

# The State of Our Schools

by Rui Dionisio, Superintendent of Schools

Welcome to the Verona Public School district. The past several years have been ripe with opportunities and collaboration, building on the successes of the past, and sustaining incredible momentum with our faculty and students. Our growth is the result of our focused commitment to the vision defined in our Strategic Plan, the support of our Board of Education and invested leadership team, a deeply committed and talented staff, the support of our parents and community, and highly engaged students motivated to achieve their maximum potential. The genesis of this inaugural publication began two years ago and our endeavor is a tribute to the dedication and efforts of our entire teaching and learning community.

The Verona Public Schools is a high academic performing school district with lofty expectations for all of our students. First and foremost, we are deeply committed to maintaining the best interests of our students, keeping this focus central to every decision we make as we work to cultivate learning environments that enable us to support

the individual potential in every child. Verona is a supportive community with highly motivated and intellectually curious students. Our district provides a full range of opportunities for our students, from academics to the fine and performing arts to athletics and extracurriculars, where there is something for everyone.

Teaching and learning is a multifaceted and dynamic process which requires intent, process, perseverance, and heart. As you review our magazine, we hope you have an opportunity to learn what makes Verona so very special. Our goal is to present what we are proud of to our community in a way that is relevant and authentic. We are certain you will appreciate our efforts in literacy through the Columbia University Teachers College Reading and Writing Project which has been successful at the elementary level and recently expanded to grade 5. In our elementary schools, you will also notice an investment in character education programs such as conflict resolution and peer mediation while we continue to sustain a positive, supportive, and

*“Whatever the mind can conceive and believe, it can achieve.”*

*-Napoleon Hill*

**1,453**

# of students learning through Columbia University Teacher’s College Reading and Writing workshop

nurturing environment for children.

Verona teachers are implementing our new inquiry-based science program as they strive to engage students in hands-on, active learning at the elementary and middle school levels. Communication, collaboration, and strategic intervention in our middle school has been enhanced with the introduction of our house model as our teachers work closely in teams to support the success of all students. Our district has also made a significant commitment to infusing instructional technology through our Google Teacher Academy and professional development for faculty to identify methods that enhance the quality teaching our community has come to expect.

**1,302**

# of students engaged in inquiry-based science learning



Verona High School ranks as one of the best. We have been recognized as a top performing school district by The Washington Post America's Most Challenging High Schools in the nation and #54 in New Jersey. VHS has also been recognized by Newsweek as America's Top High Schools and NJ Monthly Top 100 High Schools, among numerous other publications. Our high school course guide provides diverse opportunities for students engaged in honors and dual enrollment coursework in preparation for post secondary education. We are especially proud of our commitment to increasing academic engagement by removing barriers to rigorous coursework in Advanced Placement courses, evidenced by our continuous and significant growth, dedication of our faculty, and success of our students.

VHS has added five new Advanced Placement (AP) courses since 2015, increasing whole school AP participation over the past two years by 16%, and demonstrating 7% growth in student performance on College Board exams. The academic environment in our school is possible because of the willingness of our students to rise to the level of expectation set for them and the knowledgeable and nurturing staff who support our students in achieving their goals.

**7 in 10**  
juniors and seniors  
are enrolled in at  
least 1 AP course

Our performing arts program continues to flourish. 69% of VHS students participate in the fine and performing arts, choir enrollment has nearly doubled in just one year, and a thriving band program has been regionally recognized and continues to engage in authentic learning experiences. Verona also offers 26 interscholastic athletic teams that produced three championships last year. Even more impressive, the VHS athletic program and coaches help our athletes develop skills, provide a sense of belonging, promote collaboration, cultivate the ability to overcome adversity, and foster critically important non-cognitive skills.

**3 out of 10**  
# of students involved in band,  
color guard, or choir

Nearly **1 in 2**  
VHS Students in grades 9-12  
with ability to earn college credit  
enrolled in at least 1  
Advanced Placement  
(AP) Course or dual  
enrollment college course

**41%**  
Percentage  
improvement  
in HBW  
academic  
performance

**1:2** Ratio of Chromebooks to Students

Last year was also an opportunity for us to assemble new members of our esteemed staff and leadership team who will further support the growth and development of our teachers as lifelong learners. We have charted a course of continuous improvement for our students. Curriculum and instruction continue to move on an upward trajectory. Thank you to those who have joined us in our ventures and have been supportive along the way.

Our publication pays homage to several Verona educators who have made special contributions to our schools. As you flip through the publication, you will get also an inside look at the enhancements to our facilities that helped bring the district up to the 21st century. Finally, we are eternally grateful and appreciative of our education foundation, VFEE, and organizations such as the SCA, VMPPA, VMAC, and athletic boosters, who help make much of our success possible.

Verona is a special place, surrounded by an amazing faculty and supportive community. As the saying goes that iron sharpens iron, it is as we work together to create schools where our students are challenged and inspired so they may reap the fruits of our labor. We are the result of our collective efforts with each of us who are highly invested in the success of our future. I encourage you to explore our Fall 2016 publication and learn about the robust, vibrant learning opportunities that exist in our schools each and every day. Best wishes for 2016-17.