

# Community Link

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

FALL 2020

## Back to School: A NOTE FROM DR. RICCA



After a summer of nonstop preparation under the leadership of our WPCSD Reopening Committee, we began this school year as prepared as possible to manage a delicate balancing act: prioritizing health and safety while continuing to provide all children in our District with an excellent education and social/emotional support.

There is no single plan that could simply overcome all the challenges we're facing, however, by supporting one another and communicating as much and as clearly as possible, we will continue to move through the pandemic together.

While the reopening of school facilities this year was certainly different, and one for the history books, the tradition of White Plains Pride remains unshakable, pandemic or not. The first day of school on September 10th was remote learning, and we were thrilled to welcome students back into the buildings on September 21st the first day of hybrid learning. Thanks to the careful planning and amazing commitment of our colleagues, both ran smoothly!

I am grateful to all of our community members. Some special thanks are in order:

- ✦ To our teachers, support staff and administrators, who spent their summer engaged in professional development and learning new technology;
- ✦ To our parents and guardians, who have been so patient and flexible as we worked to build a new system to support our learners in novel ways
- ✦ To our students, who are working hard each day and overcoming challenges
- ✦ To our facilities, health, transportation, food services, and support staff, who are going above and beyond to keep everyone safe, healthy and ready to learn.

We could not do this without you and are #WPProud of your efforts and accomplishments!

With gratitude,

Dr. Joseph L. Ricca, Superintendent of Schools

*September 21st was a beautiful day to welcome our Tigers back to their schools.  
Photos by John Sheppard*

### STAY UP TO DATE

Visit the District's website  
[www.whiteplainspublicschools.org](http://www.whiteplainspublicschools.org)  
and Facebook page  
[www.facebook.com/wpschools](https://www.facebook.com/wpschools)  
for the latest information.



## Attention Parents & Guardians

The most important thing we can do to keep children, families and staff safe is to stay home if we are not feeling well. Please be thorough in your daily health screening and do not send students to school if they have a fever or are showing any sign of illness.



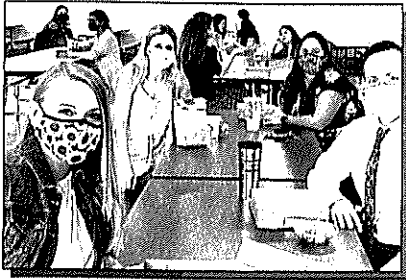
## Orientation & Superintendent's Conference Day

**About 60 new staff members** joined the District this school year and 40 teachers attended an orientation session at WPHS on August 31st. Addressing them, Dr. Ricca stressed the importance of supporting students and helping them move forward and acknowledged the "awesome power of teachers."

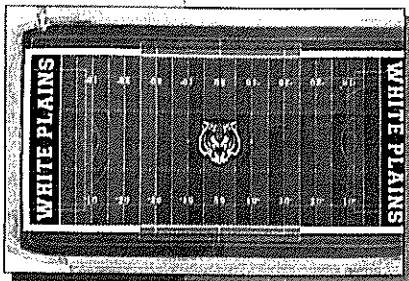
*"We will utilize and leverage every bit of technology to connect with kids every day,"* said Dr. Ricca. *"We're going to show the world that public educators are superstars!"*

Maggie Racioppo, R.N., School Nurse Coordinator, addressed the group, sharing information about new health procedures and stating that everyone must share responsibility and work together to keep the school community safe.

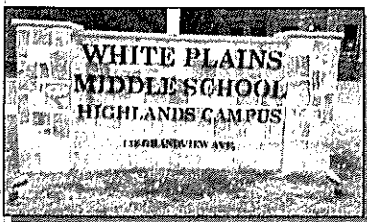
At the first Superintendent's Conference Day of the year, held via Zoom, Superintendent Ricca, Board of Education President Rosemarie Eller, White Plains Mayor Tom Roach, and District union officials welcomed staff to a new school year with words of wisdom and encouragement. Each speaker reiterated that everything we do is to teach, support and inspire students. President Eller commended District staff for the "masterful job" they do every day for students and families and reminded them that they make a difference. Dr. Ricca shared that in these challenging times, no one is expecting perfection. After all, education is a practice!



▲ *New teachers getting ready to start the school year*



▲ *Lockers field improvements include removal of replacement of the original lockers, upgrade of lockers and new lockers, game lines and zone marking.*



▲ *New Highlands signage*

## Facilities Upgrades to Improve Safety, Comfort and Recreation

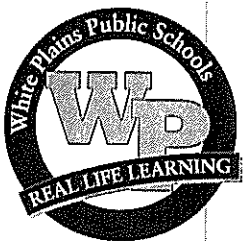
**Director of Facilities and Operations Frank Stefanelli** oversaw many improvements to the District's buildings and grounds over the summer, including air conditioning in 16 Church Street classrooms, a new public address system at GW, an upgraded sound system in the MAS auditorium, ball field renovations at MAS, Post Road and Eastview, restroom renovations at Ridgway, new signage in front of Highlands, and the completion of security fencing around the WPHS fields. The Facilities team also made many Covid-19 preparations, including new procedures for cleaning and response, the installation of more than 700 hand sanitizer dispensers in classrooms and new signage throughout all buildings.



## Student Athletes Back on the Fields

**With safety in mind, many fall sports began** in late September, including Boys and Girls Soccer, Girls Tennis, Boys and Girls Cross Country, and Field Hockey. Other Fall sports will begin March 1. As of right now, all Winter sports – Indoor Track, Basketball, Wrestling, Ice Hockey, Bowling, and Cheerleading – are scheduled to start November 30th.

*"Athletics are an important part of the students' experience and their development, both mentally and physically,"* said Matt Cameron, Director of Athletics *"I'm excited to have kids back on the fields."*



## Districtwide Hybrid Learning

**This summer was devoted to developing a plan to safely reopen our schools.** In terms of curriculum and instruction, our goal was to ensure we could continue to provide all children with an excellent education – challenging them with rigorous coursework, providing for social/emotional learning and offering extra support whenever needed.

As of September 21st, the District is operating under a hybrid learning plan with students in their buildings one or two days a week and learning remotely the rest of the time. In order to allow for social distancing (not just in classrooms but in hallways, cafeterias and on buses), students in kindergarten through 6th grade attend school in person two days a week and students in 7th through 12th grade are in their school buildings one day a week. Whether participating from school or home, students follow a full schedule that includes all regular classes, electives and specials (art, music, physical education, and library media). All art materials, math manipulatives, literacy supply kits, and more were sent home to families to ensure every child has what they need to get the most from every lesson.

As was the case pre-pandemic, most classes feature some combination of live teaching, group work and independent work/study. Many offer a synchronous, hybrid learning environment; that is, teaching students who are in the classroom and those who are participating via Zoom at the same time. It's a big challenge for teachers and teaching assistants and they are doing an amazing job!

To ensure that students and staff are still able to connect and build positive relationships, special time is set aside for community check-ins. The elementary schools have a morning meeting and closing circle, and the older students have advisory, where they gather in small groups (in person or online) with teachers.

*"One benefit of this hybrid model is that it promotes continuity of learning,"* explains Dr. Debbie J. Hand, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction. *"If a building needs to close temporarily due to the virus, if it becomes*

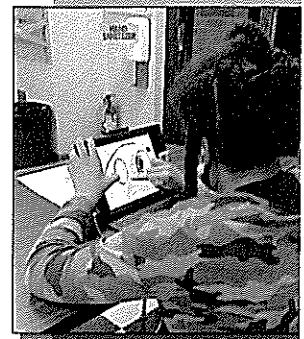
*necessary to shift to all-remote learning, or when the time comes that we are able to return to regular in-person instruction, it will be a smooth transition."*

This is only made possible through preparation, a lot of professional development and increased use of technology.

For instance, 60 of our teachers attended two four-day workshops hosted by Innovative Designs for Education (IDE) during the summer and during the Superintendent's Conference Days in early September, the District offered 100 hours of professional development options over two days. Teachers learned how to use new hardware and software and developed amazingly creative ideas to keep their students actively engaged in learning. These two examples are just a small sampling of the immense amount of time teachers have invested in professional growth and preparation!

Hardware and software also play an important role. Ron Velez, Director of Management and Information Systems and Rocco Varuolo, Coordinator of Instructional Technology, manage the Herculean task of ensuring we have the technological capacity to educate more than 7,000 students online. Every child in the District now has an iPad, classrooms are equipped with webcams and whiteboards, and the District worked with Altice One to provide WiFi to students who needed it. Two learning management systems are used as base platforms — Schoology and Seesaw. Teachers also use a variety of other tools that help them make lessons more interactive or assist students with studying or staying organized, including Nearpod, Padlet, Quizlet, BrainPOP and more. Students have access to online books through sites like Sora and Tales2go.

Even with a great plan, a lot of training and all this technology, there will still be challenges and frustration. But if we communicate well and support one another, we can make it a great year for our students.



*A digital art class at Highlands*

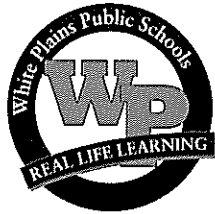
*Synchronous learning: 9th grade orchestra students practice together, some in the classroom, some at home*



Dr. Joseph L. Ricca  
Superintendent of Schools

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Rose Lovitch  
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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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Public Schools  
5 Homeside Lane  
White Plains, NY  
10605

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## National Merit Commended Students

The **2021 National Merit Scholarship Program**, conducted by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC), recognizes scholastically talented seniors across the country. This year about 34,000 Commended Students are being recognized. They placed among the top scorers of more than 1.5 million students who entered the competition by taking the 2019 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NQMST).

Eleven WPHS students were named National Merit Scholarship Program Commended Students:

Joseph Cabanillas	Samantha Martinez
Margaret Goldstein	Marina Rosenthal
Violet Hamlin	Sarah Sanzebin
Michael Innocenzi	Sarah Saposh
Mateo Jacolow	Charles Wright
Marvin Martens	

National African American Recognition Program Scholar  
Jade L. Palmer-Johnson

National Hispanic Recognition Program Scholars  
Lauren A. Azrin  
Michael A. Innocenzi  
Samantha R. Martinez  
Paolo M. Medelius

## Welcome to WPHS, Principal Martinez

**Emerly A. Martinez** was appointed as the new **Principal** of White Plains High School on August 17th, selected from more than 60 candidates after a rigorous search process which included interviews with the Superintendent's Cabinet and a Principal Search Advisory Committee representing all the constituencies of the school community.



Mr. Martinez comes to White Plains from the Principalship at Cornwall Central High School in Cornwall, New York. He has also held administrative positions in the Bedford and Ossining town school districts and began his educational career teaching High School Social Studies in Ossining. He holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from Mercy College, a Master's in Education from Lehman College, a Master's in Educational Leadership from the College of St. Rose, and anticipates receiving a Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership from Manhattanville College in May of 2021.

*"I am absolutely thrilled to be here and to be part of this amazing school community,"* said Mr. Martinez. *"The students have been fantastic and I'm excited to build relationships with staff and students over coming months."*

Mr. Martinez shared that he is committed to being visible, ensuring an environment that is safe for students and staff, and providing as much support as possible during these challenging times. *"We need to be flexible and patient and okay with the imperfection of hybrid learning."*

Keep up with happenings at WPHS on Twitter: @WPTigerPride.