



Hello Millbrook families!

Congratulations to the Class of 2022 on your graduation and to all our students who persevered. I am proud of you and wish all of you and your families a summer filled with sun and fun! See you in September!

Laura, Your Proud Superintendent of Schools

Themes Emerge from Strategic Plan Work

Four big themes have emerged from Millbrook Central School District's strategic plan work in the early stages:

- **Academics - innovative academic experiences and student voice and choice**
- **Communications - pathways to make it more effective**
- **Structure and schedules - rethinking the traditional school day**
- **Interpersonal relationships - how students and staff interact with each other and themselves**

The project launched in the fall with the help of a national K-12 consulting firm Education Elements (EE). It started with a video on the district's website asking the community to share their thoughts on, "What vision do you have for Millbrook Central School District's future?" Responses were collected from Dec. 10 through Jan. 27. Focus groups were also held with students at each school.

Armed with this information, Gabrielle Hewitt, a consultant with EE, is working with two teams of district personnel, a project team and a steering committee, each with representatives from across the district (administrators, teachers, counselors, board members, district leadership, psychologist and union presidents). In addition to the focus groups, students will also be involved as an advisory group.

The steering committee is developing a mission for the plan that will speak to why it exists and be a North Star to help guide efforts, a vision that explains where the district wants to go, and values statements that speak to what the district believes and what makes it different, Hewitt said.

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Celebrating our Graduates

Millbrook HS Celebrates Class of 2022



Seventy two of Millbrook High School's finest were the stars of the show when they graduated on June 24 during the annual commencement ceremony held at the Athletic Complex.

The Class of 2022, in its colorful caps and gowns, represent a diverse mix of talents, interests and abilities, hard-earned during four challenging but unique years. Keeping with tradition, 39 seniors graduated with advanced diplomas and 50 students received \$80,000 worth of scholarships this year.

Keynote speaker MHS English teacher Frank Fiorenza, who is retiring this year, told the graduates that the content of their character is much more important in life than any failure or accomplishment.

"Who you are goes deeper than your grades, your college, your career," Fiorenza said.

Referencing a quote from the movie "Shogun," Fiorenza encouraged the students to follow the mantra of obtaining joy from desiring for something, rather than having it.

"The wanting and trying give life meaning," Fiorenza said. "The joy is the journey, please make it meaningful."

The graduates will travel different routes with some worrying about making the wrong choice but Salutatorian Molly McMorris encouraged her fellow classmates to follow their curiosity just like Albert Einstein and Sally Ride did. "You all have the potential to do profound things," McMorris said. "Within each of you, is a spark of curiosity that is waiting to ignite."

Valedictorian David Sager compared his four years in high school to a bin of Legos that were jumbled at first with nothing built, but became assembled by senior year.



they want to be in life because like the colorful bricks, every student has their own characteristics and qualities to offer.

"Whether it's kindness, a voice of reason, or even a little touch of crazy," Sager said. "If there is one thing I have learned this past year, it's that every group needs a little bit of crazy to spice things up."



Themes Emerge from Strategic Plan Work

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ANATOMY of a STRATEGIC PLAN



Meanwhile, the project team is focused on the logistics of how to accomplish the goals.

The strategic project team is finalizing the mission, vision and values. The next step will be to build out the pillars that the district will focus on in the next three to five years, Hewitt said. Each area will have its own objectives and goals, built based on stakeholder feedback, she explained.

“People are really excited about the future and the feedback we got is exciting,” Superintendent Laura Mitchell said. “It’s nice to be rowing in the same direction.”

The plan will help create more cohesion in the district. “We’re looking forward to setting the course as a community,” Mitchell said, adding that work will resume in September once everyone returns to school and the community.

She envisions once the mission, vision and values are set that, “Everybody will be able to state the mission and vision and recite the values - it is a good morale boost for us.”

Another item being considered by the committee is branding.

Hewitt described this as an opportunity to use visuals to tell Millbrook’s story and communicate what makes it unique.

Progress on the plan will be communicated to the public via the Blazer Bulletin and the district’s website.

MMS 8th Graders Move on to Next Chapter

Millbrook Middle School’s 76 eighth graders got a feel for their new school when they were celebrated during a graduation ceremony on June 23 at the high school auditorium.

Family, friends and school staff applauded as the students graced the stage to accept their certificates. The audience was treated to a live rendition of “Pomp & Circumstance” by the Millbrook Combined Band during the processional.

Dylan Vasquez, who was named the eighth grade outstanding student, dedicated the student address to his fellow classmates who work hard and prove that a piece of paper only does not determine what an outstanding student is.

“I look around and see every single one of you as an outstanding student,” Vasquez said. “What we need to do is continue working as hard as we can to be as great as we can.”

Eighth grade science teacher Dawn



Harkenrider, who’s retiring this year, gave students worthwhile advice such as being kind, learning from mistakes and not sweating the small stuff – the latter advice being repeated throughout her speech.

“Develop an internal moral and emotional GPS that can tell you which way to go,” Harkenrider said. “Friends and family are

there to inspire and guide you, but ultimately you make the final decision.”

Ben Conklin is happy for the next step into high

school because he will have more freedom to make decisions. He will miss his friends who are attending Our Lady of Lourdes in the fall.

“I hope we don’t fade away too much,” Conklin said. “I had a lot of good memories in middle school.”

What Makenna Freeswick will most miss about being at MMS is the great teachers she had including Jeffrey Barnes, who focuses on technology. In high school, she looks forward to making new friends and seeing her career take off.

“I made a lot of good connections with all the teachers,” Freeswick said. “I’m happy, but also emotional about it.”

District Concentrates on Social-Emotional Needs

Millbrook, like many districts nationwide, has seen an increase in incidents that involve social-emotional issues. In fact, at the May 17, 2022, Board of Education meeting, a [presentation on Social Emotional Learning](#) showed national numbers indicating increases in feelings of sadness, considering suicide and attempted suicide among youth. In addition, less than 47% of students nationally reported feeling connected to school during the pandemic.

Superintendent Laura Mitchell launched the Climate and Culture Committee to help ensure all students and staff feel safe and welcome. The first meeting had 18 people in attendance with representation from teachers, administrators, parents/guardians, a board member, the Parent Teacher Organization, Millbrook Education Foundation and a student. In addition, surveys were sent out to families and staff June 17.

Students in grades 3-8 were given time during school to fill it out and copies will be emailed to high school students.

These surveys are optional, confidential, and anonymous. Results will be analyzed and used to inform our climate and culture work and will be shared with the community.

But the committee is just one element of a multipronged approach.

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PTO Discount Card Sales Help Schools

Give money to save money and help your schools, that’s the idea behind the Millbrook Parent Teacher Organization’s Ultimate Discount Card fundraiser. **For just \$15, you can save throughout the year at 28 local and regional businesses.** And, the discount is good as many times as you like! So, get a free dessert at McDonald’s with the purchase of a value meal or save \$10 off every \$100 purchase at Adams (once a day), or get \$5 off lunch at La Puerta Azul or 10% off at Millbrook Diner.

Scan the QR code on the accompanying image or visit <https://instaraise.com/millbrookpto/ultimatecard>

The Millbrook PTO is a nonprofit organization that works to enhance the experience of Millbrook students. In addition to the Ultimate Discount Card, you can help support the group’s efforts by purchasing [Millbrook Blazers apparel](#) and/or by [becoming a member](#).



Alden ES 5th Graders Promoted to Middle School



Fifth graders at Alden Elementary School are now ready for middle school following a moving up ceremony held in their honor on June 22.

Fifth graders had a stellar year of in school experiences that included robotics, a school musical, book fairs, open house, concerts and a basketball tournament – events that could not be held during COVID.

“This group learned to be resilient during these past few years,” Alden Principal Thomas Libka said. “Their technology skills are amazing and their energy will be missed.”

Libka and the administration wished the future Class of 2029 well as they travel up the hill to the middle school.

Kevin Agbenui is looking forward to sixth grade. “It’s exciting for me because I really want to go somewhere new,” Agbenui said. He is most excited about being in the school’s chorus and band, as well as playing baseball and joining the robotics club.



Looking back on his time at Alden, field and movie days were his favorites and he said he will miss Libka and his teachers.

Lidia Duncan will miss many things about being at Alden such as movie day, taking field trips to the Millbrook Library in the

village and her teachers. “I’ll miss that it’s a small school where you don’t get lost,” Duncan said.

Duncan will be part of the middle school’s chorus and band and is considering joining a club. She is also looking forward to a wider variety of courses.

“You get a more free range of things to do,” Duncan explained. “It feels exciting and nerve-wracking at the same time.”



Pandemic Impacts District Construction Projects



Construction projects in Millbrook Central School District are delayed as the district faces challenges due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

This year, MCSD planned projects to construct secure vestibules at Millbrook High School and Elm Drive Elementary School.

“Both projects initially came in over budget,” Elliot Garcia, assistant superintendent for instructional

technology and facilities, said. The decision was made to split the high school project into two phases: one for the 2021-22 school year and the other scheduled for the 2022-23 school year. Elm Drive’s project was put on hold and will be reconsidered as part of a larger capital project plan in the near future, he said.

Workers completed much of the MHS project over winter break, but some components are pending because the contractor is still awaiting the remaining materials. Once those materials are received, the first phase will be scheduled for completion.

The district is working with the project architects to get the second phase started and substantially completed this summer, Garcia said. Planning multi-year projects is difficult during these times. “Vendors have been less likely to commit to prices months or sometimes even weeks into the future. This is forcing us to project for higher escalation costs than we would typically or have in the recent past,” he said. “In very simple terms, it means this economy is putting us into a position to plan to pay more for less.”

MCSD retained a new architectural and engineering firm to perform a comprehensive assessment of district facilities which will help inform district priorities for the next phases of capital construction. Those priorities will be determined based on age, condition and expected life cycle of district buildings and systems and the programmatic needs of the district, Garcia said. “We tentatively plan to bring a capital construction plan to the community during the 2022-23 school year,” he said.

Social-Emotional Needs continued...

Assemblies Help Educate

In May, representatives of Grace Smith House gave an assembly at Millbrook High School providing helpful information to help combat bullying.

Grace Smith House’s Prevention and Education Team have long-standing relationships with Dutchess County middle and high schools. In 2021, the organization educated 2,800 middle and high school students.

School administration is looking to support all students with social emotional learning issues and they reached out to a number of organizations to see if they would be willing to come and provide students and staff with useful information.

Grace Smith Director of Outreach and Support Services Kim Dangerfield presented information about the organization’s 24-hour hotline, counseling services and support groups. She identified the characteristics and

discussed impacts bullying and cyberbullying has on children.

Principal Eric Seipp and the entire high school staff participated in the assembly and plan to apply lessons they learned during it into the everyday procedures such as daily check-ins and monitoring how students are feeling throughout the day.

“We have heard from students and families about the need to provide these educational opportunities,” Seipp said. “We are always supporting our students during these challenging times.”

Another presentation from the Council on Addiction Prevention and Education (CAPE) recently addressed the issues of drug use and vaping.

The district proposes to add a CAPE counselor who will be in the district every day and an administrator with a focus on social-emotional learning and exploring the use of the Olweus Bullying Prevention Program.

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TALK soon

