

# Community Link

White Plains Public Schools  
Unlocking the infinite and unique potential of each student, every day.

## STAY UP TO DATE

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FALL 2021

## Welcome Back

We were so pleased to welcome our Tigers to a new school year on September

9th! With the continued support of the community and our students' families and the guidance of our district and building level reopening committees, we are well prepared to meet the unique needs of every student in a safe learning environment. Let's make it a great year!

The first-day excitement was in full-force at George Washington Elementary School! Our students couldn't wait to see their friends and teachers.



## It's Not Goodbye, It's THANK YOU!

### A Letter from Dr. Ricca

If you've visited the WPCSD you know Mrs. Michele Schoenfeld, who for the past 39+ years has been an integral member of the Education House team. Michele, who has served the White Plains schools with the utmost professionalism, dedication and enthusiasm, has announced her retirement, effective December 31st.



During her tenure, Michele served as the liaison between the Board of Education and the community and its various organizations, working with 38 Board members and eight Superintendents of Schools along the way. She has seen schools built, schools sold, a host of new initiatives – the Parent Choice Program, full-day kindergarten, various reconfigurations of grade levels – and many more changes throughout the decades.

Committed to the community and our children, and always supportive and accessible to all, Michele has been so much more than "District Clerk." She has always brought both a sense of fun and calm – along with innovative ideas – to a big job with big responsibilities that she managed with incredible grace. All who have had the pleasure of working with her, know: If you have a question, just ask Michele. You'll not only get the answer you need, but you'll also get a warm smile.

Personally, Michele was the first person I met when I visited the district. She brought me around to all the facilities and taught me about the history and spirit of our incredible community. I'm immensely grateful for that. Over the years, I've recognized just how kind, witty, fiercely intelligent and creative she is. She is one-of-a-kind and we are blessed to have her as a member of our community.

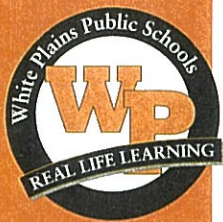
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▲ White Plains Mayor Tom Roach, Board of Education President Rosemarie Eller, Superintendent Dr. Joseph L. Ricca

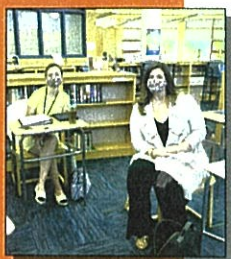
▼ Staff and teachers heading into Superintendent's Conference Day





## Off to a Great Start

**For District staff, the new school year was kicked off at the annual Superintendent's Conference Day,** held in person at White



▲ **Our newest teachers completed two days of orientation in August.**

**White Plains School District administrators gathered for two days of professional development focused on leadership, culturally responsive-sustaining education and social emotional learning. ▶**

Plains High School and broadcast live for virtual attendees. The morning started with a wonderful performance by the incomparable White Plains High School Mariachi Band, and featured a special video highlighting the triumphs and challenges of the prior year and a half, including drive-by graduation, hybrid learning and the return to full-time in-person learning. Superintendent Dr. Joseph L. Ricca, Board of Education President Rosemarie Eller, White Plains Mayor Tom Roach, WPHS Principal Emerly Martinez, and Union officials shared words of welcome, encouragement and gratitude. Dr. Ricca encouraged everyone in the District to see themselves as a leader with the responsibility to put kids first every day. *"Pre-K through 12th grade is a short amount of time, but it is a pivotal amount of time in the life of a human being. What happens in those years will ultimately dictate what will happen for the rest of their lives. Let us make it a time of positivity, building and progress so that when children walk across the stage at graduation, they're walking toward a promising future."*

Mayor Roach expressed admiration and appreciation for the "herculean" efforts of all staff, citing commitment and cooperation as the reasons the District was visited and recognized by U.S. Secretary of Education Dr. Miguel Cardona and then-Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul last year. The morning concluded with an inspirational presentation by Kim Beardon, Founder, Executive Director and Language Arts Teacher at the acclaimed Ron Clark Academy, an innovative middle school and educator-training facility in Atlanta. More than 85,000 educators from around the world have visited her classroom and attended her workshops to learn ways to better engage students, promote academic excellence, build relationships, and create a climate and culture for success.

**On behalf of the Board of Education,** President Rosemarie Eller recognized the incredible efforts of all in the District, acknowledging that administrators, teachers and staff did "anything and everything" to support the students of White Plains and their families throughout the pandemic. *"All of you, in every single role, navigated the challenges presented and did so with a steadfast dedication to safety and education. Looking forward to the new school year, she said: "I have no doubt that you will all continue to seek new and novel approaches to support students. I have no doubt that you will all continue our equity work ensuring that there are no barriers for our students. I have no doubt that in every single one of you our students see a model of inspiration, determination and grit."*

**We've celebrated 63 new hires/promotions** in the District this calendar year, including 29 teachers and PPS staff and 26 support staff.

The White Plains Board of Education appointed Joseph Onativia to the position of Assistant Principal at George Washington School at a Special Meeting in September. He joins Robert Spedafino (at Post Road) as the second new Assistant Principal this year. With 20 years of experience in education, Mr. Onativia comes to White Plains from South Orangetown, NY, where he was Assistant Principal of the Middle School for the last three years. Mr. Spedafino was appointed in August and had been an elementary teacher at Mamaroneck Avenue School for the last 8 years. He was Interim Assistant Principal there from February to June.



**Onativia Spedafino**

The school year opened with reassignments of other assistant principals: Dr. Kimberly Crawford is at Church Street School (from Ridgeway), Merle Jackson, at Ridgeway School (from Post Road), Brendan McCarthy at Mamaroneck Avenue (from George Washington), and Suzanne Lasser, at Eastview Middle School (from Post Road).



## Enhancing Computer Science and Engineering Instruction

**Two exciting new professional development programs** for District teachers will empower them to seamlessly integrate computer science, engineering and technology into a variety of subject areas for the benefit of all students. In alignment with the Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA) standards and the New York State Computer Science and Digital Fluency Learning Standards, these new tools and practices will challenge students to think critically, be persistent and creative, and get them more engaged in active learning. *“With a focus on STEM teaching and learning, we can inspire a future of possibilities for our students to innovate and create,”* said Debbie Hand, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction.

White Plains is one of six Westchester districts participating in Mercy College’s STEM Ambassadors program. A cohort of 15 K-8 teachers across different subject areas will receive 30 hours of research-based STEM Professional Development from the Mercy College Center for STEM Education and obtain new resources and materials to use in their classrooms. Participating teachers will have the opportunity to learn how to incorporate technology tools into their instruction and plan engaging student-centered lessons using computer science applications, robotics and educational technology such as Scratch and Snap programming platforms, and Bee-Bot, Finch and Lego robotics. Kathy Barpoulis, Coordinator of Mathematics K-6, STEAM and Enrichment K-5, oversees this initiative.

Similarly, 29 elementary and middle school teachers are participating in our inaugural cohort of the Amazon Future Engineer Initiative, overseen by Rocco Varuolo, Coordinator of K-12 Instructional Technology. Working in collaboration with the educational technology nonprofit organization BootUp Professional PD, participating teachers will receive professional development in Computer Science and computational thinking over the next three years, plus participate in peer coaching and model teaching opportunities. Throughout the initiative they’ll learn to how to code using Scratch and Scratch Jr., why it’s so important to teach Computer Science starting at the elementary level, and how to foster an inclusive

culture. As part of the initiative, Amazon also gifted White Plains School District multiple Micro:bit kits, which are physical coding devices that can extend participants’ Computer Science learning in the classroom. Using these platforms, participants will learn how to facilitate interactive, multi-media projects that can be integrated into various content areas from math to music and art. Students and teachers are also invited to participate in guided virtual tours of Amazon fulfillment centers to discover how engineering and computer science power Amazon’s delivery system.

Through these programs, students will have access to technologies that provide more exciting, engaging ways to learn, and develop context for how computer science and engineering are used to solve real-world problems in their communities. The teachers who participate will share their knowledge with colleagues, helping us build capacity to advance this work districtwide.

### Computer Science Equity Fellow

The Computer Science Teachers Association (CSTA) selected White Plains Elementary Enrichment Teacher Lauren Berrios as a 2021-22 Equity Fellow, an initiative made possible in partnership with Microsoft and Google.org. She is one of 15 fellows, chosen from 90 applicants, selected because they “have demonstrated success in disrupting inequities in K-12 computer science and want to improve equitable access and achievement at a broader scale.”

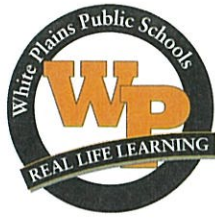
Lauren is a mentor teacher for the Girls4Tech club at Eastview Middle School and serves on the District’s Equity Committee. During this year-long program, she will receive professional learning with premier leaders in the field, as well as support from CSTA staff, expert partners and dedicated resources to implement a project.



Dr. Joseph L. Ricca  
Superintendent of Schools

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The mission of the White Plains City School District is to educate and inspire all students, while nurturing their dreams, so they learn continually, think critically, pursue their aspirations and contribute to a diverse and dynamic world.



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White Plains, NY  
10605

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**L to R: Guidance Counselor Emily Falber, Gloria Mundadan, Cristopher Brown, Jimena Perez-Tetuan, High School Principal Emerly Martinez, Sarah Sagner, Benjamin Goldman, and Guidance Counselor Marcos Monteagudo.**

## Congratulations, National Merit Competitors!

**Five White Plains High School Seniors** have been recognized in the 2020-2021 National Merit Scholarship Competition, a program designed to encourage the pursuit of academic excellence and honor our nation's scholastic champions. Benjamin Goldman is a semifinalist and will compete to be a Finalist. In the Commended Student category are Cristopher Brown, Gloria Mundadan, Jimena Perez-Tetuan, and Sarah Sagner. Additionally, five WPHS students were recognized as scholars in the National African American Recognition Program, and 27 in the National Hispanic Recognition Program.

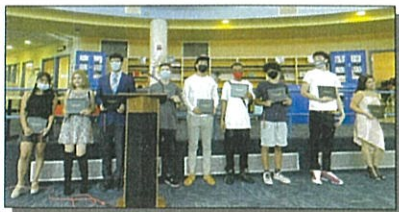
## It's Not Goodbye, It's THANK YOU! (cont'd from cover)

We thank Michele for her service and are pleased that she has agreed to continue working with the District on public relations and communications! In the meantime, she will be honored by the District at her last "official" Board of Education Meeting on December 13th, and by the Friends of White Plains Public Schools in the spring.

From all of us: THANK YOU, MICHELE! We are grateful and #WPProud to celebrate you!

**Dr. Joseph Ricca, Superintendent of Schools**

*"Michele has always been passionate about White Plains Schools and the success of our students and staff. She's been an invaluable liaison to the community. She manages a very varied and complex job in a most professional way, and it's been my sincere honor and pleasure to work with her. I'm very happy that she will continue to work on special projects for the District."* ROSEMARIE ELLER, BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESIDENT



**Fourteen Summer School graduates received their diplomas at a ceremony in the High School Media Center on August 23rd; all are off to accomplish great things in college or the workforce.**