



# Superintendent's Bulletin

January 2024 - Volume 12 - Issue 5

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Dear RCSD Community,

On January 9, Midland School played host to a special visitor: New York Deputy Secretary for Education Maria Fernandez. Ms. Fernandez visited Midland to learn about the District's Grades K-2 literacy program on the recommendation of State Senator Shelley Mayer, who is Chairperson of the New York State Senate Education Committee. Senator Mayer had visited Midland in early November to learn about the District's reading program and was so impressed by what she saw that she reached out to Ms. Fernandez to recommend she come visit, too. After her visit, Ms. Fernandez told us that she felt like very high quality reading instruction was taking place in our schools.



"Why the RCSD?" you might ask. The District's phonics-based elementary reading program has attracted the State's notice because it has been so effective, and administrators from the State are interested in learning from our process to see if parts of it could be replicated at other schools. Governor Kathy Hochul discussed childhood literacy recently in her State of the State address, so it's clearly a focus at the highest levels in New York State.

When these visitors come to tour the school, administrators have taken them around to a variety of Kindergarten, first, and second grade classrooms so they can see real live lessons from our comprehensive literacy program which focuses on instilling skills in phonemic awareness, phonics, fluency, vocabulary, and comprehension. They see a variety of types of reading instruction taking place from our K-2 units of study. These new reading and writing units have a strong focus on phonics and phonological awareness. Our visitors have seen whole group lessons, small group lessons, and students working with partners. They've also seen students reading independently with decodable books -- books that help students practice phonics skills -- we've added a lot of decodable books to our classrooms in all of our elementary schools.

After the classroom visits, we spent some time with our visitors talking about how our reading instruction has evolved and how it has resulted in dramatic improvements in our individualized reading assessments, and in our test scores. We told them about our own robust assessment system, including the Heggerty Phonological Awareness Assessment, which helps us track our students' reading progress in real time. We have also talked with them about the many benefits of our 4-year partnership with Haskins Lab at Yale University. Haskins is one of the premier research facilities in the science of reading and a leader in research involving language-based learning disabilities. They provide both our general education and special education teachers with critical professional learning.

In early April, New York State Education Department Commissioner of Education Betty Rosa and New York State Regent Fran Wills will be visiting

Midland School together. We look forward to welcoming them and showing off our instructional chops! I am so pleased to say that we are being called upon by educational experts and other school districts because we are leading the way with high-quality reading instruction. I'm really proud of the work that our teachers have done and that our kids are doing every day in the classroom.

Sincerely,



Eric Byrne, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools



Above: New York Deputy Secretary for Education Maria Fernandez

Left: State Senator Shelley Mayer

## YMCA Safe Driving and Walking Poster Contest

Congratulations to the three winners of the YMCA's 13th annual "Heads Up! A Safe Driving and Walking Poster Contest." This year was a 9th grade sweep: in first place was Rye High School 9th grader **Maggie Schmidt**, in second was 9th grader **Alienna Malkani**, and in third was 9th grader **Liam Storz**. Fifty-six students from Rye High School Art teacher Nichole Chifriller's Digital Photography classes submitted poster designs to graphically represent the dangers of distracted walking and driving. The students themselves narrowed the field to 15 semi-finalists, and the Rye Y convened a panel of community judges to select the winning posters.

The three winners received gift cards from the Rye Y. In addition, Maggie Schmidt's winning poster was featured in the January 12 issue of the *Rye Record*. The posters are currently on display outside the teen center at the Rye Free Reading Room. The contest is generously sponsored by Joe Lamberti of the Rye Brook Service Center.



Maggie Schmidt



Alienna Malkani



Liam Storz

Safe Driving and Walking Poster winners (L to R): 9th graders **Maggie Schmidt**, **Alienna Malkani**, and **Liam Storz**

# Capital Bond Construction Update

At the January 23 Board of Education meeting, the Board of Education got an update on the next steps in the capital bond construction projects. We are now in Phase III of construction, with just one more Phase (Phase IIIA) to go. As with previous construction, much of the work takes place over school breaks, particularly the summer break.

Phase III began in December 2023 and is anticipated to wrap up in time for the start of school in September 2024. It includes several important projects, all at the High School/Middle School:

- The renovation of the shared **HS/MS media center** (library) and the construction of the High School iLab. While the bulk of the work to this space will take place over the summer, we will begin transferring books onto mobile carts over the February break so they can be easily taken out of the media center while construction is underway from April onwards to be ready in September 2024
- The **High School Innovation Lab** (iLab) classroom space is directly across the hall from the existing HS/MS media center. It will serve as the temporary storage base for the media center's books, and then construction on this space will be under construction beginning in April 2024 and will be ready in September 2024
- The **Performing Arts Center** (PAC) is in almost continual use, so work on this space must wait until summertime. The work on the PAC will take place over two summers. In 2024, the space will have walls and ceiling painted, lighting replaced, and the curtains will be removed and blinds installed. Some leveling of the auditorium stairs will also take place

Phase IIIA is due to last from December 2024 to September 2025:

- At the **HS/MS**, we will be finishing the renovations to the **PAC**, including removing the old auditorium seating, regrading and epoxying the floor, and installing new seating
- At the **High School**, we will be completing the **Art, Design & Engineering Center**. As part of that work, we will be renovating the school's **art classrooms** to ensure they are code-compliant
- We will decommission the **Midland School** and **Osborn School** portable trailer classrooms and replace them with connected building additions. We are anticipating that these new wings will be ready for use in September 2025

As always, when we touch any space, we will be bringing the interior up to New York State code. In addition, in spaces where we have access to ventilation systems, we will be adding A/C if it's not already present.

## Commendations

- The **RMS Ryebotics team** qualified for the First Lego League regionals. They travel to Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, NY, on February 10 to compete in the tournament
- The **RHS varsity cheerleading team** took second place at the Section One Cheer Competition in Harrison on January 27
- 6 RHS varsity football team members were named All State:
  - 1st team **A.J. Miller** (12) and **Charlie Saurack** (12)
  - 2d team **Chris Iuliano** (11) and **Jake Kessner** (11)
  - 3d team **Jason Gonzalez** (12)
  - 6th team **Jack Acciavatti** (12)
  - Honorable Mention to **Andrew Wilmarth** (11) and **Koen Terlouw** (12)
- LoHud readers voted Rye **varsity girls soccer team's** 2-0 Section 1 final win over Albertus Magnus (en route to a state title) as @lohudsports the best moment of 2023
- The **RHS boys varsity swimming team** took first place (tying with Yonkers) in the Section 1 League 3 Championship meet on January 27



# Commendations (cont'd)

- Four members of the **RHS boys track sprint medley relay team** have qualified for nationals: seniors **Joseph Chai, Akachukwu Udeagha, William Squarek, and Jake Zion**
- Two members of the **RHS girls track team** have qualified for nationals: senior **Mali White** and freshman **Jillian DeSanto**
- Senior **Paulina Tepan** received the 2023 Rye Youth Human Rights award from the Rye City Human Rights Commission for her work with the RHS Be The Change Club
- RHS senior heavyweight wrestler **Tommy Anderson** was named the Lions Club Athlete of the Month for December
- Longtime RHS varsity football volunteer team manager **Luke Walsh** received the Judge John Carey Merit Award at the City Council meeting on January 10



*L to R: **Paulina Tepan** with fellow Rye Human Rights Award winners Sue Wexler and Clara Reis*



***Luke Walsh** shows off his award*

## Looking Ahead



### **Tuesday, February 6**

Board of Education Meeting - Budget Presentation  
7:30 p.m.  
RMS Multipurpose Room

### **Saturday, February 10**

Lunar New Year

### **Monday, February 12**

Parent Workshop on Stress  
7:00-8:00 p.m.  
RHS PAC

### **Tuesday, February 13**

Board of Education Meeting - Open Topics Forum  
7:30 p.m.  
RMS Multipurpose Room

### **Monday, February 19 President's Day**

RCSD schools and offices closed

### **Tuesday, February 20-Friday, February 23 Winter Recess**

RCSD schools closed  
RCSD offices open from 8:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.