

SPRING 2024



# LEYDEN

HIGH SCHOOL DISTRICT 212



Inspirational Eagles named at Leyden High School District

# Superintendent's Corner



Dr. Nick Polyak  
Superintendent

When the calendar turned to 2024, all I could think about was that after many years of planning, Leyden's 100th anniversary is almost upon us! We will be celebrating this special milestone throughout the 2024-25 school year and couldn't be more excited about the events and activities the steering committee of alumni and staff have come up with including:

**October 4, 2024**  
**Community Concert**  
**(Rosemont Dome, Parkway Bank Sports Complex, free)**

Sponsored by Green Associates

Featuring Jonathan Cain, songwriter and keyboardist of the band Journey and Tommy "Mugs" Cain. Consider this event the ultimate reunion tour! Not only will the Cain brothers and their family perform a free concert for our community, but a Leyden staff band, featuring East Leyden Principal Dominic Manola and other current and former staff members will open the show. You don't want to miss this!

**October 5, 2024**  
**Homecoming Football Game**  
**(West Leyden Stadium)**

Consider this weekend the ultimate reunion! In addition to all of our other athletic events that weekend, the Eagles will take on Morton in the football game and there are sure to be a few surprises at the field that evening. Reunion groups can request building tours at East or West via the online form on our website and there will be special alumni activities at the stadium, weather-permitting.

**February 8, 2025**  
**Anniversary Gala**  
**(Donald E. Stephens Convention Center, \$100/ticket)**

Sponsored by Sloan Valve

A formal dinner, dancing, silent and live auctions with all proceeds benefiting the Leyden Education Foundation, this is sure to be a special evening with friends. All proceeds will help support scholarships for current and future Leyden students.

To purchase Gala tickets, scan the QR Code:



**May 17, 2025**  
**Family Picnic**  
**(East Leyden grounds, free)**

Sponsored by SPM Architects

Calling all current and future Eagles and families! Plan on a casual daytime event featuring a cookout and plenty of family friendly activities. We will work with our elementary partner districts to mark the end of the 100th Anniversary by welcoming in the newest Leyden Eagles.

This yearlong celebration also features an original Leyden video documentary, a traveling artifact exhibit, and numerous themed student performances and concerts. The best way to connect with us about all of the festivities coming up this next year is to visit our dedicated web page ([www.leyden212.org/anniversary](http://www.leyden212.org/anniversary)) or facebook page, and subscribe to our email notification list.

This upcoming year really is the year of Leyden Pride, and gives our entire community, from students, parents, staff, alumni and all residents the opportunity to join together to celebrate the connection between us all!

With Leyden Pride,  
Nick Polyak

Leyden's  
NATIONAL  
AWARD-WINNING **One**  
**Amazing Story**  
series continues!

Each month, Leyden shares one of its many amazing stories on its YouTube channel, featuring students, staff and alumni.

To watch the latest One Amazing Story videos, scan the QR Code:



To access this newsletter electronically as text-only for easy translation, please scan the QR Code. Share with someone you know who speaks a language other than English or Spanish.



# District announces **new** assistant superintendents

## **Dr. Brian Mahoney,** human resources

Leyden's Board of Education announced the transition of Dr. Brian Mahoney from assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction to assistant superintendent of human resources. Mahoney has been with Leyden since 2020, and has also served as the assistant superintendent of student services.



Mahoney will begin his new role on July 1. He fills the vacancy left by Dr. Tatiana Bonuma, who has been with Leyden since 2007, and has accepted a superintendent's position with Maine Township High School District 207.

"Brian is a proven leader and has built amazing relationships here at Leyden," said Superintendent Dr. Nick Polyak. "I am excited to see him take on this new challenge and to continue the great work that has been done by Tatiana."

## **Dr. Dominic Manola,** curriculum and instruction

Leyden's Board of Education announces the transition of Dr. Dominic Manola from East Leyden principal to assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, effective July 1. Manola has 10 years of service at Leyden, including roles as principal, activities director, social studies teacher, and director of community outreach. He also worked at Lake Park High School as principal, assistant principal and director of student activities.



"People often ask what I love about Leyden, and my answer always remains the same; Leyden is an incredible place," said Manola. "Our students, our staff, and our families are amazing! Leyden is foundational to who I am as an educator and leader, and I am beyond grateful for this opportunity to give back to our community in this new role."

# Leyden **music** department earns national recognition

Leyden's special concert event at the Chicago Symphony Orchestra Hall this past June earned the music department a 2023 Advocacy in Action National Community Involvement Award. This prestigious award honors achievements in music education and is presented by Music for All. Partner schools Hester, Lincoln, Rhodes and Rosemont, were also included in the summer concert event and in this special recognition.

"I am particularly pleased that the project earning our third National Best Community Engagement Project Award, "A Night at Orchestra Hall," involved not only all of our Leyden Band, Choir, and Orchestra students, but also includes and celebrates our Partner School music students and the dedicated music teachers from Hester, Lincoln, Rhodes, and Rosemont Schools," said Leyden Band Director and Music Department Chair Bryan Miller. "When envisioning this project, a major goal was to help inspire and reinvigorate our Partner School music students in a way their families could actively share in. The resulting support from all of our community music families was overwhelming!"

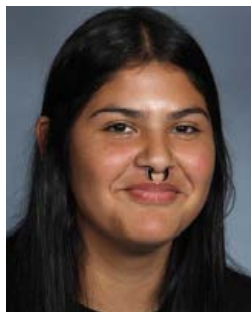
As a recognized school, Leyden will be featured on Music for All's Advocacy in Action Archive, where our events and ideas will be available for music educators to emulate around the country.



# Chicago-O'Hare Rotary and Leyden name **Inspirational Eagles**

On March 5, the Chicago-O'Hare Rotary, in partnership with Leyden High School District 212, honored twelve students in its ninth annual Inspirational Eagle Awards. The purpose of these awards are to expand what is "typically" acknowledged in terms of academics, and instead to honor students for accomplishments in improving or maintaining academic excellence, attendance, behavior and overall citizenship. Congratulations Inspirational Eagles!

## EAST STUDENTS:



**Jocelyn Delgado**

Nominated by:  
Emilie Reynolds

Jocelyn credits Leyden with helping her stay in school and not drop out when things got tough in her life. She has been through a lot since

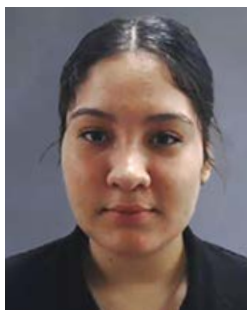
her freshman year here at Leyden and started out as a student who didn't really take her education seriously. When her mom got sick, things drastically changed in Jocelyn's life and she just kept trying to make it all work through the challenges. She wants to prove that students who go through problems at home still have a high chance of success if they try, learn to accept help, and stay motivated.

Jocelyn would like to recognize Ms. Luna for her mental and physical support and also credits Mrs. Renolds, Mrs. Gagliardi, Mrs. Black-Foltin, Mrs. Majchrowicz as impactful on her journey

## Nicoll Cano Gomez

Nominated by:  
Diana Bonilla

Nicoll has been in the U.S. just a little more than one year, having arrived in Texas as an unaccompanied minor in the fall of 2022. It was very difficult for her at first, being away from her family who remained in Nicaragua, while also spending one and half months trying to make her way to Chicago by proving she had



relatives in the area - All while being alone and not knowing English! She shares that during that time, she wanted to give up and go home, but found the strength to persevere.

Nicoll carries herself with a great comfort of who she is and is relentlessly pursuing her dream to graduate Leyden and build a career in biological engineering and is grateful for this country and Leyden's role in helping her make that happen. She would like to recognize Ms. Bonilla for nominating her and is still very surprised but grateful that she still believes in her.



**Owen Kelly**

Nominated by:  
Michael Matticks

Owen is a stellar athlete who experienced incredible success and devastating hardship during his time on the Leyden swimming team. A dedicated

swimmer for 12 years, he worked his way up on the team, was kicked off for making "bad" choices, and is working his way back up through hard work, focus and dedication. He is eating right, training, and is now team captain and is close to a school record. For him, swimming is a strong motivator for discipline, keeping him focused on his school work and making better choices in his life. Owen proves it's never too late to start again.

Owen would like to recognize Coach Cook, who saw his potential, believed in him, and helped him through so much that it's only possible to call him family. And, he wouldn't be eligible for this award without Mr. Matticks. He's been taking gambles and showing Owen his true potential this year rather than fading into the pack. He feels he owes part of this award to him.

## Jared Rios

Nominated by:  
Ilija Sisarica

Jared came to the U.S. in 2018 from Lima, Peru, for what his parents remind him of, a better life. Language has been one of his biggest challenges and while he is a good academic student, he struggled in his general education courses to use and practice his



newly acquired English language skills. He is a positive person, and encourages others to try their best - especially his peers who are also learning the language. He has learned to not compare himself to others, and reminds his fellow multilingual learners to do the same.

He calls Leyden his second home, and is grateful for all of the teachers, resources and care he has found along the way. Jared wants to recognize all of his teachers, and would like to specifically thank Ms. Bonilla for helping him be less shy and more participative in class, and credits her for the person he has grown to be.

## Yareliz Rodriguez

Nominated by:  
Denise Carrasco-Volk

Yareliz had the misfortune of losing someone close to her almost every year of high school. Things would start to get better, and then she would lose someone else. She didn't have a strong support system at home, and found herself lashing out.

Last semester was Yareliz's best academic one yet and she's enrolled in the Nail Program through Leyden. She leaves school early each day to complete the program and is studying for the exam. She plans to enroll at Triton to get an associates degree in business, and then her real estate license. Yareliz would like to recognize Denise Carrasco-Volk who has supported her through her challenging moments.



**Anthony Villalobos**

Nominated by:  
David Gonzales

Anthony works hard and puts all of his energy and effort into his goals - but it wasn't always that way. He found himself struggling with anxiety,

stress, overthinking, and a general negative mindset, especially in middle school. Anthony turned things around for himself by learning to focus on the task at hand and his larger goals of getting good grades and being a caring person. He has found motivation in his success, which helps propel him forward, and his academics have improved over time.

Anthony has his sights set on continuing to maintain his high academic standards while earning his associates degree next year, so that he can get into a good college after. He would like to recognize Coach Brad Henning for teaching him the value of hard work, and also shares that Coaches Stark and Cartwright have been impactful on his journey.

## WEST STUDENTS:



**Kareem Abdellatif**

Nominated by: Ms. Teagan Lyke, Victoria Valentine, Sabrina Treccani

For Kareem, routine is very important, and so he was sad and worried when some of his favorite staff left

Leyden. Since that time, he has been learning to manage by taking breaks when he needs them, talking to his teacher when he needs help, and visiting the sensory room when he feels overwhelmed. He starts every day as a new day, and with a positive attitude to continue working on his independence.

He was nominated by his teachers because he sets a positive example for his peers everyday, shows growth and determination, and has blossomed over his three years at Leyden. He knows he has made a great deal of progress since 8th grade and is grateful for his teachers here at Leyden. He would like to thank Ms. Lyke, Ms. Valentine and Ms. Treccani.

**Jeremy Keathley**

Nominated by: Nicole Peters and Javi Vasquez

Jeremy lives with a disability that challenges his ability to move and communicate and creates complications in

everyday life. He has grown up missing a lot of school due to hospital visits and surgeries, but he prides himself on his strong willingness to keep moving forward. Jeremy credits the staff at Leyden, who are committed and determined to help him succeed in his goals. To him, Leyden has been more than just a school - it's a place of growth and transformation. The staff here go above and beyond to make sure Jeremy has access to the same opportunities as everyone else.



Jeremy speaks of a time that Ms. Peters secured a strap holder to his walker so that he could carry his own books and personal belongings. At first, Jeremy was skeptical about his abilities to transport his things, but Ms. Peters remained patient. Even though he admits to being a little stubborn at first, Jeremy found the confidence to face his limits and push past them.



**Danielle Legaspi**

Nominated by: Angela Waddell

Danielle is a first-generation immigrant daughter from the Philippines. Financial struggles and learning how to live in a new country were

challenges that tested and built her resilience and determination. While her parents worked, she took care of her younger sister, gaining maturity and independence.

Danielle plans to study the medical field, focusing on pediatrics, and become a licensed medical professional. She wants to make a tangible difference in the lives of those in need, using her skills and knowledge to provide compassionate care and support. She would like to recognize Ms. Waddell, for her unwavering support, guidance, and encouragement throughout challenges, and her help in achieving her goals.

**Eddy Martinez**

Nominated by: Angela Waddell

Eddy was born in the U.S. but moved back to Mexico with his parents at a young age. He had always dreamed of studying here so when the opportunity arose,

he jumped at the chance. He left his family and friends behind, moved to Northlake to live with his brother, and started his junior year at Leyden in all college prep courses. At first, he struggled with learning a new environment and language.

Through his hard work and dedication, Eddy has earned a full scholarship to Triton where he plans to study education and earn his teaching degree in Spanish and History. Eddy would like to recognize Ms. Waddell, who is his counselor but feels more like a friend. He can trust her, seeks her advice and counsel, and knows she will always be there for him.



**Hector Morataya**

Nominated by: Anne Gruettner, Angela Wadell and Anna Szymczak

When Hector was just a little less than two years old in Guatemala, his parents were killed in a tragic

accident. His grandparents stepped in to raise him and their relationship grew strong as they were the only "parents" he had ever known. When Hector was in first grade, they made the collective decision as a family, to have him come to the U.S. to live with his aunt and cousins so that he could have a better education and opportunities. This was so difficult for him, as he was sad and scared to leave his home and family.

Hector made a decision to view whatever life threw at him in the most positive light as possible, and to use it to make himself better and to make those in his life proud of him. He wants to become a math or Spanish teacher, and hopes to return to Leyden to do that. He has experienced the support and care from each of them and wants to do that for the next generation of students. Hector found it difficult to pick just one teacher to honor, and recognizes Mrs. Gruettner, because she was so easy to talk to at a time when he really needed that.

**Jailene Villalpando**

Nominated by: Anne Gruettner

Jailene is first-generation and recognizes the sacrifices her parents made to ensure a better future for her and her siblings. It's a part of her family's story she carries with her every day as a motivation to make something of herself and take advantage of every opportunity.

Jailene is a dedicated student who started challenging herself when she arrived at Leyden, taking more difficult classes than usual for her. Through this, she found confidence that she really could do complex work and find success. Jailene would like to recognize Mrs. Gruettner, who has supported her throughout her challenges, is kind and caring, creates an energy in her class (even when it was remote!), and helped her build a passion for the Spanish language and culture.



# Teacher Honored by Chicago Bears



**“I’m so grateful and I am so honored. It’s not just me, there are so many people, it’s a team effort and I just want to thank you all.”**

**Kevin Mitchell**

Left to Right: Bears Chairman George H. McCaskey, Danielle and Kevin Mitchell and former Bears defensive tackle Henry Melton.

The Chicago Bears selected Leyden Special Education Teacher/Vocational Coordinator Kevin Mitchell as this year’s Classroom Legend. Mitchell works with students aged 18-22 in the district’s transition program, which helps build independence for post-secondary real-world living.

Bears Owner/Chairman George H. McCaskey and former Bears defensive tackle Henry Melton, surprised Mitchell in his classroom and presented him with a custom football and jersey, tickets to an upcoming game and a check for \$1,000.

“Kevin Mitchell is a winner in the field of education,” shared Bears Community Engagement Strategist Emily Rooney, in the presentation of the award. “Not because he accomplishes every goal he sets for himself, but because at the end of the day, he gives his best effort. Kevin embodies what it means to work hard, try your best, and be a leader on a team.”

Mitchell is a Bears “super fan” and was nominated for this honor by his wife, Danielle Mitchell.

## Leyden District 212 Board of Education

Board of Education meetings are in the East Campus Board Room



Mr. Gregory T. Ignoffo  
President



Mrs. Gloria Murawska  
Vice President



Mr. James A. Lima  
Secretary



Mr. Joseph Trevino  
Member



Mrs. Lisa Anthony  
Member



Mrs. Sandra Boehm  
Member



Mr. Cesar Garcia  
Member



Joyslyn Maldonado  
Student Member



Adriel Carrera  
Student Member

Leyden High School District 212 is an equal opportunity institution, committed to compliance with all applicable state and federal laws prohibiting discrimination. This includes prohibiting discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, national origin, ancestry, order of protection status, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability, homelessness and marital/parental status, including pregnancy.

As required by S.B. 898, you may go to Leyden’s website to view our budget at: [www.leyden212.org](http://www.leyden212.org)

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Thank you to those who contributed photos to this edition of the newsletter.