

MOUNT OLIVE MIDDLE SCHOOL

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

I usually reserve my welcome for back-to-school night, but then I thought that for you, back to school night already happened last night! So, I'd like to take this time to introduce myself and tell you a little about who I am, what I teach, and my own thoughts about teaching and learning.

My name is Darrin Wolsko, and I am your child's life sciences teacher. I received both my Bachelors and Masters degrees in biology, as well as further certification in supervision, from Montclair State University. I started my career at William Annin Middle School in Basking Ridge, NJ, where I taught computers for 6th, 7th and 8th grade students for someone on maternity leave. I have spent the last three years teaching Saturday mornings as an adjunct professor of general and human biology at Montclair State University, and I begin my seventh year as a teacher here at the Mount Olive Middle School. When I'm not teaching, I enjoy hiking, traveling, reading science fiction and collecting Spiderman items. I live with my wife, Aimee, who is a public librarian, and my five-month old son, James, who isn't yet sleeping through the night, in Clinton, NJ.

Our course on life sciences at the middle school is designed to introduce the students to the world of living things at both the macroscopic (big) and microscopic (small) levels. As we look at cells, we'll explore a world not many people ever get to see (we'll even see our own cells!). Your child will explore the components that make up cells, and the vital processes that keep all living things functioning properly. Human genetics will start to explain how heredity functions, and the almost "science-fiction" that researchers have turned into reality! We will investigate the five kingdoms. Relationships between living things, as well as our dependence on non-living aspects of the environment will be discovered. Skills vital to the practicing scientist will be modeled, and particular attention will be paid to the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, ensuring success on future state testing. Biology and the life sciences are utterly fascinating, and your students will have the opportunity to discover new and wonderful things about all life.

As for how I'll accomplish this, I believe in exposing students to a wide variety of different instructional strategies and learning styles, as different learners learn different things differently (whew!). Discussion, student presentations, demonstrations and laboratory activities are all facets of my instructional strategy. The middle school is also fortunate to have access to a wide range of technology, which will be appropriately employed to enhance learning. Finally, I have recently been training on integrating real world problem solving opportunities and the sciences with technology to provide a truly stimulating and student-directed opportunity to learn.

I see learning as an interconnected web of ideas and concepts. We tend to learn in isolated pockets – language arts is taught in the language arts room, and science is taught in the science room, and never the two shall meet...not so! Chemistry and biology are so totally different...hardly the case! I have two broad reaching goals for my students this year: One is to begin to break down these artificial walls about what we learn in school, because after all, we don't think this way. Everything we think about is connected to something else, and I will try and bring this concept through in my teaching. My second goal is to bring science out of the textbook and relate it to actual real-life. Sure there will be things that we need to know from a book, but the learning cannot stop there! And I promise you it won't.

I envision a year of exciting and interesting things. The only thing I ask is that my students (and my parents and guardians!) keep an open mind about science. I teach a subject that can be very extreme – either you love it or you hate it. I'm hoping to help those who already love it to keep loving it, and those who might not like it to give it another chance. I'm hoping to give your children the skills and the desire to be scientifically aware of an increasingly scientific society, and I hope to model the passion and love of learning that I have always possessed.

It is an honor for me to teach your children, and I wish you an excellent year. Should you ever wish to contact me, I can be reached by phone at (973)691-4006 ext.5689, or by e-mail at dwolsko@mtoliveboe.org. In most cases, I'll be able to get back to you fairly soon, but things can get busy at times, so your patience and understanding in those instances is very much appreciated. Thanks for reading, and I look forward to meeting you at back-to-school night.

Respectfully,



Darrin P. Wolsko
Teacher of Life Science

