I was also able to learn about the architectural design and plan for each building as well as how each element ranging from statues to the viewing position symbolizes the characteristics of each memorial. Having the opportunity to form groups with my friends enhanced my learning as compared to splitting up into randomly assigned groups. Exploring many museums and memorials with friends added much excitement and definitely improved my experience at each individual site. For me, the most memorable experience was the evening memorial tour. We stopped at the World War Two Veterans Memorial just as the sun began to set. The sunset over the reflection pool was a stunning sight. In addition, learning the background and history behind each memorial gave me more

context and understanding of the symbols in the memorial. The Korean War Memorial and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial had a particularly deep impression on me. The Arlington National Cemetery visit was underwhelming due to the one hour wait for the tram in pretty hot weather. However, the Changing of the Guard ceremony at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier made the Arlington tour worth the wait. The hotel stay for me and some of my classmates was difficult because rooms were cramped and the loud sounds of a city outside kept us awake. We were the first eighth grade that stayed at a hotel, as others were stayed at a children's education center close to the city.



Despite all the fun and excitement that comes with touring a historic city with friends, the trip still had its educational aspects. The many goals of this trip are to explore the workings of the United States government, the architecture behind the various memorials, the history of African American people in the United States, and different documents that reflect American policy throughout its history. Speaking with Senator Booker, getting explanations from our U.S. Capitol tour guide, and reading documents provided in the National

Archives all helped us understand the process that goes into making new laws, how people of each state's ideas are represented in Congress, and more. Presentations given by classmates at each memorial, descriptions on signs, and tour guides' explanations helped us grasp the subtle but important details that give the structure its purpose. Visiting the National Museum of African American History and Culture and viewing the many artifacts on display enabled us to understand the ongoing struggle that African American people face to this day.

In conclusion, the signature PCS trip to Washington D.C. is an exciting experience that not only allows the eighth graders to tour almost every significant site in our nation's capital, but also deepens our understanding of American civics, government, and history. Even though some aspects of the trip may be different as the pandemic dies out and unforeseen changes and setbacks may arise, the entire trip is and will remain an amazing and new experience for all future eighth graders of PCS.

The Charter Players Journey

By Charis Chien

After three consecutive sold out shows of the musical *Annie* here at Princeton Charter School, the *Hawkeye* interviewed some of the performers and directors so we could take you behind the scenes of this wonderful spectacle and revisit the history of the Charter theater.

Views of the Director

As the beloved director for three large-scale productions at Princeton Charter School, Mrs. Clemens has been with Charter for only about one and a half years. She looks back from when she first set foot on campus and was especially drawn by not only the endearing landscape that the school offers but also by the different clubs and activities that were going on, the high-level and diverse curriculum, and, not least, the small class sizes. She now shares a room with Madame Devlaminck, but before that, she taught in the Black Box room and other times in Mrs. Juergensen's room.

Clemens commented on how the plays and musicals have progressively gotten better in terms of how the quality of the production has grown significantly too from props, space, and sound & lighting. The cast has also doubled - even tripled - in size whether it be the performers or stage crew that are participating. The plays and musicals chosen for last year and this year were based on the active Charter Players and the student body. She would take note of how many different people joined and this year, she organized an Interest Meeting to get a feel on how many people there would be. If the turnout wasn't as expected, she would then have to alternate plans in advance - "you will be successful if set up for success", Clemens remarks.

It's not all "easy peasy lemon squeezy" when choosing the different people to act the main roles; rather a good deal of thought goes into each and every character. For Puck, the main fairy in *A Midsummer's Mayhem*, Clemens looked for a "larger than life character who commanded the audience's attention and had to be quick

witted too.” The radio-show play *It’s A Wonderful Life* is lighthearted and happy in the beginning but then goes on to more difficult and heartbreaking times, so the student playing George “would have to display different levels of emotion throughout the play, and the acting should be authentic and not forced.” For the character Annie, the acting should be “endearing, truthful, and from the heart. The audience should be able to connect with and care for this character”.

As for herself, Clemens is slowly learning ways to utilize the space of theater in various ways whether it be with the scenery and lighting or the use of auditorium space itself. A spoiler alert she has is for the upcoming fall play, a murder mystery, she plans on using the three sides of the Black Box Theater to create a sense of closeness in the mystery for the audience and the actors instead of using the whole gym.

When Clemens was planning the *Annie* musical, she wanted to include actors and actresses of different ages to make the production realistic. That’s why she included younger students and faculty members too. She specifically chose the fourth graders because she was familiar with them; she’d taught them not only one trimester, but every week for all three trimesters. She’d have them audition, do activities, move around, and she’d give them roles such as a movie star or a police officer.

Sandy, she points out how Cristian Gonzalez “physically became the dog,” and when she saw him audition, she was under the impression that he was the definite role for him. She also mentions how he was quiet in the beginning, but as he came out of his

shell throughout the show and towards the end, Cristian told her, “I can’t wait to do my next show!”

The trio of Mrs. Clemens, Mr. Ciuffreda, and Mrs. Nahan helped work on the *Annie* play as directors and made it the success it was. Clemens reflects on the fact that they worked well together: “There weren’t any issues in terms of personality or anything. Sure, there might be a time overlap, like say Ms. Nahan needed Annie to rehearse singing at the same time I needed her to block acting, or say maybe Mr. Ciuffreda needed the actors to perform a mic check to secure the levels, but besides that, after we got into the work and rhythm, it got easier and flowed smoothly as we also had a calendar for the different goals for different days”.

Moreover, Mrs. Clemens came up with all the original choreography in the dances for the musical. She remarked how she’d always choreographed these types of things for musicals, as she was also a dance minor in college. It’s easy for her to do it as it’s part of her vision. She notes, “It runs in my mind like a movie.” A tradition she’s always followed is decorating the lobby, so in the *Annie* production, she put photos of New York City and the performers’ headshots on the wall. Another tradition is the concession stand. She said, “It’s a good way to make money for resources for future productions such as a new spotlight or improved sound equipment where the performers can wear the microphone in their hair. I’m trying to give real world experience and opportunity to all the jobs on Broadway.”

A final message that Mrs. Clemens’ father taught her and that she would like to

pass on to the eighth-grade cast and crew: “Always follow your passion. If you’re passionate about something, you’ll do better at it and will see your passion and feel it. Always do what your passion is about and pursue it”.

***Annie* Performers’ Personal Experience**

As an actress in *Annie*, it was very interesting coming back from COVID. I have performed in other mini school plays during my elementary years such as *Piggie Pie* in first grade, *Crayons & Frosty the Snowman* in second grade, and the *Henriette Petite Souris* French play in fourth grade; and now to larger-scale productions such as *A Midsummer Mayhem* play in seventh grade and *It’s A Wonderful Life* in eighth grade. So, I’d count performing *Annie* this spring as my first grand musical ever.

Granted, I’d only taken singing lessons and attended McCarter Theater Summer camps when I was very young and had just come back to acting and singing recently. I still remember attending the first meeting right after winter break of the overview of how’d it go—we couldn’t miss any rehearsals since it’d have to require not only acting and blocking where to go with peers, but going over singing and dancing too. We’d chosen sheets of music and a monologue to perform during the audition. The first auditions were performed separately for singing and acting in front of the three judges with only one performer at a time and the others waiting in the Black Box Theater. However, there was also a dance piece each person had to perform with five other performers too. After that, it would be narrowed down to people being called for callbacks—to perform another song and act with not only

the judges this time but the other people that were called back who would also be in the room spectating. A few days later, the list of who’d play which parts was posted on Schoology. That was the day I anxiously clicked the assignment page, and the first thing I read was “Annie: Charis!” I sat there for a moment in shock and quickly ran up the stairs to tell the good news to my mom. It was a joyful moment that lasted a while, and shortly the real hard work would start. We would have to stay after school to practice a few scenes a day with their blocking and choreography. As the Dance Captain for the musical, 7th grader Sophia Budney describes her experience as “very fun”, although she thinks that there should be more 7th graders involved and joining in too.

And as one of the main characters of the play, of course I’d be obligated to go to every meeting whereas others might only need to come on specific days. Not only would we practice after school but also during drama class where we would take the time to block out acting or choreography we missed or to gather around in the music room to sing the songs together or have one on one’s with Ms. Nahan to really go deeply into going through the emotions and hand movements too.

For the first time, the musical included faculty members. It was a joy and wonder to many when the 7th and 8th grade science teacher Ms. Celik joined in on rehearsals. In addition, Ms. Celik noted that she’d never actually been in a show before, even during her school years. She was amazed at the complexity of the production and by how many people were on stage. Overall, she

was very impressed! The first show she saw at Charter was *Annie* in 2014, which was held in the limited area of the Black Box Theater; a production she also enjoyed was *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* in 2015. Ms. Celik jokes about how she wished she had practiced the songs more as there were a handful of high notes such as in “Tomorrow” and “N.Y.C.”. Throughout the three months of rehearsals, Ms. Celik has really valued her time waiting outside the theater and talking to other teachers such as Madame Devlaminck, Ms. Horan, and Ms. Gonzalez whom she doesn’t always see.

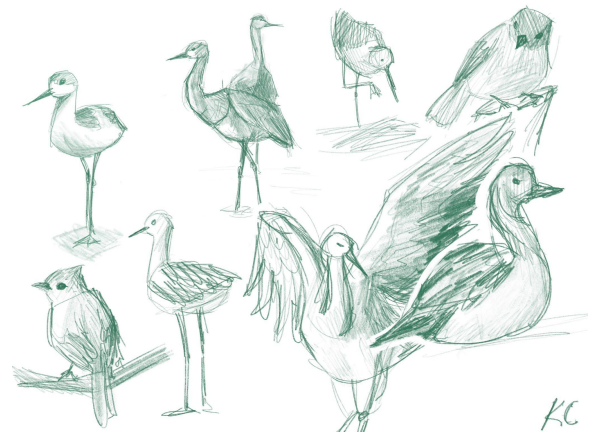
After about two to three months, the rehearsals resulted in the three shows on Friday and Saturday. It was a joy to present a play I’m really passionate about with others and to see other classmates, outside friends, and family coming to watch and cheer us on. A huge thank you to every performer, crew member, and director for making this come true.

The Versatile Theater

Whether it be overseeing theater and musical productions or organizing chorus and orchestra concerts, Ms. Nahan has been a hardworking member of the Charter family. To her, “the musical has been here forever.” It started as an audition with the Charter Room as the stage and the second floor classrooms as changing rooms, so the performers would have to use the fire escape and certain exits as passageways. The old shows were then confined in the Black Box Theater. “Mrs. Clemens then established and reconfigured the different lighting, spotlights, and brought the stage into the 21st century.” Ms. Nahan also tells how she’s so amazed with all the dancing

rehearsals without teachers that are held with such great leadership and independence, especially with the co-captain, 7th grader Sophia Budney. The team also rehearses their lines with friends at school, and the leadership is not only in the teachers’ hands but also the people and the company of the play, the students.

Here’s an art piece by 8th grader Katherine Chen:



Jokes to Lighten the Mood

Compiled by Olivia Poynter

1. Q: What did the right eye say to the left?
A: Something smells between us.
2. Q: What do you call a duck with all A's?
A: A wise quaker.
3. Q: Why can't you trust an atom?
A: Because they make up everything.
4. Q: Why did the students eat their homework?
A: Because their teacher said it was a piece of cake.

5. Q: How did Harry Potter get down the hill?
A: JK Rolling

6. Q1: Why did the elephant paint his toenails red?
A1: So he could hide in a strawberry patch.

Q2: Have you ever seen an elephant hiding in a strawberry patch?
Everyone: "No!"
A2: See, it works!

7. Q: Why did the cricket go to the dentist?
A: Because he had cricket teeth.

8. Q: what did the buffalo say to his son when he dropped him off for school
A: Bi-son.

9. Q: Why are fish so smart?
A: Because they always swim in schools.

10. Q: Why couldn't the pirate play cards?
A: Because he was sitting on the deck.

11. Q: Why did the teacher wear sunglasses to school?
A: Because his students were so bright.

12. Q: Why did the teacher draw on the window?
A: Because he wanted his lesson to be clear.

13. Q: What do elves learn in school?
A: The elf-abet

THE HAWKEYE

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