



# THE BOARD REPORT

The Allamuchy Township School District

Volume 6, Issue 1

January 2011

## *Message from Your Board: This is a Special Place*

The year 2010 was a typically busy year for the Allamuchy Township School. We accomplished many goals and earned numerous educational, sports, and extra curricular awards and recognition. Our children enjoyed another year of achievement and success. The year was also very special in that we celebrated the opening of the Mountain Villa School and the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Allamuchy Township School. Much has happened since 1910 when only a few farming families and, of course, the Rutherfurds lived here. Today many of the descendents of those farming families are still here, and even Rutherford family members return regularly. Why? Because Allamuchy is a special place with many special groups such as the Allamuchy Seniors, Friends and Neighbors and many others who generously give their time, energies, and talents back to the community.

Yet, today small towns like Allamuchy are under very close scrutiny. It is argued by some that towns like Allamuchy cost too much to run. Indeed, it is argued that economies of scale make it imperative that towns like Allamuchy be collapsed into the greater community. Thus, the very things that make this place special and the very concept of local home rule are threatened.

Local home rule is a critical aspect of what makes Allamuchy a special place. We get to make the decisions about our priorities, goals, and objectives. When you think about what brought most of us to Allamuchy, it is the lovely environment and, for many of us, the school. In fact the school, along with the other town wide organizations, is what helps to define and bind us as a community. However, the years of government waste, over-regulation and poor management have resulted in a fiscal crisis that some feel can best be addressed by the consolidation of towns and school districts, removing alleged inefficiencies, waste, and redundant layers. In difficult times schools become an easy target. The Allamuchy Board of Education has been very proactive and successful operating "lean and mean" for many years. In fact, we have been at the leading edge of generating revenue, containing cost, and sharing services like special education programs, key employees/administrators, and even our Chief School Administrator. Long before it was politically popular to take these and other cost saving measures, we led the way. Indeed, our teachers are well known throughout the region for their dedication and professionalism, and, for the most part, they remain here. Why? Because they know that Allamuchy is a special place—a place of high value at reasonable cost. This is a concept the Board clearly understands and values.

Our Chief School Administrator and his team run our school very efficiently. We have succeeded in balancing cost and education in a tough environment. In fact, we consistently deliver our services for less per pupil than other comparable districts in the state. For that reason alone, we have difficulty with the concept of consolidation. We also believe that we will always be the best equipped to educate and nurture our own. So, as the debate over consolidation of school districts gains momentum, we extend an open invitation to everyone to become involved and informed about what is going on at the Allamuchy Township School.

Please attend our Board of Education meetings, call the school office, or make an appointment to come in and see for yourself what this school has to offer. Become familiar with the facts, offer advice and assistance, and volunteer your time. Clearly, one of the benefits of local home rule is having the extended community involved.

In 2011, we anticipate that the concept of local schools will continue to be under attack. Going forward we will have several options:

- **remain a viable locally controlled school district**
- **consolidate into other neighboring schools**
  - **become a charter school**

To be honest, there may be pluses and minuses in each approach. However, The Board of Education believes it is in the best interest of the Allamuchy Township School to remain independent and be locally controlled. We also believe that we cannot move in this direction without the prior knowledge, agreement, consent, and support of our informed residents. To that end, we will be scheduling a series of meetings this year. **The first one will be on February 17<sup>th</sup> at 7PM in the Mountain Villa School** to provide information to our residents and to answer your questions on this topic. It is worth noting that local control enables you to have a meaningful say and decide on the future of your community and school. We should consider this topic very carefully because once local control is taken from us, we lose the ability to decide on our future. Several towns have seen this happen. The current talk is having a county wide school district of which we would be a small part. Decisions for our school would be made in Belvidere or Trenton with very limited involvement from Allamuchy residents. *Is this what we want?*

**Please attend the February 17th meeting. Hear the facts, and let the Allamuchy Board of Education benefit from your opinions and guidance.**



The construction of a walking labyrinth at Mountain Villa School was finished in time for Claudia Smith-Alcober's first year anniversary on November 13th. Claudia, a beloved first grader at Allamuchy School, lost her courageous battle to a rare form of brain cancer.

Claudia's Labyrinth is a 7 circuit labyrinth made with 370 Boxwood plants to be enjoyed by everyone, in appreciation to the Allamuchy Community for their wonderful support during Claudia's journey. It is a gift back to the community in her living memory: a place to gather, enjoy and celebrate Claudia's

love for nature, friends, teachers and school.

The labyrinth is an ancient sacred pattern found in cultures all over the world. It is a tool for peace and introspection, a sacred design to quiet the mind and increase spiritual clarity. It represents the journey inward to our own true selves and back out into the everyday world. For many walkers the labyrinth becomes a metaphor for the journey of life: although full of twists and turns, each of us is on a single path through life, and yet each person's journey is a separate and distinct qualitative experience.

Some children like to run labyrinths; others walk them with quiet acceptance. For children, it is a fun and joyous experience. Claudia loved labyrinths! (Editor's Note: Our heartfelt thanks to Elena Escobar for her generosity and contributions.)



## ALWAYS AT WORK



Standing erect as tireless sentinels overlooking Allamuchy Pond, two vertical axis wind turbines work continuously to produce electric energy from the wind to help offset power consumption at Rutherford Hall. These turbines were purchased and installed as an educational project made possible in part through the district's REAP grant. The school is striving to have working models of alternative energy on site for our students to see and study on a daily basis. Teachers, students, and community members will have access to these fascinating machines as they study ways that alternative energy can eventually lessen our dependence on fossil fuels.

Unlike traditional "propeller" wind turbines, these vertical axis turbines are wildlife-friendly and virtually silent. Their presence forms an interesting living sculpture and a reminder of how powerful natural forces are and how we may better utilize them.

The school's ultimate goal is to have working models of many forms of sustainable and alternative "green" technologies on site and available for students and the community to study. Our future depends on today's students having a solid working knowledge of energy in all of its forms.

The Allamuchy Township Education Foundation will hold a meeting on Thursday February 3rd, at 7:00 p.m., at Allamuchy Township School, Room 149. The ATEF asks that anyone interested in helping with the 2nd Annual Golf Outing attend this meeting, especially members of the township organizations involved in the Rutherford Hall collaboration: this could provide the perfect cooperative opportunity to guarantee a financial and social success! Funds raised from this event will be used to bring innovative educational programs and opportunities to the school district and help to restore and preserve an important piece of Warren County history, Rutherford Hall.



*Save the Date*

Monday  
May 16th 2011  
Panther Valley  
Country Club  
Allamuchy, N.J.



## **RUTHERFURD HALL GRANTS AND ACTIVITY UPDATES**

This fall, there has been much in development at Rutherford Hall from an organizational and funding perspective. We submitted a grant to The William Penn Foundation for \$81,900 in collaboration with a number of non-profit and community partners. This grant includes generally a continued focus on our green/sustainability development, and specifically a request for funds for a feasibility study of the historic hydro-electric dam site, onsite consultant staffing, exhibit panels about good development in the Highlands region, and 4 pilot community education programs. We also submitted a grant to the 1772 Foundation for \$79,000 in restoration and planning support. This grant included restoration work to the first floor and to hire a conservator and furnishings expert to complete furnishing interpretation plans for 4 rooms that correspond with Rutherford family furniture holdings. Additionally, a grant for \$32,000 was submitted to the Mary Teets Butcher Trust to support restoration work in the “chapel” or “sanctuary” room; this proposal includes plaster repair and flooring work, as well as a small exhibition about the notion of “sanctuary” as defined both by the Rutherford Family and by the Sisters of Divine Charity, and by the culture at large (the notions of rural escape and sanctuary). We also submitted a grant to Hudson Farms Charities for over \$80,000 for on-going planning work as it relates to architectural and landscape historic preservation, as well as general facility use planning as it relates to history, environmental education, and land use. Further, we requested Federal Recovery and Reinvestment Funds, for the upcoming January 2011 distribution, to assist with the building of a handicapped accessible bathroom facility, and we are engaged in a momentous new statewide initiative for funds that would support field trips and educational programs in 2012.

Finally, we have applications in final development phase for Bank of America Foundation, and the Victoria Foundation, as well as the Geraldine R. Dodge Foundation. These projects are designed to cross-pollinate best practices in the Allamuchy Elementary School and expand them out into the community through public programs that are applicable to families and seniors and that address themes of literacy, green and sustainable practices, innovative environmental education, as well as the arts and history.

Parallel to grant writing, there have also been a few other major developments. The Allamuchy Board of Education has formalized a number of partnership agreements with civic and non-profit entities. These include, but are not limited to, the Allamuchy Township Education Foundation, Allamuchy Township and various committees within the municipality, the school’s PTO, the YMCA, and Allamuchy State Park. These partnership agreements formalize the relationships and working intentions of the various municipal entities and assist in grant writing and fundraising. We have also formed a Rutherford Hall Steering Committee made up of our partner organizations and various community members; the intent of this group is to expand and improve information-sharing about the project as well as to assist in managing the project. While it is an advisory group to the BOE, this committee reinforces the notion that this project is a community based endeavor that seeks to benefit a broad base of needs within Allamuchy and the larger NW/Highlands NJ region.

In the coming weeks, we will launch the first phase of the Rutherford Hall website. Please keep your browsers ready for [www.rutherfordhall.org](http://www.rutherfordhall.org) where you will find general history and the latest news and events. The website will also collect “stories” about Rutherford Hall and include ways to join our e-blast mailing lists and other information sharing initiatives. We have also just formalized a Summer Institute for teachers and for the general public (adults and children) for July 2011. This project will utilize the Mountain Villa School and grounds, and the brochure and online materials will be available in the coming weeks.

If you are interested in volunteering at Rutherford Hall, please send us an email now; while we are still a few steps away from opening the doors, we are very interested in cultivating a volunteer base to assist us in this process. If you are interested in volunteering, please email your available days and hours, and areas of interest to Laurie Rapisardi at [lrapisardi@aes.k12.nj.us](mailto:lrapisardi@aes.k12.nj.us). If you are a student interested in an internship, we have a simple application process and this information can also be obtained by emailing Laurie. You can also join the Friends of Rutherford Hall by emailing the same address, and we will share the next meeting date with interested community members. Happy New Year and thanks for your continued interest and support!

### **FOCUSED ON ACHIEVEMENT**

Students must be invested in the process and product of their education. As major stakeholders in their own learning, these young people need to be given the proper tools to help them to best harness their knowledge and skills. On December 3, 2010 our middle school students engaged in an NJASK Practice Day that enabled them to gain insight into the types of questions asked on the Language Arts test while also practicing the various strategies that they have been taught in the classroom.

In our first segment of the session, students were able to review their own writing samples from last year’s test, and they were given the chance to self-reflect. Working with a teacher-designed tool, these students answered questions about their writing so that they were able to gauge how closely they followed the NJASK Rubric. Many students stated that they knew they could have performed better, and they recognized the ways that they could improve their writing.

Next, students wrote persuasive essays to practice for the writing assessment. The prompt, done in a 45-minute time frame, asked students to consider the type of field trip that would best benefit their classes. Proposed trips needed to have educational value, but students were not limited in any way by cost or travel time. Students wrote about trips to museums, hospitals, colleges, NASA headquarters, and foreign nations.

The final component of the NJASK Practice Day was a sample Reading assessment. Students read passages, and they worked with the text to answer open-ended and multiple-choice questions.

Once the students were finished with their part of the day, a team of teachers met to begin the scoring process. A blind scoring approach was used, with student names masked by ID numbers. Two scorers read each paper, and the NJASK Rubric was applied. In cases where the two scores differed too significantly (scores must be contiguous to be valid), a third reader was used.

All middle school writing samples were scored that afternoon, thus providing us with much raw data to help us to guide our instruction and intervention strategies. The event was coordinated by our Curriculum Advisor Joanne Ferguson.

Allamuchy Township School District  
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Allamuchy, NJ 07820

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# Allamuchy Township

SCHOOL DISTRICT

PO Box B  
Allamuchy, NJ 07820

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### PTO PRIDE

The Allamuchy PTO is proud of the cooperation of students, families, and the community that has allowed the PTO to:

- 1) Purchase 26 books at Mountain Villa's Holiday Scholastic Book Fair and at the ATS Fall Fair for Warren County Foster and Adoptive Family Services—in time for Christmas—through One-for-Books;
- 2) Purchase reference books for the Mountain Villa library from the book fair profits;
- 3) Purchase a laminator for the teachers at Mountain Villa with profits from the November Market Day sale. Order online at [www.marketday.com](http://www.marketday.com). Internet order deadline for the next sale: Friday, January 14 at 11:00 PM CST. Pick-up: ATS cafeteria, Thursday, January 20, 4:30-6:00 PM. PTO contact: Claire Britt 908-850-9679;
- 4) Earn \$209 from the Terracycle program—with special thanks to the very green-conscious students at MVS and the Allamuchy Senior O.W.L.S. Check out this NJ-based company at [www.terracycle.net](http://www.terracycle.net) or contact Beth Gavin 908-852-5479.

For the latest list of what the PTO collects, in addition to **BoxTops**, **Labels for Education**, and **TYSON A+ 1,2,3** bag tops and box flaps, and for more information about One-for-Books and Market Day, visit the PTO website. Go to [www.aes.k12.nj.us](http://www.aes.k12.nj.us) and click on the PTO drop-down .

**SAVE THE DATE FOR THE PTO'S MAJOR FUNDRAISER OF THE YEAR:  
THE TRICKY TRAY!!**

*April 8, 2011.*

## Did You Know???

Prior to Every Board Meeting, Informative Parent Workshops are Held at the Allamuchy Township School in Room 151

January 24, 2011	6:30 pm	<i>Math Anxiety (presenter: Mr. Sam Greco, Math Teacher/Advisor, ATS)</i>
February 28, 2011	6:30 pm	<i>Leveraging the Renaissance Learning Package including Accelerated Reader (presenter: Ms. Suzanne Chamberlin, ATS Librarian)</i>
March 28, 2011	6:00 pm	<i>Structure for Your Child (presenter: Dr. Michelle Cannata, School Psychologist)</i>
April 25, 2011	6:00 pm	<i>Touch Math (presenter: Ms. Tracy Holt, ATS Special Education Teacher)</i>