



Community Link

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

WINTER 2021

SCHOOLS TO REOPEN FULLY!



"We're coming back to school and I'm excited to see that," said Dr. Joseph L. Ricca, Superintendent of White Plains Schools, one year to the day from the diagnosis of the first case of COVID-19 in Westchester. He announced that schools will begin a phase-in on March 22nd to reopen fully, five days a week. In a live Community Update on March 3rd, Dr. Ricca announced the following schedule: Monday March 22nd schools will open to Kindergarten, Ninth Grade and Twelfth Grade. On Monday, April 5th First, Second, Sixth and Seventh Grade will return. On Monday, April 12th, Third, Fourth, Fifth, Eighth, Tenth and Eleventh Graders will all return, completing the phase-in. Watch Dr. Ricca's March 3rd session at youtu.be/beDXewxP77U.

Dr. Ricca thanked the Reopening Committee, the teachers, staff and all those who have been instrumental throughout the past year in preparing for this long-awaited day. It was made possible by thoughtful, collaborative goals, based on health and safety, and because of success in the areas of mitigation,

(continued on page 2)

SAIL Students Make Masks and Blankets

SAIL (Strategies for Adult Independent Living) students require a highly specialized learning environment to work toward achieving independent living skills. Typically, they build skills by participating in internships in the community, but the Covid-19 pandemic necessitated a switch to in-house vocational training. This fall, these High School students made fabric face masks for children, a process that taught them how to measure, make, cut and glue their own templates, measure and cut ear elastic, organize materials, and follow a schedule of activities. Students increased their rate of production over time and became more independent each day.

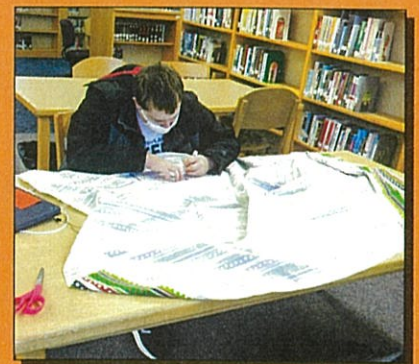
In December, students were asked by a member of the community to make blankets to donate to local homeless and animal shelters. After the initial batch was completed, Teacher Chris Nolan decided to officially expand the SAIL students' scope of work to include blanket-making. Students enjoyed this work because it required them to move around more to navigate the large material and because they work on the product from start to finish. (The masks were made in more of an assembly line.) Soon, a whole set of carefully sewn blankets will be delivered to a local animal shelter!

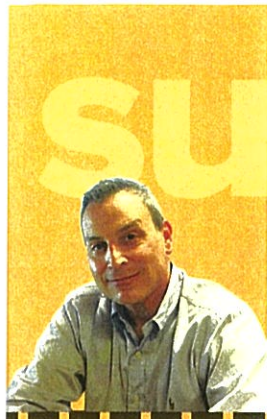
Attention Parents & Guardians

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.

STAY UP TO DATE

Visit the District's website
whiteplainspublicschools.org
and Facebook page
facebook.com/wpschools
for the latest information.





▲ Robert Janowitz



▲ Robert Spedafino

Interim Leadership at MAS

Following the retirement of Principal Eileen McGuire at Mamaroneck Avenue School, Robert Janowitz was appointed Acting Principal. He will serve from February 1st to June 30th. Mr. Janowitz has been Assistant Principal at the school for the last 14 years; he began his administrative career in White Plains in 2004, as Assistant Principal at Ridgeway School. He has a Bachelor of Arts Degree in Social Work from Mercy College and a Master's degree in Education, also from Mercy College. *"It may be a cliché, but it's true... if you love what you do, it never feels like work,"* said Mr. Janowitz. *"I feel so fortunate to be given this opportunity to lead Mamaroneck Avenue School as the Acting Principal. I appreciate the collaboration*

and support from my MAS community, faculty, cabinet and our Board of Education."

On February 22, Robert Spedafino was appointed Interim Assistant Principal of Mamaroneck Avenue School, replacing Mr. Janowitz. His first-hand experience within the building — as a fourth grade teacher for the past eight years — and love for MAS inspired him to apply and interview among a competitive pool of applicants.

He holds a Bachelor's degree in Psychology/General Education/Special Education from Marist College, a Master's degree in Literacy from Iona College and a Certificate in Educational Leadership from the College of St. Rose. He is pursuing his certification in Administration.



▲ Nurse Maggie

Superintendent's Update *(continued from page 1)*

such as vaccination, contact tracing and physical preparation of schools. Protocols will all remain in place and parents will have the option for their children to continue in remote learning.

Parents may contact their children's principals or teachers for further information and Dr. Ricca said the District will work with everyone on their specific questions and needs. Schools will continue to provide updates.

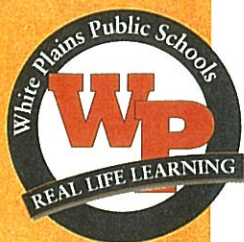
Schools have been working throughout this past year to continue to provide a rigorous academic experience and support the social/emotional needs of every student. We have worked collaboratively with our professional associations to support vaccination of all of our staff.

More good news. We are able to offer off-season training for student athletes and are excited that our mid-winter and spring athletic seasons are proceeding. Year-end celebrations will look different. We are planning to host outdoor High School graduation and the Highlands moving-up ceremony in person, taking into consideration requirements for health and safety. Details are forthcoming!

We must give a shoutout to our amazing Nurse Coordinator Maggie Racioppo, a part of our leadership team from the beginning, who has contributed tremendously to our ability for in-person learning. She has helped coordinate health and safety efforts within the District, with the community and with the County Health Department. She and the Health Services team have been instrumental in contact tracing to prevent the spread of illness within our facilities.

And, of course, we must thank our parents and guardians who have been so understanding and flexible and a valued source of feedback and constructive criticism, all of which is needed to manage our approach to this immense and complicated undertaking.

Dr. Ricca expresses his gratitude to everyone.



Color Monsters Teach Coping Skills

An innovative program at Church Street School is helping students develop social/emotional coping skills that will serve them for the rest of their lives. Based on the book *The Color Monster* by Anna Llenas, this initiative uses “color zones” to help children identify and express how they are feeling. Then they learn strategies – like breathing techniques – to move from one zone to another. They also learn how to identify the same feelings in people around them so they can be better, more empathetic friends.

Each week during morning announcements, Principal Myra Castillo explores one Color Zone, feelings associated with it, what causes those feelings and body clues to identify them. For instance, if you are relaxed or calm, you are in the green zone and may be smiling and have relaxed shoulders. If you are sad, bored or lonely, you are in the blue zone. At the end of each week, students share their thoughts, with photos and drawings. For example, when students read a book, they discuss the characters’ feelings and strategies that could help them cope with their circumstances.



School Psychologist Greta Luka is working closely with one third grade class to develop a toolbox of coping strategies. Those students serve as ambassadors, teaching skills to the rest of the school through videos. Ms. Luka has been very impressed with how the students are already beginning to use the coping strategies at home and in school. *"It's not about reacting perfectly every time; it's a matter of understanding and trying our best to do our best."*

School leadership anticipated greater need for social/emotional support this year due to the pandemic and began to hear from parents at the start of the school year that children were struggling more than usual. *"The goal is to have a common language to articulate how we are feeling and to have strategies that help us develop coping skills,"* said Principal Castillo.

SROs: a Valued Part of School Community

Our Board of Education and District leadership consistently seek to explore how well we are serving students and learn where there may be opportunities for improvement. To that end, we recently surveyed residents about the District's School Resource Officer (SRO) Program.

As expected, the feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Nearly 80% of respondents said it's important or extremely important to have an SRO assigned to our District and more than 70% believe that their presence in our schools creates a safer environment and protects students, teachers and staff. The majority of respondents also agreed that SROs help students with personal problems and to avoid potential problems before they occur.

"We have an amazing relationship with the

White Plains Police and Department of Public Safety and are lucky to have two wonderful SROs in our schools," said Dr. Ricca. *"They are part of the fabric of our educational community, a resource for our kids, and help create a positive connection with law enforcement. It is a critical collaboration and we are pleased that this survey showed that the program, and the officers themselves, are valued and are very positive influences."*

In the words of one survey respondent: *"I cannot speak more highly of our SROs! They foster a trusting relationship with students and the police force, connect with the community and are amazing in every sense of the word."*

For more information about the School Resource Officer Program, please reach out to Dr. Ricca.

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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Go Tigers!

We're thrilled to have more athletes back in the gym, and on the courts and fields. Boys' and Girls' Winter Track, Boys' and Girls' Bowling and Boys' Swimming and Diving started in January. In February, "high risk" sports – Boys' and Girls' Basketball, Ice Hockey and Cheerleading - began. Participants will get regular Covid tests. Wrestling is proceeding only as a strength and conditioning program.



Keep up with happenings
at WPHS on Twitter:
[@WPTigerPride](https://twitter.com/WPTigerPride).

Students Lead the Way in WPHS Clubs

White Plains High School has nearly 70 clubs and groups that bring students together to celebrate different races and cultures; educate, empower and advocate; practice and enjoy hobbies and languages; and more. Overseen by Administrator for Student Activities Natasha Freeman-Mack, these co-curricular activities engage and inspire not only club members, but the school and broader community.

The Black Awareness Club, advised by Monique Adams, has been hosted weekly virtual Black History Month events. Sessions, which were totally student-led and generated a great deal of engagement and conversation, included Black Women in STEM, Knowing Your Rights, Black Contributions to Popular Culture, Performative Activism, and Black Members of the LGBTQ+ Community.

The Key Club, advised by Linda Woodward, is a community service organization that provides opportunities for students to develop initiative, leadership skills and experience working together. Recently, members decided to spread some gratitude. They distributed goodie bags with a note of thanks to every teacher/staff member in the building! Throughout the year, this group organizes toy drives, volunteers at a local hospital and much more.

SEED (Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity), advised by Wendy Dale, has been hosting student-facilitated conversations about critical topics, like the recent events at the Capitol and issues related to vaccine access for immigrants.



▲ Special "thank you" delivery from Key Club member Ashanty Ventura