

The School Story Monroe Township



The Oak Tree Elementary School Grows in Monroe

In September, students will start streaming into Oak Tree Elementary School, the latest addition to Monroe Township's stellar network of schools. Housing grades Pre-K through six, Oak Tree will ease overcrowding in Barclay Brook and Brookside and help the district in the long term when the new high school opens.

As of January 2008 the steel structure has been erected, exterior masonry walls are constructed, the brick façade is 90 percent complete, and interior masonry walls are 70 percent complete. Contractors are currently installing mechanical, electrical, and fire protection piping and systems within the building. JCP&L and PSE&G are in the process of installing electric and gas services to the building, and the contractors are working on connecting the sewer and water lines to municipal services. Many thanks to Project Manager Jerry Tague for overseeing this vast project.

Principal Dennis Ventrello is hard at work as well, figuring out the new school's first budget. Mr. Ventrello is also working with Mr. Tague to select playground equipment that will be fun and safe for children grades Pre-K-6. The process to select staff has begun, most of whom will be selected internally and on a volunteer basis.

Over the next few months contractors will install exterior windows, cabinetry, doors, hardware, chalkboards, and interior finishes such as paint and flooring. Outside, finished paving will be installed in all parking areas and the landscape will be graded and seeded, with trees planted in the spring.

Oak Tree Elementary School will be a wonderful benefit for students, parents, teachers, administrators, and the entire township. Vibrant schools help keep our community's future bright.



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With New School Comes New Districting

With the new Oak Tree Elementary School set to open in September, district administrators have been hard at work setting new district lines in place to determine which students will attend the new school.

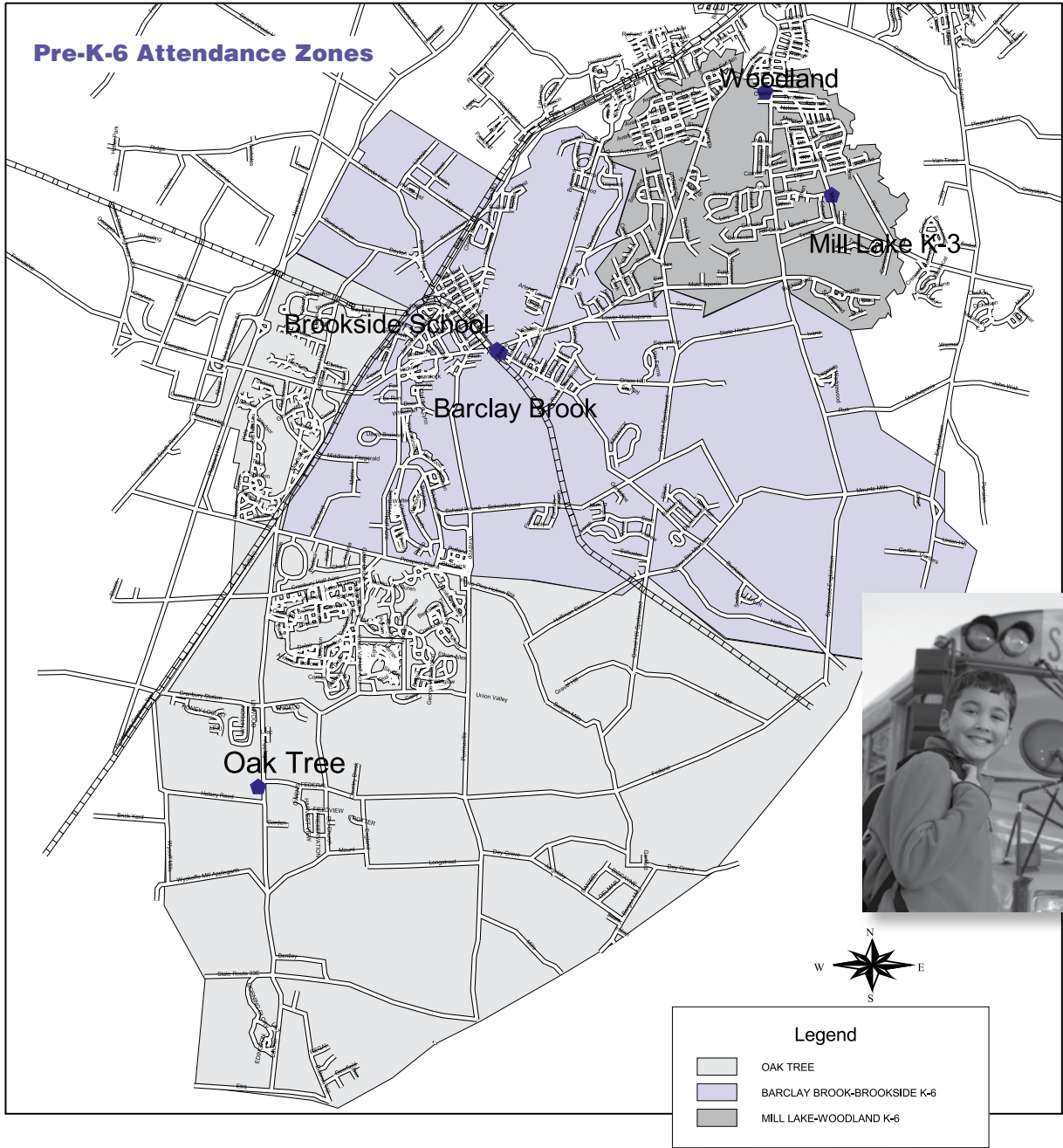
This will go a long way toward easing overcrowding and balancing school populations throughout the entire school district. According to Assistant Superintendent Christopher Tienken, Ed. D., “The redistricting balances enrollment across all of the

elementary schools, keeping class sizes low, which enhances instruction.”

Indeed, Barclay Brook’s and Brookside’s student population will be reduced. Ross Haber of Ross Haber Associates, aided by school district administrators, were responsible for drawing the new boundaries, which are very clean and clear-cut. Neighborhoods will remain intact, and the southern part of Monroe—which is the fastest growing area

in the township—will soon have a school to call its own.

Parents will be especially pleased that their children will have shorter bus rides—and a brand new school, of course.



Block Scheduling a Resounding Success

Now that Monroe Township High School has passed the 90-day mark, the halfway point in the school year, administrators are taking a hard look at several innovative programs implemented this year, including block scheduling. Instead of seven classes each day, high school students now take eight courses on alternating days. This format allows teachers more quality instruction time—84 minutes per class—and students feel less stress to complete lengthy daily assignments and have more time to prepare for exams.

The response to block scheduling has been overwhelming. Teachers, staff, parents, and students all report feeling more comfortable. High school Principal Robert Goodall says that so far things are going “much better than expected.”

These changes didn’t happen overnight, though. Three years ago Goodall convened a Design Com-



mittee to explore alternatives to the standard high school day, from the rotating schedule to block scheduling. They made site visits to schools using different methods and concluded that the block schedule was the best fit for Monroe. This was no surprise to Goodall, who has had positive experiences with block scheduling in other school districts he has worked in.

Goodall stressed that the block scheduling is still a work in progress. “We’re not going to rest on our laurels. This spring semester we’ll be examining and tweaking the schedule, and we’re going to make it as valuable as possible for the kids.”



Senior Option—Student Spotlight

Adina Safta is a student at Monroe Township High School, but she’s also something more—a young person on the fast-track toward a career in finance. This year Adina chose to take advantage of the new Senior Option Program, which fits in nicely with her job at Wachovia Bank, where she started out as a teller at the end of her sophomore year. She loves sales and banking, and it shows, since she has moved up from the teller position to an internship for a financial specialist. Every day she gets out of school at 12:30 p.m. and goes to work. The hours Adina spends at Wachovia accumulate toward a whopping 540 hours she is required to work for Senior Option. She takes it all in a stride.

Adina is a real asset to Wachovia. Says Jason Zabawa, Adina’s mentor, “She could do the job tomorrow. The work world is tough today, and she’s learning that rather than status or education, it’s your skills that will determine your success in your field of choice.”

Wachovia is rewarding her hard work and loyalty by paying for a portion of her college courses next year. She plans to attend Brookdale Community College for two years and then transfer to Kean University, where she will major in communications and marketing.

Adina credits Senior Option with helping her leverage her job into a career. She is impressed with the Senior Option course, where she has learned everything from how to create a household budget to how to write a top-notch resume. Adina is looking forward to her big final presentation at the end of the year that will show her teachers and classmates what a career in finance is all about.

“My older sister didn’t get to take advantage of Senior Option. It’s not just about getting out of school early. By the way, Wachovia is amazing! Everyone should have an account there!”

Students Explore the Real World with Senior Option

Many a teacher has heard the question: “Why do we need to learn this? This isn’t important in the real world.” Partly in response to that question, this year Monroe Township High School launched an ambitious new program—the Senior Option.



The Senior Option Program was created by Robert Mele, supervisor applied arts/careers, along with the superintendent’s office. The district then hired two uniquely qualified individuals, Beverly Baskin and Denise Galluccio, to oversee Senior Option. Baskin and Galluccio bring a vast expertise in human resources and individual counseling that adds a valuable element to this program. Baskin and Galluccio say that this first year has been challenging, but a huge success. “We’re becoming more visionary as the year goes on.”

As one of the first schools in New Jersey to implement such an ambitious program, Monroe is on the forefront of a new era in preparing students for their futures. The Senior Option is an umbrella program under which students choose a track from among a wide spectrum such as community service, apprenticeship, school-based assignments, and work-study. Students spend half a day or more in school, then spend the afternoon working or attending

outside college classes offered at Middlesex County College. The program creators offer such an array of activities because they want to attract a diverse body of students. “We want all students to be interest-

ed, from highly academic students to those interested in trades,” says Baskin. This year approximately 20 percent of the senior class is participating in Senior Option.

As Baskin and Galluccio describe it, their job has three parts: supervising, mentoring, and teaching. The students’ experience with their chosen career track is complemented by

one-on-one mentoring and a mandatory course specially designed to give students the skills they need to excel outside the classroom. The coordinators bring in a diverse variety of outside speakers from Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) to the local National Guard, as well as from every kind of higher education, from trade schools to four-year colleges. A professional Certified Public Accountant (CPA) recently visited their classes to help students understand the tax process and prepare a simple return.

Another critical aspect of Senior Option is the Structured Learning Experience (SLE), a state-run program that helps Galluccio and Baskin ensure safe working environments for students. The two coordinators take courses through the Department of Labor, inspect workplaces, and make themselves available to students with concerns about their employers.

“We want to give kids confidence. Some students start out at Stop ‘n’ Shop, then

after seeing other students and hearing guest speakers, they’re on more of a career path,” relates Galluccio. As a result of Senior Option, future educators can choose district schoolteachers as mentors. One student even works as an intern in the office of State Assemblywoman Linda R. Greenstein.

The best measure of success is the experiences of the students themselves. Many have discovered rewarding career paths, like one student who had an interest in computers but was afraid he wasn’t cut out for a four-year university. When a representative from Chubb Institute visited his Senior Option class, the student was surprised to learn that they offer an 18-month certification in security networking. Now he is preparing to complete that program.

Baskin clearly finds satisfaction in her work. **“When there’s an excellent fit, it’s so rewarding. We can see the students grow, and there’s no better feeling. It’s like a happy marriage!”**

Galluccio echoes Baskin in that the best part of her job is working one-on-one with the students and helping them define potential career paths.

Now Baskin and Galluccio are looking forward to an April career fair that will introduce Senior Option to this year’s juniors. They anticipate that the event will help many find summer jobs and get a head start on next year. With some fine-tuning and a full year to look back on, Senior Option could become a signature program for Monroe Township High School.

Curriculum Corner

Reinventing New Jersey High Schools

Five years ago Monroe Township High School joined a statewide initiative to reinvent the high school experience. The initiative, known as *Reinventing New Jersey High Schools*, was developed by the New Jersey Department of Education. The goal was to improve the education experiences for all high school students.



Since that time, several outcomes have been realized. Our high school has more than doubled the number of Advanced Placement (AP) courses offered, and the number of students taking AP courses has increased more than 50 percent.

This is part of a districtwide effort to put each and every student on a college preparatory track. We are proud to say that starting in September 2008, all freshmen will enter the high school in a college preparatory program.

We have observed how positively students respond to these high expectations, and the numbers reflect this as well. The number of students taking the SAT test has increased almost 20 percent since 2002, and their combined scores are above the state and national averages. The percentage of students taking college-level calculus has more than doubled.

More than 60 high school seniors take college courses during their senior year as part of an arrangement with Middlesex County College. This opportunity is part of our Senior Option Program, which is in its first year and already has over 100 participants. With Senior Option, students participate in professional internships, job shadowing, apprenticeships, community service, college courses, or teacher mentorships at district elementary schools.

The enthusiastic response and achievements of our students have spurred us to do even more to improve the quality of education we offer. Recently, we have added more high-quality science electives like forensics, biotechnology, astronomy, and aerospace, as well as more art, music, drama, and language arts electives. Italian and Latin have been added to the foreign language program. In addition, the new block schedule format has increased the number of credits students can accrue during their high school careers.

Monroe Township High School continues to improve and move forward. The school has achieved 286/287 No Child Left Behind indicators, putting us in the 99.99 percentile. It's no wonder that *NJ Monthly* ranked us in the top 1/3 of all New Jersey high schools.

The next five years will see continued change and growth as the student population grows and the school moves into a new building. One thing will remain constant: The drive to provide the highest-quality education for our students.

Keeping Kids' Safety in Mind

An ad hoc security committee met in 2007 to discuss how to make students in Monroe Township's schools safer. It was decided that the district would install surveillance cameras on the exterior of all school buildings and on all school buses owned by the district.

Installation of real time digital

recorders was completed prior to the winter recess. Superintendent Dr. Ralph Ferrie issued letters informing the school community of these new security measures.



Applegarth on Public Utilities

Thanks to a partnership between the Monroe Township Board of Education and a local developer, Applegarth Middle School is now running on municipal water.

Lennar Homes is developing a residential housing complex surrounding Applegarth Middle School, and as part of their project they were required by the county to widen Applegarth Road. The Board deeded Lennar Homes a small width of road frontage along



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Applegarth Road so they could accomplish this, and in exchange, Lennar Homes brought municipal sewer and water mains from their housing development onto the Applegarth Middle School property. The Board then contracted with Brian Patterson Mechanical, Inc. to complete extension of these municipal services and tie in to the school.

Municipal sewer has been connected to the school. Brian Patterson Mechanical, Inc. is currently working on extending and connecting the municipal water service to Applegarth Middle School. Municipal water service is anticipated to be completed by early spring.

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