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Schools focus on technology, environment

By KATHY CHANG
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MILLTOWN — Moving instruction toward the 21st century and maintaining the district's new rain gardens are top priorities for Milltown schools as the 2015-16 school year goes into full swing.

Schools Superintendent Stephanie Brown along with 193 teachers and staff welcomed the 716 students enrolled in the Milltown School District back to school on Sept. 2.

The district's two schools are Parkview Elementary School and Joyce Kilmer Middle School.

Brown said the district has purchased additional Chromebooks for use at both schools.

"We have replaced aging SmartBoards with Smart TVs," she said. "A student technology club will also begin this year for Joyce Kilmer students."

The Google platform will be the focus of the club.

"Students will be learning to use Google Docs, slides and other Google tools," said Brown. "Google is also a very large training initiative for our teachers this year. A certified Google educator trainer will work with our teachers through a year-long professional development series in the use of Google Classroom and the other features of Google to enhance instruction."

Brown said the middle school's STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) elective this school year will benefit from updated software used as the basis of the program's instruction.

"The teachers have also worked hard to meet a challenging state deadline to have eight separate curriculum guides updated this September," she said. "The updated guides reflect the new state standards in music, art, social studies, physical education and health, science, technology, world language and 21st century skills."

Brown said the district is looking forward to a close working relationship with the North Brunswick Township School District, which has opened a Pre-K Annex in the Our Lady of Lourdes (OLOL) school site on Cleveland Avenue. The Diocese of Metuchen school had closed in 2013.

Janet Ferlazzo, principal at Parkview, said in her welcome letter to parents and guardians that the teachers, staff and students plan to build on last year's successes.

"We know the importance of setting ambitious goals and maintaining our focus in support of our students," she said. "Together we work to support students with a well-rounded program focused on high academic standards. We expect all of our students to succeed and our commitment is to provide them with the tools they will need to meet those expectations."

William Veit, principal at Joyce Kilmer, shared similar sentiments in his welcome letter to parents and guardians.

He said the staff has been carefully reviewing and planning the school's academic goals and objectives over the summer as well as making sure the school building and grounds are safe, clean and a healthy environment for the students to learn and have fun.

Parkview School has new rain gardens this school year, which are a demonstration project chosen to be implemented as part of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension (RCE) Water Resources Program.

Milltown Councilwoman Doriann Kerber was instrumental in making the project happen after attending a meeting when project concepts were being explained by Dr. Christopher Obropta, extension specialist in water resources with RCE.

The program had received funding to implement a Climate Resilient Green Infrastructure for the Raritan River Basin Project from the Hurricane Sandy Coastal Resiliency Competitive Grant Program, a grant administered by the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation.

The project seeks to provide 54 municipalities in the Raritan River Basin with ways of reducing storm water impacts through climate resilient green infrastructure practices.

The RCE Water Resources program prepared construction designs for two rain gardens — one on the school property on Violet Terrace and one along the road next to the school.

Rain gardens are shallow landscaped depressions that capture, treat and infiltrate storm water runoff.

A three-tiered rain garden with a trench drain was installed on the grounds of Parkview School and directs storm water runoff coming from Violet Terrace and the other rain garden installed in the rear of the school receives runoff from the train tracks.

Enviroscapes, Inc. partnered with the RCE Water Resources program and Milltown Borough to install the rain gardens.

“These rain gardens were planted with native perennials and will not only treat runoff, but will also create natural wildlife habitat for beneficial pollinators,” said Sara Mellor, program associate at the RCE Water Resources program.

Brown said the students in the Green Clubs at both schools will be maintaining the plants in the rain gardens to ensure that they continue to be a viable deterrent to storm water runoff.

This fall, the RCE Water Resources program will work with the Milltown Board of Education to provide a one-day program, “Stormwater Management in Your Schoolyard,” to educate students about the rain gardens.

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