

# BRENTWOOD BULLETIN

PUBLISHED BY THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

FALL/WINTER 2023

## WANDA ORTIZ-RIVERA Named Interim Superintendent

As of Sept. 30, Superintendent Richard Loeschner has retired, with Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education and Bilingual Education Wanda Ortiz-Rivera being named interim superintendent for the remainder of the 2023-24 school year.

Mr. Loeschner led the Brentwood Union Free School District since 2017, overseeing significant changes in capital improvement funding and the district's position within Long Island's education sector. Prior to becoming superintendent, he served as the principal of South Middle School and Brentwood High School, and was named New York State's Principal of the Year in 2016. His journey with the district began in 2000 when

he led the math department at the high school. With over 38 years in education, including 24 dedicated to the Brentwood Union Free School District, he retires with a wealth of experience and accomplishments.

"It has been an honor to be part of this district and community for so long. I will miss our students!" Mr. Loeschner said.

A bilingual administrator who was born and raised in Puerto Rico, Ms. Ortiz-Rivera is deeply passionate about providing access to education and supporting systems for all students to succeed. At the age of 16 and not initially speaking English, she traveled to New York State to enroll at Dowling College to pursue higher education. There, she obtained

a Bachelor of Arts in natural science and math with a minor in Spanish literature in 1991. After that, she earned a Master of Business Administration in 1992 and a Master of Education in bilingual/bicultural education from Columbia University Teachers College in 2004.

Ms. Ortiz-Rivera has served the Brentwood Union Free School District for more than two decades, beginning as a dual-language teacher at Southwest Elementary School in 2001. She has served in several positions in the district along with working with the Office of Funded Programs in the development of competitive grants for the students of the district. Additionally, she has been responsible for the overall administration and evaluation of the Bilingual/ENL Education programs, which have become model programs for the state.

Ms. Ortiz-Rivera is an active member of the ASCD (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development), Curriculum Council, Long Island Latino Teachers Association, New York State Association for Bilingual Education (NYSABE), New York State Education Department English Language Learners Leadership Council and New York State Education Department



World Language Council, among other organizations. She has been recognized for her advocacy and contributions to the field of education and community service. Some of the recognitions have been granted by the Brentwood Board of Education, Columbia University Teachers College, the Fundacion Ortega-Maranon y Gasset, NYSABE and the Town of Islip.

Ms. Ortiz-Rivera firmly believes that the diversity within the Brentwood School District is its strength, a unique "superpower" possessed by its students. Her vision is clear: to celebrate and nurture this uniqueness while continuing to provide the highest-quality education to all students.

"The Brentwood community is not just a place to work; it is my family," Ms. Ortiz-Rivera said of her role. "My students are the medicine to my soul."



The 2023-24 Board of Education with outgoing Superintendent Loeschner. (top, far right)

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# Creating Skills for Life With Auto Shop



Around 5,000 students attend Brentwood High School's Sonderling and Ross campuses for classes that help them learn vital skills to further the pursuit of their careers following graduation. Some students prefer the arts; others, the sciences; and still others pursue electives in education or home-based skills such as cooking. In a far corner of the Ross Center, however, over 20 students per class period sit at high-top tables and try their hand at fixing automobiles that have been loaned to them by teachers at the high school.

"You can go to work," instructor Joseph Lorefice noted, "and bring your car to the auto shop and leave with an oil change or a brake repair."

In some cases, students learn the difference between metal gaskets and silicone housing. Through parts comparison processes, the class can turn into an exercise on the proper ways to replace a water pump and how much coolant to add to ensure that the car can run at its best.

"We do live practice work," added Bret Illingworth, the main instructor in the automotive program at the high school. "We also have a fleet of shop cars to be able to give the students as much real-world experience as we possibly can."

The auto shop itself has undergone modernization. Thanks to capital improvements, the facility has chrome countertops and updated tool housing along with years of historical artifacts, such as racing flags, that hang over the large computer screen in the front of the classroom.

"There's a lot more storage for our tools," stated senior Brian Guevara, who has taken automotive classes since he was a sophomore. "The old classroom was rusted and breaking down, so this was a major improvement."

Guevara's love for the auto shop was instilled in him thanks to his brother, who went through Brentwood High School and also took classes in the auto shop. Fellow student Aaron Agosto has

taken automotive classes at Brentwood since he was a sophomore and credits his family as well for the interest in automobiles.

"My grandmother always used to bring me to car shows and muscle car clubs," Agosto recalled. "It just spiked my love for cars. My brother took these classes and told me about them, and I've loved them ever since."

The auto shop at Brentwood High School runs in partnership with Suffolk County Community College, with students earning collegiate credits in classes that focus on maintenance and light repair. This allows the students to apply for a one-year certificate program or an associate degree to be able to work in their own auto repair stores. Students in the program can also travel on special field trips to training facilities in the tri-state area to help further their knowledge and love for automotive maintenance. This includes trips to Lincoln Technical Institute's main campus in Connecticut along with stops in New Jersey at the Universal Technical Institute.

"Not all of our kids are going to four-year colleges," Illingworth explained. "We introduce them to some technical options after high school. They can go for further technical training to become more career-ready, and we try to get them certified" on newer equipment.

With nine-period days at the high school and the two semesters of schooling offered, almost 1,500 students can find themselves in the auto shop each year. Guevara and Agosto both noted that despite the large number of students that take part in the classes, instructors such as Illingworth and Lorefice make taking the classes easy and fun.

"Overall, the classes are great," Guevara said. "The teachers understand and take it slow for those of us who are still learning the material."

"The teachers connect with us," Agosto said. "We're all a team here and we all love what we're doing."



West Middle School students journey to their next class with a three-minute break between periods.



Sixth grade students take part in the newly offered digital literacy class at North Middle School.

# MIDDLE SCHOOL TRANSITIONS TO A NINE-PERIOD DAY

Middle school students in Brentwood have noticed a faster pace in their day, thanks to a newly enacted nine-period school schedule. All middle schools in the district still start at 8 a.m. and end around 2:30 p.m., but the day now includes more learning opportunities for the students who walk the halls.

“Our students feel as though the day goes quicker because they are going to more classes,” North Middle School teacher Heather Knudsen said. “They feel that they can still learn their lessons and appreciate the extra period for support in math and ELA (English Language Arts).”

With the new schedule, students have 40 minutes for classes and three minutes to get from classroom to classroom for their next period. Across the district, sixth grade students can now take a digital literacy elective, seventh graders have language options such as Spanish or French, and eighth grade students are being taught business and financial literacy. Additionally, students at all middle schools are offered a lab period for further instruction in certain subjects.

“I like taking the electives,” North Middle School seventh grader Daniela Vides Calderon said. “I can have a double period in the subjects in which I need the most help, such as

mathematics and English.”

“The eighth grade has never had a business class before,” South Middle School Assistant Principal Kathleen Barber said. “Now, they are learning about budgeting in the course. We also have representatives from TD Bank that come to classes and teach the students about balancing checkbooks and being financially literate.”

“Holistically,” South Middle School Principal Barry Mohammed said, “adding a ninth period also means adding another period of lunch. We’re making sure that students are supervised properly and have enough offerings throughout the nine-period day as well as additional services and support if needed.” Mohammed also stated that sixth grade teachers can now reach upwards of 130 students due to departmentalizing staff to teach specific subjects.

Each school day starts with a 10-minute advisory period that can be used for teachers and staff to build a better relationship with their students. This 10-minute period can be used in a variety of ways; each school offers the option for restorative justice circles along with morning announcements. West Middle School, in addition, has added a Quote of the Week initiative as well as a celebration of holidays.

“We also have Mindful Mondays,” West

Middle School Principal Felicia Thomas-Williams said. “This is a great way for students to transition their brains from weekend mode back to focusing on learning when they’re in school. Our students in the district are resilient and they’ve learned to roll with everything.”

The changes have been well received as students and staff alike note the positive outcomes that are being featured thanks to the new initiative. The sixth grade digital literacy class is one avenue where students are noticing changes that they can bring home to their families.

“We can help our parents learn about the dangers of the internet,” North Middle School sixth grader Elizabeth Contreras said. Touting the lessons of the class, fellow student Andrea Menjivar noted that grandparents “don’t understand the dangers either. They think someone is trying to help them” when they themselves can fall victim to a scammer.

“It’s a great opportunity for us to be on an even playing field with other districts,” South Middle School Assistant Principal Kathleen Hudzik said. “The students have more chance to take classes that they are interested in and that will give them more opportunities for the future.”



The studio, one of the new offerings at South Middle School, where morning announcements are produced during the 10-minute advisory period at the start of the day.



Mr. Gengler, Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education speaks with students regarding the nine-period day.



# BOYS VARSITY SOCCER TEAM: Five Straight State Championships

In the beginning of the school year, athletic programs aspire to be the best program in their league or conference. From there, the programs may aspire to bigger and better goals: best in the county, best in the region, best in the state, best in the nation.

The Brentwood boys varsity soccer team accomplished all of that and more, adding another title to their resume for the 2023 season: Undefeated.

The squad triumphed on Nov. 12 with a 2-1 victory over Baldwinville in the inaugural New York State Class AAA Championship. The title is Brentwood's fifth New York State championship in boys varsity soccer and came on the heels of a perfect

22-0 season that started back in August with a 5-1 victory over North Babylon.

"From the start of the season," senior captain Chris Arriaza stated, "we knew that we could accomplish this because we have a great team and great coaches."

Brentwood continued its torrid stretch of play in the fall by shutting out six consecutive opponents from Sept. 5 through Sept. 22. The team's dominance peaked in October with blowout victories against Central Islip (7-1) and Longwood (8-0) before the team dominated Northport in an 8-2 victory in the Suffolk County Class AAA quarterfinals on Oct. 27. Wins over Commack and Ward Melville



cemented the team's status as the best in Suffolk County, while a win over Nassau Class AAA champion East Meadow on Nov. 5 earned the squad the Long Island Class AAA championship.

All that was left to accomplish was to win two more games at Middletown High School in the New York State tournament. Additionally, the squad rose through the national rankings to place inside the top 20 by the time their state semifinal match-up with Arlington came around. The early-season dominance turned into late-season grit, as Brentwood came up with a 2-1 win in double overtime to advance to the championship game.

"Once we beat Arlington in double overtime," Arriaza said, "it felt like we had already won the state championship. Going into the next game, we were all tired, but we just knew that we had to give everything we had."

Following the team's victory in the championship game, the dream had been realized and the celebration could begin. The team journeyed home to Brentwood and got back to a raucous party as community members and fellow classmates came to Sonderling Center to show their love and support for their undefeated champions.

"It was a movie scene," Arriaza said. "Coming home and seeing all the fire engines and ambulances escort us to Sonderling and seeing how many fans came down in the cold night for us, it was a dream come true."

The dream had come true for Brentwood, indeed. The final national poll from United Soccer Coaches ranks Brentwood as the fourth-ranked team in the United States and the top-rated team in all of New York State. For the players and coaches, the 2023 fall season will always be one to remember.



# Honoring Hispanic Heritage Month

Elementary schools in the district engaged students and their families with myriad celebrations to recognize Hispanic Heritage Month. The monthlong recognition of Hispanic culture took place from Sept. 15 through Oct. 15 and featured performances from outside groups as well as internal student-run organizations.



Laurel Park Elementary School welcomed the Sol y Sombra Dance Company on Oct. 11 to provide an educational assembly to the students centered around different dances of Hispanic culture. The performance was interactive, inviting the students to join along in the steps of flamenco, tango and other forms of dance.



On Oct. 17, several schools hosted Hispanic Heritage Celebrations to welcome the community and enjoy different aspects of the arts of Latin American cultures through dance, song and other means of entertainment. Oak Park Elementary School hosted another assembly of Hispanic heritage through dance, including a special Zumba class led by the students.



At Hemlock Park Elementary School, students and their families were invited to walk the hallways to see different forms of artwork from students regarding Hispanic heritage. Everyone was then invited into the cafeteria to try a variety of meals from different Latin American countries along with meeting a community member dressed as the great Mexican artist Frida Kahlo.



Twin Pines Elementary School hosted a unique assembly combining games and the arts. In the gymnasium, community members watched students perform on percussion instruments or take part in dance celebrations. Several students put on a show of ventriloquism during the performance, as well. After the assembly, families retreated to the cafeteria to take part in different arts and crafts activities or to play a friendly game of dominoes.



One of the larger capital improvement projects was the creation of a brand-new turf soccer field next to the Anthony F. Felicio Administration Building. Upon completion, the complex will feature lights and a community track in addition to a state-of-the-art surface for varsity soccer matches.



New additions to the science labs in both Sonderling and Ross centers included triangular desk spaces to allow for more room to work on projects.



A new floor was placed in the gymnasium of Ross Center to coincide with renovations done in Sonderling.



New cabinetry and asbestos abatement were both part of the undertaking at North Middle School.



The newly redesigned Stan Kellner Court in the gymnasium at Sonderling Center where the Brentwood High School volleyball and basketball teams play their home games.



Pictured, Pine Park Elementary School was one of several schools in the district to have its gymnasium floor completely redone. In addition, North Middle School's gymnasium floor received a new sealant and waxing over the summer, and Oak Park and Southwest elementary schools also received new gymnasium floors in the capital improvement funding.

# CAPITAL IMPROVEMENTS COMPLETED

Capital improvement projects ensure that facilities are modernized or revamped to better serve the constituents of a community and/or school district. Over the course of the summer, the district undertook significant capital improvement projects to revitalize parts of the district's school buildings and grounds to make them safer and more welcoming for all members of the community. Some of these capital improvements were larger undertakings than others; however, the goal of the projects is simple: make our Brentwood schools the best district possible for the residents of the Brentwood community as well as the staff and students who work in and attend the schools in the district.



The music rooms at Brentwood High School were cleaned and renovated with new flooring.



New signage has been placed at the renamed Brentwood High School – Freshman Campus (formerly Freshman Center).



The newly renovated classroom for cooking and other skills classes at North Middle School.



Progress in the parking lot at Loretta Park Elementary School over the summer.