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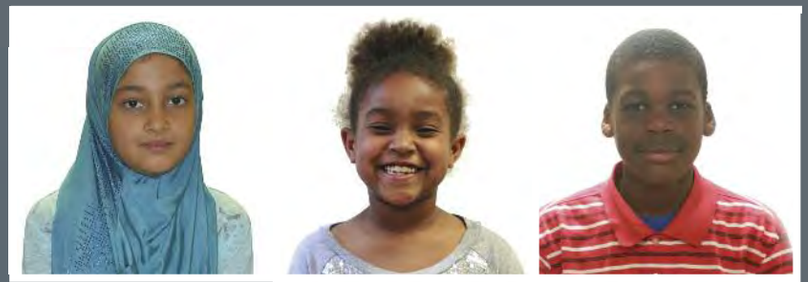

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FUTURE

Adult & Continuing Education Catalog

Inside pg 14

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Message from the Directors

Five years ago, the Office of Neighborhoods and Families was charged with implementing the directives of a community-created *Children, Youth, and Family Master Plan*. From the beginning, one of the department's major goals was strengthening the relationship between the town and the Board of Education. During the last school year, the Office adopted the Manchester Public Schools' new *Family and Community Engagement Plan* as its unofficial "second-generation" plan with the goal of further aligning the work of all those committed to Manchester's children and families.

Today, we are excited to announce the first Education Edition of *Better Manchester Magazine*, an unprecedented town-school collaborative publication, produced on-site at the EastSide Neighborhood Resource Center, which is now home to both the Town of Manchester Office of Neighborhoods and Families as well as the Manchester Public Schools Office of Family and Community Partnership. *Better Manchester Magazine* will continue its mission of bridging communication on a town-wide scale with "community" issues packaged together with the Manchester Recreation Department catalog. The new "education" issues of the magazine will be released in conjunction with the Manchester Adult and Continuing Education Program Guide.

The Office of Neighborhoods and Families and *Better Manchester Magazine* are proud to partner with Manchester Public Schools in this new work, and we look forward to chronicling the past, present, and future work across the entire Manchester community of all committed to a Better Manchester.

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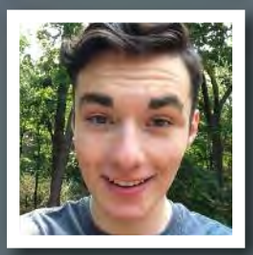

James Costa
MHS 2017

Kaitlin Maloney
MHS 2015

ON THE COVER

Top Row: Aaisha M., *Buckley*; Alicia C., *Keeney*; Jamari M., *Buckley*; **Second Row:** Brock R., *Keeney*; Dasani F., *Bennet*; **Third Row:** Zamiah S., *MHS*; Deacon P., *Keeney*; Amanda P., *Bennet*; Jack S., *Highland Park*; **Forth Row:** Jenny A., *Illing*; Aaron A., *Martin*; Dora G., *Martin*; Damon B., *Washington*; Cora M., *Waddell*; **Fifth Row:** Tanvi P., *Robertson*; David D., *Highland Park*; Jezmine M., *MHS*; **Sixth Row:** Daisy G., *Bowers*; Austin C., *Robertson*; Rayeisha G., *Illing*; Angelica K., *Keeney*; Afeef S., *Waddell*; **Seventh Row:** Kyle M., *Bowers*

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Visitors to any of Manchester's 13 public schools may encounter staff members wearing brightly colored T-shirts with words like "Courage" written across their front. The schools haven't gone to a casual dress code. These shirts and the words on each are one way we look to announce and look to live by four key tenets of our work.

Yellow shirts say "Excellence for all" and add "High expectations are the key to everything."

Green shirts are for Creativity, and say "Turn obstacles into opportunities."

Red? That's for Courage, and remind us "You must take your chance."

Finally, blue shirts trumpet Collaboration, and promise "anything is possible with teamwork."

Ours is a large, complex district, with more than 1,200 employees including more than 600 certified staff members working together to provide all of our approximately 6,200 students with a high quality education. Our objective – and here I quote from our district's mission statement – is to "create safe, inclusive schools where equity is the norm and excellence is the goal." Again, excellence for ALL is our first tenet. We seek to ensure all students are prepared to be lifelong learners and contributing members of society.

We view our work as hugely important and enormously satisfying – but not without challenges. For those who follow our budget and test scores, it should be clear that each of those areas can be quite complex. Inside our profession, educators are famously enveloped in a world that includes myriad abbreviations and acronyms. Our T-shirts are designed to remind us, in a simple, visible way, that if we stay focused on just a few key pillars – creativity, courage, collaboration, and excellence - and make decisions based first and foremost on what is good for all students, we will achieve our mission.

We are working in a time of great collaboration between the public schools and the community. This special education edition of *Better Manchester Magazine* is the result of an unprecedented collaboration between the school district and the town's Department of Neighborhood and Families, under the leadership of Chris Silver. His department has been publishing *BMM* for five years, and we are delighted to have worked together to produce this special edition, which for the first time focuses exclusively on public schools in town.

The cover of this magazine features the faces of two dozen randomly selected students from schools throughout the district. When you look at the faces on individual young people you are not thinking about statistics or generic students but of those children and young adults who will be the future. Each has a unique story. We wanted to feature students and their stories to share our vision as they are the focus of all that we do.

This edition emphasizes the faces and stories we hope will help to illustrate our pillars: creativity, courage, collaboration, and excellence. One dimension of our district that we believe exemplifies these pillars in action – our efforts to ensure that all students have access to 21st Century technology that supports student-centered learning—is highlighted as well. We can't ready the next generation for the world it will face with pencils and notebooks alone. Digital tools are those they will need to compete. Another reality of that world is its increasing shift toward globalization and diversity. We sought to share stories about the amazing diversity within our district that makes our schools beacons for global learning.

With the faces we've chosen and the stories each has to tell, we hope to give readers an unusually revealing "insider's perspective" on what is going on in our schools. You should also know, though, that everything you see is part of what we believe to be a thoughtful, coordinated effort – one that is outlined in our District Improvement Plan.

That document, which you can read on the district website at www.MPSPride.org, breaks down our work into four key areas. One is **Talent**, where our work is focused on recruitment, retention, and development of a diverse faculty and staff. In the area of **Academics**, we are deeply committed to ensuring that all students have access to a challenging, engaging curriculum. Our work on **Culture and Climate** is deeply focused on strengthening relationships between and among students, families, and staff, while our efforts in the area of **Systems** seek to ensure continuity and consistencies across the system through thoughtful planning and collaboration.

This is a time of tremendous change in education, including reflection on the Common Core State Standards, which were implemented over the last three years along with the introduction of new standards in Science and Social Studies. The work to improve the Manchester Public Schools includes changes to our programming at all levels.

Among the most notable might be those that have taken place at Manchester High School during the past few years, including the creation of academies to ensure that all of our students there are part of a relatively small "learning community." Students in the academies have opportunities to pursue passions and to focus their learning around themes that may become careers or future majors. These academies are:

- MCA: Medical Careers Academy
- STEMD: Science, Technology, Engineering, Math and Design
- EPSA: Education and Public Service Academy
- CHEA: Culinary, Hospitality and Entrepreneurship Academy
- PAA/CCA: Our combined Performing Arts and Contemporary Communications academies.
- Liberal Arts

All of our 10th through 12th graders belong to an academy, while our grade 9 students are still housed primarily in the Freshmen Center.

Other highlights at MHS include the opening, a year ago, of a café within the building that is run by our CHEA students. And this year, EPSA students will assist with instruction and supervision of 3- and 4-year-olds in a new pre-school class that is moving into MHS.

Three years ago we were able to provide every student at MHS a Chromebook computer, accomplishing the first phase of our goal to ensure that all students had the 21st Century tools needed to interact with the curriculum and communicate as the world around them does. Relatively few public high schools in the state – or the nation, for that matter – can make that claim.We have gone further at this point, providing Chromebooks to all students from grades 6-12. 21st Century demands ask us to keep pace.

In another effort at keeping pace, starting this year, our Illing Middle School students will have the option of learning Mandarin Chinese, which is far and away the most popular language on earth. We have also revamped the schedules at Illing and Bennet to strengthen academic programming and add elective course offerings at each.

Use of technology and the skills called for in the world around us are essential to all students. As such, at our elementary schools we will be adding two Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) specialists to each elementary school. The STEM specialists will lead students in inquiry-based experiences to promote curiosity and excitement about the sciences. We will also be expanding our structured play initiative from Kindergarten to grade 1. The workshop model continues to be our primary format for teaching math, reading, and writing. The workshop model is designed to access the range of ways that children learn — from listening to the teacher modeling a skill to hands-on learning opportunities. It is a rigorous and challenging educational model that consists of a mini-lesson where a teacher shares the skill or strategy that is being taught, small group work where students work either with the teacher, independently, or collaboratively on a task that allows them to develop the particular skill or strategy that was taught, followed by a whole class conclusion to the lesson.

During this time of great change in education, our district is well-positioned to ensure that all of our students emerge as skilled, resourceful, thoughtful scholars and citizens. We have high expectations for all of our students, and we are confident that stressing creativity, collaboration and courage will prepare them well for life beyond graduation.

Manchester Public Schools

Visit
MPSPRIDE.ORG
to Learn More!

CREATIVITY

Hands-on exploration *is part of the appeal of "purposeful play" time for kindergarteners throughout town, including* ***Aamiyah P.*** *at Washington Elementary School. Meanwhile, at Manchester High,* ***Duran S.*** *(at left) and* ***Xavier A.*** *enjoy spending time in the 'Maker Space– a converted computer lab that is now home to an array of tools and materials where students can tinker, experiment and innovate.*

'Purposeful Play' Among Strategies That Inspire

In kindergarten classrooms across America, students sit quietly, listening to their teacher's instruction or hunched over a worksheet practicing letter shapes.

Not so in Christina Blum's classroom at Verplanck Elementary School. Here, students are spread about the room, some working together to build a block tower, others sifting sand, or playing with stuffed animals. Mrs. Blum moves slowly and attentively throughout, pausing for a moment next to a child who has been hovering near the sand sifters, gently encouraging the onlooker to join the play.
And "play," according to Mrs. Blum, is exactly the right word.

Across the country, while headlines are popping up dubbing kindergarten "the new first grade"— due to an ever-increasing focus on academics—Manchester Public Schools have made "purposeful play" part of every kindergarten students' day.

It's all part of a district-wide effort to emphasize creativity – which is now widely recognized as an essential 21st Century skill. Manchester High has converted a computer lab into a "Maker Space" – a place where students gather to collaborate and innovate amid an array of tools, materials, even a 3D printer. Keeney Elementary is implementing a "clusters" program, where students work together around interest areas such as hiking, kindness, engineering, and building. The list goes on … with creative initiatives reaching every school, every day, throughout the district.

The kindergarten play campaign started last year, when a committee developed a "library" of mobile learning centers to encourage student-directed play around themes such as the ocean and puppet theater.

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CREATIVITY

That is student **Roman N.** *(above) during a kindergarten play session at Verplanck. At right is* **Mr. Ortiz**, *a science teacher at Bennet, guiding a discussion about how student-constructed classroom terrariums and an aquarium lab can simulate ecosystems within our community. Ortiz is wearing one of the four T-shirts that were given to all staff members in the district; his says "Creativity -- Turn obstacles into opportunities."*

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"This isn't just throw out materials and have at it. It's supposed to be purposeful, and it is based on the state standards for early childhood," said Dr. Amy Radikas, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, who explained that teachers received support from the state Office of Early Childhood and the district Family Resource Centers ensuring they had the tools to encourage what the experts call "constructive" play.

According to Radikas, "constructive" play has a real —and vital—role in a child's development.
"There's a lot of information and research that states having students have choice supports the executive functioning of the brain," she said. "Allowing them to work collaboratively with their peers helps them develop the ability to play together, instead of just playing alongside one another. They have conversations. They build vocabulary. They are curious and creative."

And the benefits of play don't stop in Kindergarten.

At Keeney, older students participate in self-directed curiosity-driven projects work during "genius hour." Principal Julie Martin-Beaulieu, who adopted the "genius hour" model from the software world, stresses that creativity and play engender the flexibility of mind, self-starting, and willingness to fail that are increasingly valued in the 21st century. "The challenge now is to prepare our children for jobs that don't exist yet -- jobs we can't even imagine."

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CREATIVITY

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She isn't wrong.

In fact, studies suggest that jobs that rely on routines (e.g., manufacturing) and rule-based thinking (e.g., insurance underwriting) are vulnerable to automation in the next 10 to 20 years. These studies predict that jobs of the future will require creative and social intelligence.

That is, precisely the skills that children build when they engage in self-directed activity. Such as "purposeful play."

In Mrs. Blum's classroom, two children have carefully crafted the Legos into a now precarious tower. In response to a question on how her classroom has changed, Blum says she's seen real gains and "social and emotional skills." Then she bursts out, "Last year, my kids were in chairs for hours a day."

This year?

"I hear more from them. Last year, it was mostly them hearing from me."

She pauses.

"It's been wonderful."

At Verplanck, dozens of students and staff gathered recently for the launch of Reading Dogs vs. Math Cats, which was funded by a district-led creativity grant program. The district has given out over $88,000 in creativity grants to school staff seeking to fund "innovative approaches that engage students in critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity." Above, ***Ja'Ziyah L.*** *was one of the 12 Verplanck students in Grades 1 - 5 who worked with a local author to brainstorm, plot, write, edit, and illustrate the 18-page story featuring the Tails of Joy Reading Education Assistance Dogs. At right, Washington students* ***Ari M.*** *and* ***Jayson W.*** *build a tower as classmate* ***Jameson K.*** *reaches for more blocks during kindergarten play.*

COLLABORATION

Together, anything is possible. *That's MHS students* ***Kyon R.*** *(top left) and* ***James L.*** *(right) carrying out a lab procedure in Chemistry class. They are performing an acid-base titration, one of the most common ways to identify concentrations of unknown solutions. Above, that's teacher* ***Daniel Spada*** *and student* ***Ny'chzzieanna B.*** *preparing graphics for the Illing Morning News. At left, Buckley Elementary School physical education teacher* ***Mike Kolze*** *gives student* ***Bassel T.*** *a boost.*

Partnerships are Crucial In Classroom and Beyond

"It's all about relationships."

At the Manchester Public Schools' new Office of Family and Community Partnership, it's become a sort of refrain—echoed at team meetings, punctuating anecdotes, and volleyed across the hallway at the end of the long day. Sometimes an explanation of a series of events, sometimes a rallying cry. In the converted Spruce Street firehouse that's now home of the EastSide Neighborhood Resource Center, it's always in the air.

This time the speaker is Latasha Turnquest, the director of Manchester Public Schools' Family Resource Centers (FRCs) and an integral member of the Office of Family and Community Partnership's active core team. She's explaining the spirit behind the district's commitment to expanding the scope and reach of FRCs throughout Manchester.

Since 2007, when Turnquest took over as coordinator of the FRC in Washington Elementary School, the number of centers in Manchester has grown from one to nine. For the first time, when schools open on Aug. 27 there will be an FRC in place at every elementary school across the district.

"We really deal with family as a whole," said Turnquest, referencing the five-component model adapted by the district from Manchester's original FRC, which is still funded and administered through Eastern Connecticut Health Network's Family Development Center. Through family engagement, outreach, playgroups, positive youth development, and resource and referral, the goal of the FRCs in Manchester Public Schools is to create a place for every family in the district—even those without children in the schools—to connect with supports, opportunities, and each other.

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COLLABORATION

Parents and guardians play a crucial role in the education of every child, which is why Manchester public schools make every effort to collaborate with families inside and outside of school buildings. Robertson kindergartener ***Amari D.*** *is escorted by his father while walking to class. All of the elementary schools have Family Resource Centers. At Bowers, FRC director* ***Latasha Turnquest*** *(above, at left) chats with parent* ***Geraldine Reyes****.* ***Rachael Hymen*** *(right) oversees the FRC at Verplanck.*

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Said Turnquest: "I remember someone saying in an FRC meeting, 'It doesn't matter your socioeconomic status or the side of the town you live in. At some point, we are all in need of resources. We are all in need of someone just to talk to or bounce ideas off of.' "

According to Dr. Scott Ratchford, Director of the Office of Family and Community Partnership, it's not just the undisputed need for connections that's driving the district's investment in initiatives such as the Family Resource Model. It's also the power of those connections.

"There's a large and growing body of research supporting the idea that the greater the collaboration among families, schools, and communities, the better the outcomes for kids," said Ratchford. He was referring to the new wave of education policy inspired by scholars such as Harvard's Karen Mapp, which shows strong correlations between parent-school-community partnerships and indicators such as student achievement. "When we all work together, test scores go up," Ratchford said. "Absences and dropout rates go down. Students are more motivated and teachers are happier at work. It's win-win-win across the board."

Inside the schools, too, collaborative relationships are seen as crucial to student success. New approaches to teaching and learning, such as the "workshop" model, which allows students room to both work with and solicit feedback from peers, help students gain the collaboration skills increasingly desired by colleges and future employers. In school-level Professional Learning Communities and district-level groups such as the District Improvement Team, professionals are increasingly taking a collaborative approach to shaping both curriculum and administrative policy.

At the EastSide Neighborhood Resource Center, which now houses both town and school offices in the same building, Ratchford says that's the way it should be.

"It all comes down to an essential truth. When we all work together as partners we are much more likely to create an environment where all students succeed."

Or, in other words: "It's all about relationships."

21ST CENTURY TOOLS

Manchester has "Gone Google," *as every student has a school Gmail address along with access to Chromebook computers and all the 'apps' that come with. In the photo above, Martin fifth-grader* **Lordina A.** *is using her Chromebook to get information as she investigates the attributes of seashells. At right is MHS student* **Amanda D.**, *creating promotional materials during her Sports & Entertainment Marketing class.*

Thanks to Chromebooks, Students Always Connected

Schools throughout Manchester are closing down computer labs, but not because there is a de-emphasis on technology.

Quite the opposite.

Now, it's all about 1-to-1.

"To compete in the world today, people have to be connected," said Kerri Kearney, the district's director of technology. "That's especially true for students – and we have made a commitment to go 1-to-1 because it provides amazing opportunities."

Every Manchester student from grades 6 to 12 has daily, personal access to a computer, and students at the high school are issued a Chromebook to carry all day and take home at night. (Students at Bennet and Illing are generally not allowed to take their Chromebooks home.)

"The possible benefits are dizzying and we've only begun to explore them," said Kearney, noting that Manchester has "gone Google" by affiliating with the nation's most powerful technology company.

Every student has a school-issued Gmail address, and access to an entire suite of computer apps. The most popular might be "Google Drive" — which allows teachers and students to see and even edit the same document simultaneously.

"Now that students have access to a world of information at their fingertips, classes no longer have to wait for limited computer lab time to research, write and create," Kearney said. "At home, students with siblings don't need to compete for their turn to use the computer. Beyond just access, students and teachers can collaborate in real time, anytime."

Kearney added that teachers can go beyond book work and assign homework that allows students to take advantage of a Khan Academy tutorial or a documentary hosted on YouTube.

"As students and teachers become more comfortable with the devices, the types of things they are creating continue to evolve," she said.

Tyler Madden, who is starting his junior year at MHS in the fall, said Chromebooks are invaluable, in part because "you don't have to lug 500 textbooks around anymore."

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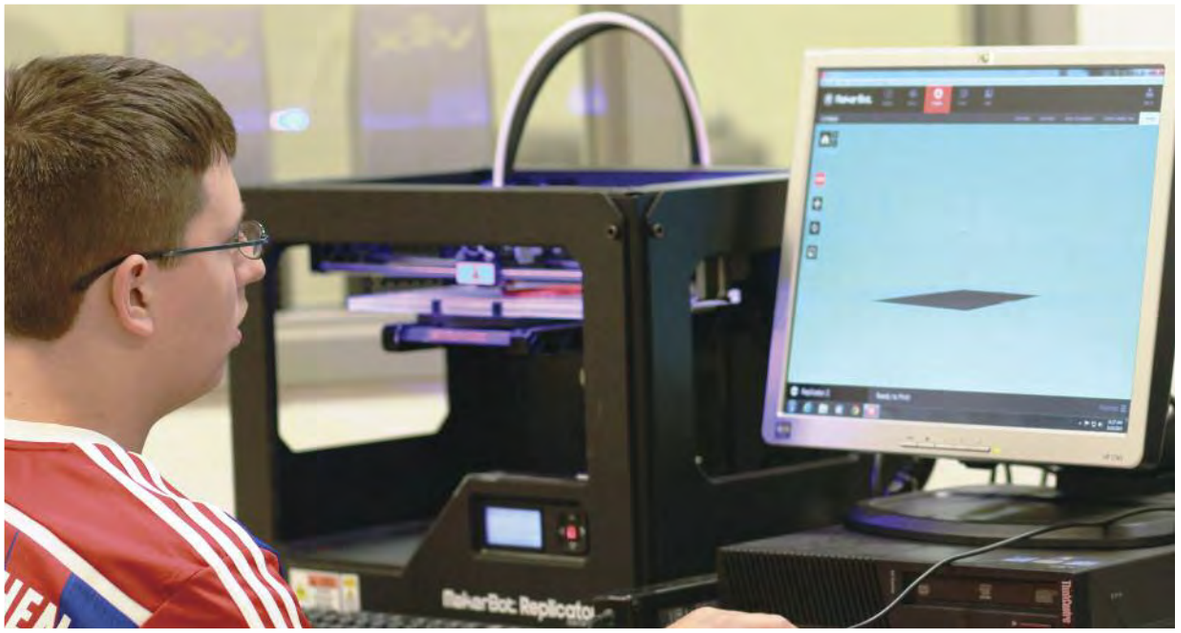
21st CENTURY TOOLS

Building and programming robots provides wonderful opportunities to innovate and problem solve, and for those reasons the district is getting more elementary students involved with robotics. That's Keeney student ***Jeremiah O.*** *operating a robot as part of a "cluster" activity that gives students a chance to pursue areas of personal interest. Below, MHS student* ***Dylan R.*** *operates a 3D printer.*



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He said he also benefits from what his teachers call "student-centered learning."

"A lot of times they give us the outline of what we need to do," he said. "But we can go on the Internet and use whatever details are interesting to us."

While Chromebooks receive a great deal of attention, they are just part of an ambitious district-wide effort to put 21st Century tools in students' hands.

Kearney said the middle school has opportunities for students to build and program robots using LEGO, and some of the elementary schools have gone beyond just participating in the Hour of Code to actually bringing robots into the classroom for all students to use.

Meanwhile, at the high school, students even have access to five 3D printers, which are used for a variety of projects including making parts used in robotics and aviation classes.

"It's great when a student can conceive of some sort of product, then design it in CAD (computer-assisted drawing) class, then program one of our printers to make it," said Chris Casey, who is head of the Tech Ed department at MHS. Casey said the school prides itself on keeping up with the latest trends to ensure that students are well-positioned when they go off to college or enter the workforce.

He said that people are often surprised to learn that MHS has CNC (computer numerical control) machines in both the wood and metal shops, allowing students to experience 21st Century manufacturing techniques.

"There is still a strong interest in students to make things and when we connect that interest with technology the results can be a real catalyst in sparking a student's untapped potential," Casey said.

What else?

"We just picked up five drones," Casey said, noting the largest is powerful enough to carry a GoPro camera.

The high school also has robotics classes and a team that is nationally renowned.

Kearney noted that such smart use of technology can give students "an engaging way to build on their logic and math skills while collaborating with their peers to solve problems," Kearney said. "That's what this is all about."

GLOBAL LEARNING

Rubaiya Sultana *(above), who moved to Manchester from Bangladesh last year, is among more than a dozen students in the district who speak Bengali. Manchester is diverse in many ways, and students such as* ***Janiya W.****(bottom left), who attends Keeney, are among the approximately 60 percent of students who are members of minority groups. Staff members from throughout the district say that students from different backgrounds get along well – as is clearly the case with Verplanck students* ***Matthew T.*** *and* ***Jahaira M.***

Diverse Languages, Cultures Provide Enriching Experience

Rubaiya Sultana loves to talk.

"And it's a huge advantage for me," she said as she sat alongside teacher Violet Sims in the English Language Learner room at Manchester High School. "It's helping me learn faster."

When Rubaiya moved to Manchester from her native Bangladesh in the summer of 2014, she did not speak English, instead speaking Bengali and Hindi, the latter popular in nearby India. But she learned to read and write English, giving her a nice foundation for when she moved to Connecticut with an older sister.

"The pronunciation has been the hardest part because I want to say everything perfectly," she said, giggling when she was reminded she had improperly stressed the second syllable in the word "perfectly."

Manchester, like America itself, is becoming increasingly diverse, with only about 40 percent of the district's approximately 6200 students categorized as white. Hispanic or Latino students make up 27 percent of the enrollment and Black or African American students account for 22 percent. Meanwhile, participation in the school district's ELL program has more than doubled in the last 10 years, and there are now approximately 400 students who are receiving ELL instruction. These students speak 37 different languages, everything from Thai to Teluga (spoken in a part of India), from Arabic to Akan (spoken mostly in the eastern Ivory Coast, south-central Ghana, and central Togo).

World language instruction in Manchester is itself evolving.

Starting this fall, students in seventh grade will take one quarter split consisting of exploratory Spanish and intro to Mandarin. Those students can then elect to take Spanish or Mandarin the following year in eighth grade. No longer will French be offered at the middle school.

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GLOBAL LEARNING

The chart above depicts all 37 languages spoken by the approximately 400 Manchester students receiving England Language Learner services as of February 2015. The exact breakdown of speakers per language is available at MPSPride.org (Source: Manchester ELL Department; Graphic Illustration: Brendan Nicholas.)

The high school offers French 1-5, Italian 1-3, Latin 1-3, Mandarin 1 and Spanish 1-5. Also, incoming freshmen must earn two credits in world language in order to graduate. That's a new requirement.

Mellie Crespo-Jimenez, the district's ELL coordinator, said the "rich blend of cultures, foods, beliefs and religions" within the district presents challenges but also an eye-opening perspective, even for native English speakers born right here in town.

"The benefits of experiencing the multicultural landscape that characterize this nation are endless," Crespo-Jimenez said. "Students are better informed and equipped to compete in a multicultural and global work force."

Sims, the primary ELL teacher at MHS, speaks English, Spanish and some French -- and thus relies heavily on pictures and gestures when she works with a student who speaks none of those three languages.

"And you're not just teaching a language, you're teaching a culture," Sims said, adding that she is always pleased when new students, who sometimes come to school feeling alone and isolated, start to make friends and grow comfortable.

That's what happened to the chatty Rubaiya, who on a mid-June field trip to Lake Compounce became best friends with an Arabic-speaking boy from Iraq.

"I was talking to him the whole time," she said.

Crespo-Jimenez, who grew up in Puerto Rico, knows the value of being educated in a diverse environment.

"Our minds are open to new insights and perspectives about the world and its history," she said. "It really is like taking an international trip without leaving Manchester."