Briarcliff Manor School District

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Briarcliff Middle School Earns the Coveted Apple Distinguished School Designation

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Briarcliff Manor School District Superintendent Dr. James Kaishian is known for his famous mantra to the District teachers: “Play! You have permission to fail. Learn by doing,” and has thus set the tone throughout the three schools. This mantra has opened up both teaching and learning opportunities, and this growth mindset has culminated in Briarcliff Middle School recently earning the coveted Apple Distinguished School Designation for 2021.

“We are being recognized for our continuous innovation in learning and teaching,” said Briarcliff Middle School Assistant Principal Amy Gladstone. “We use Apple applications and programs to help apply our lessons and deepen the experience for students.”

According to Briarcliff’s Instruction Technology Mentor Dr. Tracy Campanile, using these programs enables students to be more in charge of their learning.

“Students can make decisions about how they learn. One student might want to draw, another may create a video and a third might want to create a song,” she said.

The designation, which has been awarded to only 546 schools worldwide, has a duration of three years and can only be achieved after an invitation from Apple and a lengthy application process.

“In addition to having a 1:1 program using Apple devices, 75% of our teachers and leadership have to be Apple teachers, which is a certification you can get by learning about iPad or MacBook and different applications, and completing quizzes to earn six different badges,” explained Dr. Campanile.

“Teaches can become Apple Teachers on their own, but we do also offer courses to work on the certification in school,” Dr. Campanile said. “The benefit of doing the certification as a group is that teachers can get inspired by one another.”

According to Ms. Gladstone, the Apple programs and applications that teachers use are practical and useful on a daily basis.

“Students are able to personalize their devices to best support their unique learning styles – they’re able to split their screens, isolate text in busy web pages, and customize their digital experience in a number of other helpful ways,” she said.

Not only do the teachers learn new skills, but their knowledge trickles down to the students, who can then use those skills and tips on their own devices.
“After earning their certification, teachers can delve deeper into what they learned if it piques their interest, and they end up both strengthening their skills and finding meaningful and creative ways to integrate the technology into their curriculum,” Dr. Campanile said.

One of the programs that teachers learn during the certification program is GarageBand, which is a creative program that enables students to create music or podcasts and collaborate with others.

“We are starting to see a lot more creativity around the school. There are no boundaries – students can try anything and see where it takes them. We see this across grades and in multiple content areas,” Ms. Gladstone said.

Another creative program that teachers learn for the certification is Keynote. This program can be used to create presentations and slideshows.

“You can take a song that you created in GarageBand, put it in Keynote, add a picture that you drew and have it be animated,” Dr. Campanile said.

Many such examples have been listed on a PDF file, which was created as part of the application process.

“Once we were nominated, we formed a committee that was tasked with creating a two-page document demonstrating how students were using Apple products and programs in an innovative way,” Ms. Gladstone said. “The document became a snapshot of how teaching and learning are practiced at the school.”

The school received its designation in September of this year, but the teachers are not resting on their laurels.

“We are continuing to use the programs in innovative ways,” Ms. Gladstone said. “One of the programs teaches how to create QR codes, and recently a seventh grader who is running for student government created a QR code that links to a video she made for her campaign. This is a great example of how these Apple programs are being used – not only in class, but supporting extracurricular activities as well. Students are using these tools in many creative ways.”

Another benefit of the designation is that it enables faculty members to connect with other educators from across the world.

“We can connect with educators from other schools that share this designation and exchange ideas,” Ms. Gladstone said. “We have met virtually with folks from Scotland, Australia and Brazil, as well as from throughout the United States. This has really broadened our professional development.”

Both Dr. Campanile and Ms. Gladstone have expressed immense pride in the school’s achievement.

“We are proud to have received this distinction but even more proud of how we are using technology in meaningful and creative ways and providing students with the tools to do the same, both inside and outside of school,” Dr. Campanile said. “We are preparing our students for the future. Collaboration, creative thinking and problem-solving skills are very important in today’s world.”
Ms. Gladstone shares Ms. Campanile’s vision.

“We seek to mold our students into global citizens who love to learn and love to express themselves in unique ways,” she said. “This work is not something that only began since we were nominated last winter—we have been committed to these values for many years and we will continue to be for years to come.”

URL Link:

Dr. Campanile and Assistant Principal Gladstone
Briarcliff Manor School District

Apple Distinguishes School Application:

Briarcliff Middle School
Briarcliff, NY
A community of thinkers, innovators and future leaders

Today
Briarcliff Middle School is a learning organization that:
* Is responsive and adaptive to our students and the world around us;
* Provides equal access to tools and resources to enable teachers and students to participate at a global level;
* Fosters curiosity and innovation in students and educators alike;
* Engages families in partnership.

BMS seeks to become a school without walls that provides equity through access to resources. Supported by on-going professional development, we see classroom instruction shifting towards a new blend of student-centric lessons and projects that are authentic, reflect students’ choices and encourage creativity and innovation.

Vision
Our vision is driven by a growth mindset that supports innovation and creativity, with an overarching goal of personalizing learning and preparing students for global citizenship. Our Superintendent of Schools set the tone when he told the faculty, “Play! You have permission to fail. Learn by doing.” In this way, the lines between teaching and learning have blurred and the Superintendent’s mantra is repeated in classrooms. With enthusiastic support from the community, teachers have become designers of new ways of learning. Access to an infinite pool of resources provides students with perspectives beyond textbooks and beyond our own community. Technology gives students opportunities to “play” and show what they’ve learned through authentic products and a variety of modalities.

Demographics
282 students
44 faculty members
Public
Grades 6 - 8

Apple Products & Services at BMS
MacBook Pro
iPad Pro
iPad
Apple Pencil
Apple TV
APL Specialist
Executive Coaching
Apple Leadership Cohort
Learning

We strive to ensure that all learning is personalized, relevant, focused on growth and reflect choice and voice. Customized digital notebooks are interactive and display resources from a wide range of sources. We engage students through multiple modalities, allowing them the autonomy to choose the ways they learn best and dive deeper into learning.

Similarly, professional learning takes place before, during, and after the school day, as well as over the summer. Teachers identify areas of need and often lead workshops. Collaboration and continuous growth are cornerstones of our practice. Last Spring we began working with an APL specialist; a majority of teachers and leaders (67.4%) participated in an average of 3.3 hours of learning in May and June.

Learning during the Pandemic: When schools closed in March 2020, our technology journey accelerated in ways we did not imagine. Within a day of closing, teachers offered remote instruction to students. With support from Apple and in-district PD, teachers found solutions to problems of connecting with students, engaging them in learning and assessing progress. Virtual science experiments, breakout rooms and a virtual Wellness Center helped us stay connected. Upon opening in September 2020, BMS has been open daily for in-person learners as well as those that remain remote. The responses to a pandemic crisis have turned into some best practices that will sustain us in ensuring we keep the pulse of learning alive, no matter where we are.

Success

Success is like mastery; once you hit a benchmark, you move the bar higher. On Apple Technology Surveys we saw a 2% increase in faculty identifying as moderately to very prepared to teach with technology, bringing us to 96%. This is confirmed by classroom observations, where technology is imbedded seamlessly across content areas. We also measure success through engagement as students use technology to research, explore and express themselves. We look for depth of knowledge as students interact with content, create products and express understanding.

In March 2021, the Apple Learning Academy Team invited Briarcliff to share personalized learning as a Showcase School. Hear what Middle School teachers had to say.

What's next

Through technology and innovation, we seek to extend experiences and expand resources beyond the walls of our school. Classroom instruction shifts as we create a new blend of creative lessons and projects that are authentic, reflect students' choices and passions, guided by rubrics that celebrate creativity and innovation. We seek to provide more opportunities for for coding and STEM based learning, and recently created a new strand in related arts to focus on STEM based projects. We look forward to hosting an on-site APL specialist and adding a new curriculum director grounded in the LATIC model to support this work.