



# 2023

## Happy New Year

### Happy New Year Blazers!

When I think of the New Year, I always think of the typical “new year, new me” type of resolutions that so many of us make - those attempts at a firm or committed effort to do or not do something for the next 12 months and beyond (although let’s be honest, sometimes we struggle to even get through February!).

As we move into 2023, I would like to offer a new meaning to the term “resolution.” This one from the field of photography, where resolution describes the difference between a blurry, indiscernible image or a crisp, focused picture. This time around, I propose we use this time of reflection to create a clear image of the best version of ourselves and adjust our focus to make that a reality. Instead of simply making promises that we may or may not be able to sustain, let’s adjust our resolution to create a clear image of all we hope to achieve in 2023!

Wishing you and yours all the best in this new year!

Caroline Hernandez Pidala  
Interim Superintendent of Schools

## School delay, closure decisions begin early

Though parents and students receive notification of a snow delay or cancellation being called before the first bus leaves the garage, the process begins much earlier in the day.

When a storm is forecast or underway, Interim Superintendent Caroline Hernandez Pidala is on a call at 4:15 a.m. with all 13 school district superintendents in Dutchess County. Together, they speak with weather experts from Fogbank, a specialized weather service, to help determine whether roads are safe to traverse in order to open schools. But, even before the call, district personnel are on the job.

“We’ve already had people out on the roads and staff on campuses before 4:15 a.m. to determine how icy they are and what the campuses look like,” Hernandez Pidala said. “The goal is to make the call before the first bus run.”

The challenge for Millbrook is that the district covers a large geographic area and includes multiple municipalities.

“Road conditions are just one element we face. We deal with multiple municipalities, some of which are struggling with staffing issues,” Hernandez Pidala said, explaining that while main roads may be clear and ready for safe travel, all of the local and back roads also need to be plowed and sanded in order to safely transport our students. “There’s a lot of different road terrains in the area and all must be passable.”

### Making notifications

Parents are alerted to snow delays and closures through Blackboard Connect calls, texts and/or emails and the information is also posted on the district website. If you have unsubscribed from any Blackboard Connect calls at any time in the past, you may actually have blocked all calls, so Hernandez Pidala recommends checking your settings and enabling the calls so you can stay informed about schedule changes. If you have any questions or concerns, you can reach out to [helpdesk@millbrookcsd.org](mailto:helpdesk@millbrookcsd.org)



## Master Teacher program recognizes two Millbrook educators

Two Millbrook teachers were recently included in a list of Master Teachers from the State University of New York – one who is new to the program and the other an emeritus.

The Master Teacher Program is a professional network of more than 1,400 public school Science, Technology, Education and Math (STEM) grade school teachers throughout the state who share a passion for their own STEM learning and collaborating with colleagues to inspire the next generation of STEM leaders.

### Leslie Anson, Millbrook MS



Millbrook Middle School Math Teacher Leslie Anson answers student Evan D'Ascoli's math questions.

Anson, a math teacher and previous finalist in the 2020 Presidential Awards for Excellence in Mathematics and Science Teaching, was accepted into the program in late December, after applying in late June. The process

included an individual and group interview and a content presentation on a STEM topic that she didn't already teach to her students. She chose to focus on the engineering behind sneakers.

“I like to run, so that’s what brought me to that,” Anson said. “It (being selected) was a six month process.”

When she was in the group interview, Anson heard many fantastic ideas that other educators have worked on and is excited to learn from her fellow math teachers so she can incorporate those ideas into her curriculum. Additionally, she and other teachers in the program will work together on professional development plans.

“I’m definitely looking forward to being involved with other people who want to learn and grow as much as I do,” Anson said. “Ideally you want to learn it, but you want to be able to use it in a classroom setting.”

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## Master Teacher program recognizes Millbrook educators *cont'd from page 1...*

### Colette Alonge-Watz, Millbrook HS



Millbrook High School Chemistry Teacher Colette Alonge-Watz shows her students how to do a fingerprint project.

Alonge-Watz, a chemistry teacher, recently finished her time in the program after starting in 2017. While she is sad that it has ended after working with and learning from fellow chemistry teachers in other districts, she can continue going to professional development programs as an emeritus. “That’s a positive,” Alonge-Watz said. “I adored the time I was working with colleagues...working with them through COVID was a blessing.”

While she was in the program, Alonge-Watz learned new pedagogical methods such as cross-curricular content knowledge in engineering and physics, as well as argument-driven inquiry, the latter of which she has applied to her lessons. “When you’re excited about something, it’s really exciting to bring it back to your classroom and try it,” she said. “I thought it would be a wonderful resource.”

When Anson was applying to the program she had reached out to Alonge-Watz with questions. Alonge-Watz is thrilled to see another Millbrook teacher join the program. “She’s an excellent teacher,” Alonge-Watz said. “I think it will benefit her as much as it did me.”

Teachers selected for the initial four-year program receive an annual \$15,000 stipend, engage in peer mentoring, professional development, and work with pre-service and early career teachers to foster a supportive environment for the next generation of STEM teachers.

## PATHWAYS TO CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

### Students learn about human rights at FDR site

The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is as important today as it was in 1948 when it was first adopted. That’s why about 167 students from six Dutchess County school districts – including 16 from Millbrook CSD – spent a half-day diving into the declaration and learning how they can carry it forward through their actions.

Dutchess BOCES Center for Educational Equity and Social Justice’s “Pathways to Civic Engagement: Small Places Close to Home,” brought students and chaperones to the Henry A. Wallace Center at the FDR Presidential Library and Home on December 6 for the event – a fitting location since Eleanor Roosevelt chaired the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights drafting committee.

The title of the event came from a quote from Roosevelt which began: “Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home – so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world.”

“We wanted students to see what they had in common to build bridges across the county and give them time to think about civic action they can take,” Jenny Schinella, former director of Dutchess BOCES Educational Resources, said. “This is a trial and we wanted to see how it works. The districts were excited.”



Millbrook junior, Alexa Fish, called the event, “A great opportunity to learn about the topics and a chance to meet and talk to other students.” Fish liked that instead of just having one period to discuss the subject, they had more time to go into detail.

Jeff Urbin, education specialist at the Wallace Center, kicked the day off explaining that the declaration’s 30 articles cover the basic rights everyone

should have. The list includes being born free and equal in dignity and rights, the right to a fair trial, to worship as you want, to be free from slavery, to be free from torture, cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment.

“Human rights are being challenged every day right in our own communities. It’s not old, it’s not foreign. It’s here and it’s now,” he said.

#### How does this change?

“It happens with kindness, with us working together. You’ve got the power,” Urbin said, sending the students into a rotation of three breakout sessions on these topics:

- 100 Cups of Coffee, Transformative Dialogue Project presented by the Dutchess County Commission on Human Rights. This group took selected articles from the declaration and discussed them.
- Bystander Intervention, a virtual presentation from Right to Be, addressed the topic of harassment and how bystanders can make a difference.
- Living Links: Standing up to Antisemitism and Hate, presented by 3GNY – a group of grandchildren of Holocaust survivors. This session was designed to build empathetic connections to the events and lessons from the past and help students come up with effective “Acts of Honor” they can perform

to honor the legacy of Holocaust survivors by standing up to antisemitism and hate.

After just the first session, students were already sensing an impact.

Junior Adrian Ashong said his initial takeaway was “how important it (the Universal Declaration of Human Rights) is and how it affects other people in their daily lives and how much the Roosevelt family put into it.”

Ashong was one of the students in the 100 Cups of Coffee session to present information from his group discussion about Article 7 of the declaration which states that all people are equal under the law. The group was asked to discuss how this applies today.



“It is the foundation of the modern human race and how we are today,” he said, adding that while it still applies today, it isn’t consistent. “Everybody knows the rules, but they don’t respect them.”



# DUTCHESS BOCES STUDENT OF DISTINCTION

Congratulations are in order to Millbrook senior Andrew Popovic, who studies in Dutchess BOCES' Work Based Learning program and was honored as the organization's Student of Distinction during Millbrook Central School District's monthly Board of Education meeting December 20.

The award enables BOCES principals to highlight their students in component districts.

BOCES special education teacher James Baker nominated Popovic for the award. At the board meeting, BOCES' Maureen Gallagher, coordinator of special programs, spoke about Popovic's work ethic, kindness and approach to learning. He has interned at many worksites including the produce and candy departments at Adams Fairacre Farms, Price Chopper and Vassar College's cafeteria.

"He is a very quick learner, very detail-oriented and very conscientious;

these skills have served him well," Gallagher

said. "His attitude makes Andy one of the most requested students in our program."

Popovic briefly described some of his responsibilities at Adams.

"In Poughkeepsie, I did go faster at the produce section," Popovic said. "I did the stocking."

Gallagher, Baker and the board gave Popovic a huge round of applause for his efforts, with BOE President Perry Hartswick calling Popovic's achievement phenomenal.

"Congratulations, you did a wonderful job," Hartswick said. Work Based Learning Program facilitator Jeanette Straebler described Popovic as a kind and considerate young man.

"He has come a long way in the WBL Program and has really matured into a very good worker," Straebler said. "Andy is a very hardworking student."



Millbrook BOE President Perry Hartswick listens to December's Student of Distinction Andrew Popovic and Dutchess BOCES' Coordinator of Special Programs Maureen Gallagher.



(From left to right) Andrew Popovic's parents Frank and Marcela, with their son and his teacher James Baker.



Retired New York State Police Investigator and Cyber Crime Specialist Thomas Roidl spoke to Millbrook students of all ages about internet safety during three separate assemblies at Alden Place, Millbrook Middle School and Millbrook High School December 13.

In order to solve cybercrimes, Roidl had to become a U.S. Marshal as these types of crimes can span many states and countries. In this role, he conducted forensic analysis of electronic devices, including computers and cell phones.



Former NYPD Police Investigator Thomas Roidl presents about internet safety to Alden Place students.

"I had to be able to cross state lines to get the bad guys," Roidl explained. "The internet has no borders."

When using the internet, Roidl encouraged students to consider whether information they come across

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## Millbrook HS/MS programs promote mental and financial well-being

Throughout the past couple of months Millbrook Middle and High Schools hosted a series of talks focused on social-emotional learning for students.



### Ending the Silence on Mental Health

The National Alliance on Mental Illness (NAMI) hosted a presentation called "Ending the Silence" on December 1 which helps students learn about the warning signs of mental health conditions and what steps they should take if they or someone they know is showing symptoms.

Millbrook High School senior Lorraine Affigne has been supportive of bringing these types of resources to the district and brought it to the attention of Samantha Holsborg, Supervisor of Student Services, who arranged to have NAMI representatives visit.

"I have always been a true advocate for mental health," Affigne said.

"I just truly want Millbrook to have the proper resources and things put into place so that students feel supported and cared for."

After meeting with Affigne, Holsborg was connected with NAMI Mid-Hudson Program Director Jo Ann Brown. Holsborg later attended a NAMI presentation at Beacon High School which sealed the deal in bringing NAMI to Millbrook.

"After seeing its success, we welcomed NAMI to present to our 8<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade students," Holsborg said.



### Hang Up and Drive

MHS students learned about the dangers of distracted driving during a grant-funded assembly on December 9.

Jacy Good and Steve Johnson, advocates for phone-free roads, sent an inquiry to MHS Principal Eric Seipp

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# MCSD students learn the importance of internet safety

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is fact or opinion and who's on the other side of the computer, as there are many cases of artificial intelligence and people hiding their identity.

"A characteristic of the internet is that you can be temporarily anonymous," he said.

Roidl advised students to never respond to a cyberbully, but instead to save the evidence and report it to an adult or the police if it becomes threatening. Students should be mindful of what they post on social media, as billions of people could possibly see it worldwide and that might bring negative consequences.



Thomas Roidl takes a question from an Alden Place student during his presentation on internet safety.

"If you wouldn't say it in person, why say it online," Roidl said. "If something feels wrong, say something."

Privacy is vital, as most new computers and phones have a camera and online advertisers target social media users anytime they react to a post.

Additionally, Amazon's Alexa device stores information every time a user asks it to complete a task.

"You're using Google, at home or in the classroom, it stores information, even if nothing is intentionally transmitted," Roidl said. "Once we give away one permission, it often brings with it others."

At Alden, students asked Roidl thoughtful questions about cybercrime and his life as a police investigator.

Fifth grader Evie Gonzalez found the talk helpful. "It helped me understand a lot more," Gonzalez said.

Fifth grader Evelyn Licis was both shocked and amazed to learn about how many electronics have listening tools installed in them. She feels the talk will help her navigate the internet better.

"It's kind of scary, but also kind of cool," Licis said. "I enjoyed it."

# Millbrook HS/MS programs promote mental and financial well-being

about presenting the program and Seipp welcomed the opportunity.

Good was in a car accident in 2008, caused by a distracted driver, that left her partially paralyzed and claimed the lives of her parents. Since then, she has worked tirelessly to educate the country about the dangers of cell phone use while behind the wheel.

"The hope is to end the epidemic that shatters thousands of American lives every year," Holsborg said. "As a participant myself, the presentation was emotional and impactful."

## Money Smart Kids

A presentation teaching students about ways to earn money, save it and the importance of careful spending was held on November 22



by Mid-Hudson Valley Federal Credit Union Financial Education Specialist, Melissa Colon.

After Holsborg attended a "Working Together for Youth Success" retreat, she worked with Colon to schedule the session to explain life's financial journey to students. In addition to the financial basics, students also learned about using savings accounts to reach financial goals, how to manage spending money on "wants" and earning interest.

"Students learned how to chart their savings to reach financial goals," Holsborg explained. "The presentation built on the importance of smart money decisions."

# Kirsch ready to assist MCSD with its goals



With a love of technology and a background in education, Evan Kirsch is ready for his new role as Millbrook's Supervisor for Digital Fluency and Data Privacy.

The role is similar to that of a director of technology where Kirsch will oversee technology districtwide, as well as handle computer inventory, budgeting and cybersecurity initiatives.

"It has a lot of different tentacles," Kirsch said. "Anything you do at the district level trickles down."

For now Kirsch's main priority is to work with Superintendent Caroline Hernandez Pidala and other administrators to help them carry out the district's vision and plans regarding education and technology.

"You have to acclimate to the environment and see where the district is going in its strategic planning," Kirsch explained. "I'm here to help."

Prior to Millbrook, Kirsch was an assistant principal at Highland High School where he worked with data and was the coordinator for both college and Advanced Placement, among other duties. He has always been interested in working with different software and technology, as well as district office work where he can look for ways to make school systems better for students.

"It is a different way of challenging yourself," he said. "It broadens your understanding of how schools function."

Millbrook's reputation of being forward thinking and always seeking innovation is what drew Kirsch to the district. He looks forward to learning from a team of like-minded people.

"It has a strong office administration core that looks down the road," Kirsch said. "The district has a really good culture of people wanting to be here."

Kirsch has three master's degrees in Sports Management, in Educational Leadership and in Physical Education and Sports Pedagogy. He expects to complete his master's in Curriculum Development and Instructional Technology from the University at Albany this summer.

Kirsch is married and loves to spend time walking his black German shepherd in the woods and playing golf when he is not working.

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