

# Forward **FOCUS**

*A News Bulletin for Employees of Metro Nashville Public Schools*

IN THIS ISSUE: PROJECT LIT INITIATIVE • PARENT ADVISORY COUNCIL • BOARD HIGHLIGHTS



## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

*Dr. Shawn Joseph*

*"We have to liberate our children. We have to give them the greatest civil right we can give them and that is the ability to read."*

You have probably heard me speak these words since my first day on the job and they still ring true. Two out of three of our third-graders are not reading proficiently and our economically disadvantaged students are bearing the weight of this reality. It begs for bigger, bolder solutions and a collective effort to address the issue.

While we've invested in additional supports for teachers, such as literacy development specialists and expanding Reading Recovery, we know this work will have the most success through a collaborative effort.

Our community has stepped up to answer the call. I'm proud to stand with community leaders on the Nashville Literacy Collaborative, a group that has created a citywide effort to address this challenge. It's not just the community – leaders within our schools are going above and beyond to give our students the support they need. You'll read about one of those leaders, Mr. Jarred Amato, in this edition.

I encourage you to lean into what our community is doing in support of our students. We have one plan, one vision, one structure. I know we will succeed and exceed great expectations.

Learn more about the Blueprint for Early Childhood:  
<http://bit.ly/NashvilleLiteracyVideo>

## FEATURE STORY



## PROJECT LIT

### *How a Classroom Project Sparked a Movement*

Two-thirds of Nashville's third-graders cannot read on grade level – a fact that has been the reality in Nashville for more than two decades – and a challenge that Dr. Joseph addressed the moment he came to Metro Nashville Public Schools, calling it the 'greatest and most complex' issue our district faces. We are focused on improving literacy for all students, including additional resources for our reading teachers as well as students.

Literacy is the one area that can have the most significant and long-term impact for students. Metro Schools is not alone in solving this problem. Many community partners

and organizations are equally committed to ensuring every student in Nashville can read, speak and comprehend.

This includes Project LIT Community (Project LIT), an organization founded by Jarred Amato, a 9th and 11th grade English teacher at Maplewood High School.

Project LIT, founded in 2016 and led by students, strives to eliminate 'book deserts,' pockets of communities that have limited access to books – by collecting book donations and creating

**(continued on next page)**



## INCLEMENT WEATHER

Student and employee safety is the district's primary concern and is the only priority in situations of inclement weather. Here's how you can get the quickest notification in case of bad weather:



- **We'll update social media and our website.** Follow us on Twitter [@metroschools](https://twitter.com/MetroSchools) ([twitter.com/MetroSchools](https://twitter.com/MetroSchools)) and like our [MNPS Facebook Page](https://www.facebook.com/MetroSchools) ([facebook.com/MetroSchools](https://www.facebook.com/MetroSchools)) for immediate updates. Our website, [www.mnps.org](http://www.mnps.org), will also be updated with information about delays or closings.



- **You'll get a phone call.** Parents, families and staff will receive a phone call with any delay or cancellation information. If MNPS chooses to close school during the overnight hours, you will receive a call early the next morning - maybe even before your alarm clock goes off! Make sure your personal contact information is accurate to get that first phone call.



- **Keep an eye on the news.** MNPS also reports any delays or closures to local media partners during the 5 a.m. hour.

When school is cancelled, school activities are also cancelled - even if conditions improve later in the day. This includes athletic practices, games, performances, parent meetings, etc., excluding TSSAA playoff games. Independent after-school providers are responsible for notifying families about closure.

As for employees, 12-month employees are expected to report to work if school is cancelled due to inclement weather; however, if the weather is severe enough to warrant closing district offices, employees will be notified.

(see "PROJECT LIT" page 1)

mini libraries to place throughout the city. Project LIT also strives to encourage a love of reading through community-wide book clubs. Equitable access to enriching, diverse and high-quality books gives students exposure to different texts and can help them discover a love for reading.

Project LIT, founded in 2016 and led by students, strives to eliminate 'book deserts'

"I envision a future where all children are passionate and proficient readers who possess the literacy skills to choose their post-secondary path," said Amato. "For this to become a reality, I believe every child deserves access to high-quality, diverse books, along with daily opportunities to read, celebrate and discuss these books with caring peers and adults in their school and community."

Amato was recently awarded the First Place 2017 Penguin Random House Teacher Award, an award that recognizes projects that support and cultivate literacy and lifelong readers, along with a \$10,000 grant.

"My students and I are extremely grateful for Penguin Random House's support of Project LIT Community," said Amato. "The generous award will allow us to purchase hundreds of high-quality, culturally relevant books that will help more Nashville children become lifelong readers and spark important conversations in our communities."

Since its inception, the organization has grown beyond its Nashville roots and is now in more than 50 schools across the country. Follow along with Project LIT and review the book club schedule here:

[@ProjectLITComm](https://twitter.com/ProjectLITComm) ([twitter.com/ProjectLITComm](https://twitter.com/ProjectLITComm))



Learn more about Project LIT Community:

<https://youtu.be/supun9z6duA>

Follow along on twitter: [@ProjectLITComm](https://twitter.com/ProjectLITComm) or contact Mr. Amato at [jarred.amato@mnps.org](mailto:jarred.amato@mnps.org) if you'd like to support or join their movement.



Learn more about Mr. Amato: <https://youtu.be/0ftBYc9PAuM>



## GILLEY – “AN ADVOCATE FOR KIDS”

Donna Gilley has spent her career, spanning more than 25 years, trying to help students find their place in the world. Gilley currently serves as the director of the Academies of Nashville but she still thinks of herself as a teacher. In her role, Gilley manages the career and thematic academies across the district. She works with teachers and outside business partners to create engaging, real-life activities for students.

Gilley has worked with the Academies for 10 years and was a part of the team that implemented the Academies’ model in 2006, after the district received a Small Learning Communities grant. Prior to that, she spent 17 years in the classroom teaching a variety of business classes.

As a first-generation college graduate, she understands firsthand what it is like for students who have a hard time envisioning themselves going to college because no one in their family has ever gone.

“I see myself as an advocate for kids who could never see themselves stepping foot onto a college campus,” Gilley says about her work.

She says when the Academies model was first created, one goal was to make sure every path had an accompanying college or post-secondary credit available and that’s what they’ve done. Every Academies of Nashville program now includes some type of college or technical credit, which according to Gilley, helps students understand their options and envision their future.

For more information about Gilley’s work and the Academies of Nashville you can visit them here: <https://www.mnps.org/academies-of-nashville>

# BRIDGING CLASSROOMS & FAMILIES

## Parent Advisory Council Renews Effort to Support All Schools

Our students’ academic success is a joint effort that reaches far beyond the classroom. It takes many invested individuals – parents, families, teachers, coaches, community leaders – and a collective effort to ensure our students are on a successful trajectory during their Metro Schools experience and even into college and career.

Since 1986, one way the district has engaged with families and the community at-large is through the the Parent Advisory Council (PAC). The PAC exists to better connect families and communities with MNPS and ensure stakeholders have one goal: improving student outcomes and ensuring all students have access to great public education.

This year, the district is reorganizing the PAC structure with the ultimate goal of organizing an advisory

council in every school, which will provide every school with an accessible volunteer bank to tap into for school support. There will be advisory councils at multiple levels: for each school, for each cluster, for each quadrant plus an executive PAC, that will have representative from each cluster.

Any parent who has a child enrolled in an MNPS school is eligible to serve on the PAC. Parents who serve as cluster PAC president and vice president will also serve on the executive PAC.

With this new structure, MNPS plans to continue to strengthen the link between our families, our schools and our communities. For more information or to learn how you can help, contact Barry Barlow, PAC President, at:

[barrybarlow81@yahoo.com](mailto:barrybarlow81@yahoo.com).

## BOARD HIGHLIGHTS

### BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETS WITH MAYOR BARRY

The Board of Education met with Mayor Megan Barry Tuesday, Nov. 21, to share progress since hiring Dr. Joseph. The Board shared remarks on the following areas of improvement:

- The district’s efforts to better manage the budgeting process, including the transition to a three-year budget planning process and an energy-efficiency initiative that has the potential to save the district millions of dollars.
- The Board’s professional development work with organizations like the Panasonic Foundation, which is leading the effort to help “Build a Better Board” and providing counsel on the district’s strategic framework creation and implementation; Gallup, which MNPS uses for the StrengthsFinder assessment, and the Arbinger Institute; which is

helping the Board and MNPS collectively focus on a results-focused “outward mindset.”

- The Board’s efforts to rewrite policies, assistance of the Tennessee School Boards Association.
- Dr. Joseph’s director evaluation and the Board of Education’s self-assessment, two internal accountability systems the Board has created and designed to monitor progress now and in the future.
- New student engagement efforts, like efforts to start Board Meetings with student performances and the Board’s new internship program for MNPS high school students.

You can watch the full meeting with Mayor Barry here: <http://bit.ly/BOEmeeting>





## CALENDAR

### DEC. 7

Administrative & Supervisory Meeting  
*Martin Professional Development Center*  
500 Wedgewood Ave.  
Nashville, TN 37203

### DEC. 9

ACT national test date

### DEC. 12- 14

Half day for exams grades 9-12

### DEC. 15

Half day for all students; end of first semester  
WINTER BREAK

*Schools Closed*  
Dec. 18-Jan. 1  
*Central Office Closed*  
Dec. 22-Dec. 26

### JAN. 1

New Year's Day  
*Central Office Closed*

### JAN. 23 (NEW DATE!)

School Choice Festival  
5-7 p.m.  
*Nashville Fairgrounds*  
500 Wedgewood Ave.  
Nashville, TN 37203



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To submit to Forward Focus use this online form:  
<http://bit.ly/2acUpTv>

The deadline for submissions is the end of the business day on Tuesday. Submissions received by this deadline will be reviewed for the following week's edition.

### QUESTIONS? COMMENTS?

Email [communications@mnps.org](mailto:communications@mnps.org).

## NEWS BRIEFS

### *Metro Council Approves Mid-Year Budget, Including MNPS Capital Projects*

On Nov. 21, Metro Council approved Mayor Megan Barry's **\$133.2 million** mid-year capital-spending plan which includes **\$9.55 million** for MNPS. This funding will be used to support several projects including Hillsboro High School's renovation and addition, land for a new Nashville School of the Arts and various maintenance projects.

To learn more, visit [www.mnpsconstruction.com](http://www.mnpsconstruction.com).

### *Adventure Science Center Youth CR3W Program*

The Adventure Science Center is recruiting students for the Youth CR3W program, a volunteer engagement program for students (grades 9-12) interested in gaining real-world experience in a science or museum setting. Students who successfully complete the program will receive a stipend at the end of each year.

Registration Deadline: Dec. 8

Learn more: [www.adventuresci.org/youthcr3w](http://www.adventuresci.org/youthcr3w).

### *Apply for the Teaching Tolerance Award*

The Teaching Tolerance Award for Excellence in Teaching recognizes five teachers who teach the knowledge and skills necessary to thrive in diverse settings, achieve academically and work collaboratively.

Learn more and apply: <http://bit.ly/TeachingToleranceAward>.

Deadline: Dec. 10

## STAFF ANNOUNCEMENTS



### *MLK Teacher to Serve on TFLTA Board of Directors*

Michael Bartus, German teacher at MLK Magnet School, has been elected to a three-year term on the Tennessee Foreign Language Teaching Association's (TFLTA) Board of Directors. TFLTA is an organization for all foreign language educators in the state of Tennessee.

### *MNPS Science Kit Assessments Due Dec. 15*

Science teachers should complete their online science unit assessment by Friday, Dec. 15, for the unit they just taught.

Access assessments here: <http://bit.ly/2zMx5KK>.

## 2016-17 TENURE ELIGIBILITY

The first round of educators eligible for 2016-17 tenure will be completed in early spring 2018. Tenure eligibility determinations are based on teachers' status as of the end of the 2016-17 school year. Tenure recipients will receive a certified letter confirming their tenure, which will be included in their personnel file.

**A list of educators who previously received tenure but who must return to probationary (non-tenured) status pursuant to TCA 49-5-504(e) will be sent to Dr. Joseph for approval in early spring 2018.** Educators who receive overall level of effectiveness (LOE) scores of 1 or 2 from their most recent two consecutive years of service and who received their tenure designation after July 1, 2011 will be returned to probationary (non-tenured) status. Tenure designations will not be revoked from educators who received designation before July 1, 2011, regardless of LOE scores.

For more information, review these guidelines: <http://bit.ly/2AE88Bd>.