

**DeWitt Middle School PTA Meeting  
November 14, 2011**

[www.dewittpta.org/](http://www.dewittpta.org/)

*Submitted by Tonya Engst, PTA Secretary*

Approval of the minutes from the previous meeting was delayed until the end of this meeting so that more people could review the minutes. Shivaun Archer motioned to approve them. Someone seconded and they were approved.

The focus of this meeting was on how parents/guardians can support students at home.

**Library and Online Databases**

As you can see in the adjacent photo, Ms. Church, DeWitt Librarian, passed out bookmarks with info about online databases that children can access at school or at home. I've included a scan of the front and back of the bookmark below, but I can't include the passwords online, so please contact Ms. Church to get the login information. The children do not need to enter the passwords in school, because of the way the computers are set up. The instructions for getting to the databases are on one side of the bookmark, and the descriptions of the databases are on the other.

A scan of a library bookmark with a light blue background. The text is arranged in several boxes. On the left, the phrase "Knowledge is Power!" is written in a stylized font. The main text includes instructions on how to use online databases, a list of characteristics (Accurate, Current, Objective, Authoritative), the library homepage URL, and instructions on how to access research resources. At the bottom, there is information about the library catalog, the library's address and contact info, and details about book checkout policies. On the right side, the phrase "Exercise your Brain: READ!" is written in a stylized font.

**Knowledge is Power!**

Use Online Databases to get information that is:

- Accurate
- Current
- Objective
- Authoritative

On the library homepage  
<http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/library>

Click on **Research Resources**  
You will find links to online encyclopedias, online references, and magazine and newspaper articles.

Find out what books are available in DeWitt's library:  
<http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/library>  
Click on **Library Catalog**

**DeWitt Middle School Library**  
560 Warren Road, Ithaca, NY, 14850  
607-882-9858 / [jchurch@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:jchurch@icsd.k12.ny.us)

- You can check out a total of 3 books at a time, with a 3-week loan period. You can renew books as often as you wish.
- If you don't find it in DeWitt library, we may be able to borrow it from another library for you.
- If you lose or damage a book, you will need to pay to replace it.
- Families are welcome to borrow books, too!

**Exercise your Brain: READ!**

**ONLINE DATABASES** [Log-ins and Passwords](#)

**Culturegrams MS**  
 Reports on 200+ countries that provide facts, figures, and perspectives on daily life and culture  
 Username: [REDACTED] Password: [REDACTED]

**Novel / Gale Virtual Reference Library**  
 Collection of education, history, and science eBooks, with option for listening. Click on ASCD Education selection, then scroll to bottom of page and click on Main eBook Collection.  
 Password: [REDACTED]

**Grolier Online**  
 Encyclopedia Americana, Grolier Multimedia Encyclopedia, New Book of Knowledge, La Nueva Enciclopedia Cumbre, America the Beautiful, Amazing Animals of the World, Lands and Peoples, and The New Book of Popular Science  
 Username: [REDACTED] Password: [REDACTED]

**Maps 101**  
 4,000+ viewable and printable maps, geography tools, online games teacher lesson plans, and interactive maps  
 Username: [REDACTED] Password: [REDACTED]

**NOVEL/EBSCO Databases**  
 \*Funk & Wagnalls New World Encyclopedia  
 NoveList K-8 Plus: readers' advisory for fiction and nonfiction  
 Teacher Ref Ctr: abstracts from educational journals  
 \*Primary Search: full text articles from 70+ magazines  
 \*in English and Spanish  
 User ID: [REDACTED] Password: [REDACTED]

**Proquest Direct MS/HS**  
 Collection of full-text articles and full page images for research and general reference  
 Username: [REDACTED] Password: [REDACTED]

**TeachingBooks.net**  
 Adds a multimedia dimension to the reading experiences of children's and young adult books  
 Leave Username [REDACTED] Password: [REDACTED]

**World Book Encyclopedia**  
 World Book Kids, World Book Student, and Enciclopedia Estudiantil Hallazgos  
 Username: [REDACTED] Password: [REDACTED]

## Mr. Gottlieb Shares Ideas from the Perspective of 7th Grade Teachers

I've included a scan of Mr. Gottlieb's notes below. To summarize and/or to highlight a few things not in the notes, Mr. Gottlieb said that 7th grade is a time when students should be becoming independent, and parents' role is to let them become independent, but pay attention and see how it goes. You can get onto School Tools to check grades on an ongoing basis—different teachers update these on varying schedules.

### **Allow independence:**

As a student practices being independent, in addition to the points on the notes, be aware that the teachers would rather see a poorly done project that student did by themselves than see a great one, but suspect that the parent helped. Also, keep in mind that students may need help with buying supplies. And, they may need help thinking about situations wherein they might want to work ahead.

### **But, if independence isn't working...**

Check that backpack doesn't contain a sort of compost pile of a mess and that assignment book is reasonably filled out. More suggestions in handout.

### **But what if it gets really bad?**

- Step in and take more control. Ask to see homework before it's turned in and check assignment book.
- Call or email teachers to see if work is being turned in.

Here is a scan of the handout:

**Talk to the PTA**

**Will present some types of communication between teachers and parents.**

**First: Middle school is a time when parents should back off to see how independent their students are.**

**We encourage you to keep an eye on your student, but let them be independent**

- Make sure they have time to do homework
- Make sure they have a quiet place
- Make sure they do not have irresistible distractions
- Help them if they ask, but don't do the work for them.
- If absent, help them find the homework on homework pages.

**When it becomes clear that your student is not working independently, it's time to step in to help. (teacher calls or low grades)**

**A. Check to see if they are organized (Check backpack)**

- How are classes organized?
- Where is homework?
- Do they keep their assignment book filled out?

**B. Take away distractions**

- Insist that they do homework before other things
- Remove electronic devices until homework is done.
- Natural consequences for low grades

**If they need more help. (no improvement in grades)**

**C. Know the homework**

- Go to the teacher's homepages and get the homework
- Ask your student to show you the homework before turning it in.
- Check their assignment book regularly
- Call or E-mail teachers to find out if work is being turned in before grades come out.

### **How do you know what homework is assigned to your child?**

Mr. Gottlieb demoed how to use the Web to see the actual homework. Teachers are learning how to update the homework pages more efficiently—it requires learning new skills.

On the ICSD Web site (<http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/>), on the button bar at the top, go to Grades 6-12 and choose DeWitt Middle and then click on Classes & Staff. This will open a page that Mr. Gottlieb is maintaining. For many teachers it has a link that will lead to details about what's happening in class and/or what the home work is (If a teacher has nothing listed on the Web

page, get in touch with him or her.). The page is at [http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=33](http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=16&Itemid=33), so you might want to bookmark it.



You can also go to <http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/> and on that page there is a Staff Directory button and a Teams button. Be sure to check out your child's team!

This led to a comments about the different online tools that teachers are learning and exploring in order to post homework and other info online. Tools being used include Edmodo, Blackbird, and Google Docs. It was expressed that there will always be new tools coming along that are better than before, and it can be difficult for teachers and parent to keep up, but this fact seems to be part of the lay of the land.

### **Ms. Volckmar Shares Ideas from the Perspective of 8th Grade Teachers**

Ms. Volckmar passed out a list of comments and suggestions, and it is included below. She also offered these words of hope: they really do listen and pay attention to what you do and how you live and what you say to them, and they will follow your lead even if they are testing you constantly now. So, be of good cheer.

A few things that were emphasized or that are not in the handout:

- An example of knowing your kid, is knowing if your child tends to conceal if things are not going well.
- Vigorous exercise can be extremely helpful for smoothing out emotional ups and downs.
- Watch out for a roller coaster of good grades, relaxing effort on schoolwork, and recovery back to good grades.

Here is the list, copied and pasted from a Word file that Ms. Volckmar used for the handout:

### **Eighth Grade Team Suggestions for Parents, in Aid of Student Success**

Parents are a child's first and most important teacher. Your child really is listening and learning from your guidance and example.

You know your own child. Trust your instincts about his/her strengths and areas needing structure and support.

These are good and helpful:

- Middle schoolers typically need 9 hours of sleep a night for optimal alertness.
- Vigorous exercise promotes physical, emotional and mental health.
- It is not truly possible to concentrate effectively on more than one verbal source of input at a time. Therefore avoid/prevent doing homework simultaneously with texting, Facebooking, Internet surfing, and TV watching, or listening to music with lyrics.
- Help your child keep an organized backpack and binder, and an orderly place to do schoolwork.
- Help your child come to class prepared with materials: paper, pencil, pen, etc.
- Communicate with your child's teachers at regular intervals about your child's progress.
- Help your child have a safe and focused place in which to do homework.

#### **Parent question: How much should parents participate in writing assignments?**

Ms. V answers: Depends on the kid. In 7th and 8th grade, a kid's developmental mission is to become independent. So, kids may not want help. So, it depends on the kid and the parent-child relationship. Help with grammar, capitalization, run-ons, for example, can be good. It can be a great chance for a partnership between child and parent, but parent should be a tutor—goal is that child can write just as well in in-class assignments.

Mr. G. adds: In terms of writing for science. Good if parents take the opportunity to help, so long as it is a learning experience for the child, not just for the purpose of making it better.

*Contact information for 8th grade teachers is appended at the end of these minutes.*

*A list of Community Resources and after-school programs is also appended.*

## **8th Grade End of Year Trip Plans**

Ms. Volckmar talked about this, but the write-up in the PTA email list the next day was much better than my notes, so I've inserted it here from the email:

### **May 11th Field Trip for 8th Graders to Ellis Island and NYC**

The 8th grade teachers are finalizing plans for a grade level trip on May 11, 2012 to Ellis Island and New York City. We will visit Ellis Island in the morning for a tour and program that supplements our Social Studies/English unit on Immigration. In the afternoon, we will split into several interest groups for tours of many different NYC sites, including museums, monuments, and historical areas.

We will leave DeWitt at 5:00 am and return by 11:00 pm. In the afternoon, each group of 12 students will be supervised by two adults, one teacher and one parent volunteer. The trip cost per child will be approximately \$80.00, most of which covers the cost of chartered buses.

Our commitment is for every child to go, so numerous fundraisers and requests for donations will be organized to reach this goal. A more detailed letter will be sent home before the Thanksgiving holiday. In that letter, we will be asking for the following: student permission to attend, parent volunteers to help chaperone, parent volunteers to help with fundraising, and a \$20.00 deposit. Our first fundraiser was the Nov 10th dance, from which all proceeds will go towards the Ellis Island trip. If you have ideas for fundraisers or have any other questions, please get in touch with an 8th grade teacher.

## **Co-President's Report (Vanessa Wagner)**

- Vanessa thanks various people for help with various events.
- The school directory is being printed.
- PTA direct appeal has raised \$1100+ so far.
- PTA is planning a fundraiser on February 4.
- During the open house, there was a parent survey. This meeting was based on one of the suggestions from the survey. More ideas are welcome.
- You can access a lot of information from the PTA Web site ([www.nyspta.org](http://www.nyspta.org))
- Membership cards are being sent shortly and they will have login info on the back.
- Also note the new ICSD superintendent's blog at <http://superintendentblog.wordpress.com/>.

## Treasurer's Report (Shivaun Archer)

Shivaun walked us through the financial information shown on her written report. I've included a scan of the report below.

<p><b>DeWitt PTA Treasurers Report 11/14/11 (Shivaun Archer)</b></p> <p><b>Reporting period from 9/1/11 - 11/14/11</b></p> <p><u>Income</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• DeWitt PTA Membership = \$541; DeWitt Donations w/ membership = \$407</li><li>• DeWitt Direct Appeal = \$1165</li><li>• Donations to International Night = \$149</li><li>• Advertising Newsletter (3) = \$187 (Buffalo St Books, Dr. Mariunts DDS, Rawlings Construction)</li></ul> <p><b>Total = \$2449</b></p> <p><u>Expenses</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Office supplies, mailing = \$360</li><li>• NY PTA dues = \$380</li><li>• Open house and welcome picnic = \$454</li><li>• Stocking student supply cabinet = \$150</li><li>• International night = \$48 (some reimbursements still pending)</li><li>• Petty cash = \$35</li></ul> <p><b>Total = \$1427</b></p> <p><b>Balance in Bank Account (11/14/11) = \$3600</b></p> <p><u>Other</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Requests for clubs are coming in. (Budget \$1500)</li><li>• There will be a winter/spring fundraiser (Dinner and movie)</li><li>• Tax postcard has been filed</li></ul>
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## Principal's Report (Mr. Knight)

- Mr. Knight is now officially full-time after hip resurfacing procedure.
- Mr. Knight shared some booklets that he has in his office. They have tips and ideas about helping middle schoolers in school. He has shared some of the tips from those booklets in a recent PTA newsletter.
- He has the idea of adding some of these tips to the homework planners, in future years.
- He also has the idea of doing a mini-bootcamp for the first few days of school, which would focus on general skills to be successful: note taking, time management, organization, etc.
- Because of scores on the most recent ELA testing, DeWitt is a SINI school with respect to students with disabilities. (SINI stands for School in Need of Improvement)

This is because not enough students with disabilities scored above Level 2. Mr. Knight is working on submitting a report about this to the state. State will then review and send back recommendations. Based on those recs. DeWitt must create a plan for use next school year. Some of the problem is with the recent change in the cut score for what was needed to get a Level 3. Mr. Knight is seeing this as an opportunity to improve. (About 2/3 of the middle schools in NYS are SINI schools, for one reason or another.)

- Tip from Mr. Knight: Be vigilant about how your student is using electronic devices especially with respect to socialization and etiquette.

*Next PTA meeting is January 9.* This is a change from the previously planned date. The meeting will be about nutrition.



## **C OMMUNITY RESOURCES/AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAMS**

**Caroline Youth Services - 539-6345**

[Cooperative Extension and the Town of Caroline Youth Commission offer after school and summer programs]

Fridays - 4-6 p.m. ICSD bus to Brooktondale Community Center

**Dryden Recreation Program - 844-3565**

Recreation program for school age youth; free

**Dryden Youth Pride - 844-3565**

After school recreation, volunteer crew, discussion groups, helps find jobs for ages 12-19

**GIAC (Greater Ithaca Activities Center) - 272-3622**

Recreation and sports programs, youth activities, pool, summer camp, Multi-cultural center, summer basketball league; small fees or free

**Southside Community Center - 273-4190**

Open gym, special events, summer and after school programs, bicycle program; free

**Learning Web - 275-0122**

On the job training in business and management for ages 14 - 21

**YES Employment (Youth Employment Service) - 273-8364 - Ithaca Youth Bureau**

Helps teenagers find part-time and full-time jobs, training for Junior Counselors working at day camps.

**YMCA - 257-0101 Graham Road West**

**Big Brother Big Sister (One-to-One) Program - 273-8364 Ithaca Youth Bureau**

**Paul Schreurs Memorial Program 273-8364- Ithaca Youth Bureau**

**Urban Outreach - 272-2292 West Village & Park Housing - Cooperative Extension**

**Youth Programs - Villages of Lansing and Cayuga Heights and Town of Ithaca**

The joint Youth Commission offers after school and summer programs such as Primitive Pursuits, Stilt walking, Working with Children, Cooking, and more to youth who live in the Town of Ithaca, Villages of Lansing, and Cayuga Heights. Contact Cornell Cooperative Extension at 272-2292 for more information.

## Contact Information for the 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Teachers and Staff (November 2011)

### **Joanne Church**

#### **Subject: Librarian**

Best way to reach: email [jchurch@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:jchurch@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Phones: 607-882-9858 (school), 607-277-3574 (home)

[www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/library](http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/library)

### **David Buchner**

#### **Subject: Technology Engineering Education**

Best way to reach: email [dbuchner@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:dbuchner@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Phone: 607-592-32236

[www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/teched](http://www.icsd.k12.ny.us/dewitt/teched)

### **Susan Danskin**

#### **Subject: Math**

[sdanskin@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:sdanskin@icsd.k12.ny.us)

### **Cathi Exantus**

#### **Subject: Science**

Best way to reach: email [cexantus@k12.ny.us](mailto:cexantus@k12.ny.us)

Phone: 607-351-2989

### **Name: Joe Exantus**

#### **Subject: Social Studies**

Best way to reach: call 607-351-2990

Email info: [jexantus@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:jexantus@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Phone info: 607-257-3222 School Phone

Website info: <http://www.edmodo.com/> group code is 9ywxiz

### **Camille Gorman**

#### **Subject: Resource room and co-taught math**

Email: [camille.gorman@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:camille.gorman@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Phone: 257-3444

### **Maureen Jakubson**

#### **Subject: Occupational Therapy**

Best way to reach: email [mjakubso@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:mjakubso@icsd.k12.ny.us)

### **Dan McGrath**

#### **Subject: Math**

Best way to reach: email [dmcgrath@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:dmcgrath@icsd.k12.ny.us)

<http://mcgrathclassroom.blogspot.com>

**Shannon O'Loughlin**

**Subject: English 7/8**

Best way to reach: [soloughl@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:soloughl@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Phone: (610) 349-8317

[oloughlinsclassroom.blogspot.com](http://oloughlinsclassroom.blogspot.com)

**Mary Ann Pitzer**

**Subject Matter: Resource Room and co-taught English**

Best way to reach: Email: [mpitzer@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:mpitzer@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Phone: 257-3444

**Monica Sherman**

**Subject: Resource room and co-taught English and Science**

Email: [monica.sherman@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:monica.sherman@icsd.k12.ny.us)

**Laura VanVleet**

**Subject: Earth Science 8th**

Best way to reach: Email (home: checked regularly in the evening): [lvanvlee@rochester.rr.com](mailto:lvanvlee@rochester.rr.com)

or Email (school: checked regularly in the morning and during the day): [lvanvlee@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:lvanvlee@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Phone: school (7:45-9:00 am is best time to reach me): 257-6445

Phone: home (use rarely, but if important call before 9:00 pm): 582-6445

Website: On Blackboard off district home page (drop down from INET, to Blackboard)  
log in guest-vanvleet, password guest-vanvleet

**Andrea Volckmar**

**Subject: Social Studies**

Best way to reach:

Phone 256-1128

Email: [volckmar@twcny.rr.com](mailto:volckmar@twcny.rr.com), [avolckma@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:avolckma@icsd.k12.ny.us)

**Bob Walters**

**Subject: Technology Engineering 8th grade and Digital Literacy 6th grade**

Email: [bwalters@icsd.k12.ny.us](mailto:bwalters@icsd.k12.ny.us)

Websites on Blackboard:

Digital Literacy: de-comp-6-walters: Computers 6 –

Walters Technology Engineering: DEW-Tech-A56-8: Technology Education –

Mr. Walters TSA: ics-dbuchner-03:

Technology Student Association - Dewitt Chapter Buchner/Walters