



# NEW JERSEY SCHOOLS TO WATCH

## VISITOR'S GUIDE

### Pleasant Valley School



#### Designated in 2017

Pleasant Valley School • Harrison Township School District  
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### 2017 School Statistics

**Community:** Pleasant Valley School is part of the Harrison Township School District, located in historic Mullica Hill, NJ. Once considered a rural farming community, the township is becoming more suburban. The district Board of Education, school administration, faculty, and staff work proactively to predict and prepare for the future learning needs of the students and community.

**Enrollment:** 638

**Grade Levels:** Grades 4, 5 & 6

**School Schedule:** Our teachers have spent significant time developing and nurturing the team concept. Instructional teams in fourth, fifth and sixth grades develop and implement interdisciplinary units in the best interests of their students.

#### Student Demographics

- 1.5 % Hispanic
- 85.6 % White
- 6.1 % African American
- 5.7 % Asian
- 9.2 % Free/Reduced Lunch
- 0.2 % English Learners

(Source: 2016 STW application)

Visit the New Jersey Department of Education  
<http://www.state.nj.us/education/> to view this school's assessment data.

### School Characteristics and Replicable Practices

#### Notable Highlights in Academic Excellence

- Strong emphasis on high academic standards, deep understanding of important concepts, and the development of essential skills.
- Standards-based report cards and data envelopes explicitly state and present the New Jersey Student Learning Standards, which lead all curriculum decisions.
- Consistent use of data to inform and guide instruction, determine strategic intervention needs based on a multi-tiered system of support, and identify trends within and across classrooms and grade levels in order to modify written curriculum and emulate successful practices.
- Creation of the roles of ELA Coordinator and Academic Innovations / STEM Coordinator to support staff and students through formal and informal trainings
  - o ELA Coordinator is instrumental in supporting students through a Multi-Tiered System of Support (WIN period: What I Need), progress monitoring and documenting effectiveness of interventions, Student EdCamps, providing professional learning opportunities for staff with subsequent guidance in classrooms.
  - o AI/STEM Coordinator works to support district technology initiatives, Student EdCamps, professional learning opportunities for staff with follow-up assistance in classrooms, and maintenance of our Design Studio and 3D printers.

**Notable Highlights in Academic Excellence (continued)**

- Collaborative affiliation with Student Achievement Partners (SAP) to provide an outstanding English Language Arts program, which includes such resources as expert packs, content-rich nonfiction, hyper-documents (HyperDocs) and authentic infusion of technology to achieve and surpass learning standards.
- Backward unit design with a focus on essential questions.
- Evolution of student growth measurement to include multiple and varied assessments (formal and informal, formative, summative, performance- and project-based) supported by student choice.

**Notable Highlights in Developmental Responsiveness**

- Frequent vertical and horizontal articulation within the district, among sister schools, and with sending high school.
- Thoughtful, intentional student placement into heterogeneous teams with input from various stakeholders including past teachers, counselors, parents, and administrators.
- Teaming concept, which establishes a community-like setting where adults can develop strong relationships and advocate for students intellectually, socially, and emotionally.
- A master schedule reflective of the school's vision, ensuring time dedicated to meet goals and objectives through common preparation periods for teaching teams, Professional Learning Communities, cross-teaming to analyze data, develop interventions, collaborate, and plan for students' unique needs.
- Implementation of a Multi-Tiered System of Supports to support all learners including interventions, enrichment, Intervention & Referral Services (I&RS), Basic Skills Instruction (BSI), and Extended School Day (ESD) options.
- Time allocated in the master schedule for our Student EdCamp initiative, providing students voice and choice in their learning, time, opportunity, and access to exploring and engaging in areas of strong interest.
- Opportunities for communication, collaboration, creation, and critical thinking are the cornerstones of the curricula and school culture. Recent examples include the creation of our Design Studio, an Escape the Bus experience, collaboration with Predicate Academy, an emphasis on coding, instruction and application of green screen technology, and the acquisition of two 3D printers for student use.

**Notable Highlights in Social Equity**

- Positive Behavior Support (PBS) to promote a safe and positive atmosphere for teaching and learning that includes acceptance and mutual respect. Known as the STARS Code of Excellence, our program provides students the ability to manage their own behavior through a comprehensive school-wide set of strategies, which are explicitly taught, practiced, and promoted. Students grow to conduct themselves in a respectful manner, act responsibly, and are consistently recognized. The reward system celebrates diversity, civility, service, and democratic citizenship.
- Student recognition through STARS slips, Student of the Month, Panter Awards, Superintendent's List, Recognition Night ceremony awards and scholarships.
- Opportunities for student contributions to our positive school environment include Circle of Friends, Buddy Bench, Lunch Bunch, Student Council, Principal's Committee, and Safety Patrol,

- Strong communication with and support from parents and community members, characterized by trainings and information sessions: PARCC, Next Generation Testing, BSI Night, Cyber Safety, Enrichment, EdCamp, weekly Principal Newsletters for teacher and Valley View News for parents, backpack mail, district and school website, email, mass messaging, Twitter, Facebook, district handbook, student planners, and student initiated newspapers.)

### **Notable Highlights in Organizational Support**

- Strong vision toward integrating twenty-first century skills across the curriculum and encouraging students to be confident, capable, life-long learners.
- Purposeful, relevant, meaningful professional learning opportunities: Active Participants Professionally Learn Essential Skills (APPLES). Topics are developed with teacher input. Staff members are encouraged to explore job-embedded professional learning of their choosing, and serve as the 'experts' in sharing information with colleagues.
- Monthly new / non-tenured teacher support meetings provide unique learning opportunities designed specifically for such staff. Topics consist of preparing for successful parent/teacher conferences, instructional practices, classroom management techniques, peer observations of distinguished educators, and reflection upon pedagogical practices. These cohorts serve as peer support groups, as well.
- Pleasant Valley School is experiencing an evolution toward non-traditional faculty meetings. Rather than a means for transmitting information, we are exploring 'flipped' options in which information is provided prior to meetings, freeing valuable time for relationship building, professional learning, task completion, problem solving, and decision making during faculty meetings.
- Staff recognize one another through giving 'STARS' (similar to kudos) for support and assistance, which are published in a weekly communication email to all staff.
- One staff member is recognized each month during a faculty meeting by being nominated as a 'STAR Polisher'. The STAR Polisher is one who serves as a role model to others in contributing toward a positive and collegial school culture.