

APRIL 2023



Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS
FOR SCSD FAMILIES



Somers High School has announced a second salutatorian for the class of 2023. Due to the discovery of a computing error, Senior Kaeleigh Picco joins Andrew Tatela as a co-salutatorian. Zoe Gutherman is the valedictorian.

"Kaeleigh is an incredible individual who displays great leadership and character in all that she does," said high school principal Mark Bayer. "She has worked hard these past four years and being recognized as salutatorian for the Class of 2023 is a testament to her dedication and commitment to excellence."

Picco's high school resume is extensive. She is an IB Diploma candidate, a science research student, a member of the Student Athletic Council, secretary of the 2023 class board, and vice president of the National Honor Society. She runs on the track and cross country teams, has been a part of Model UN, the Human Rights Club, the Current Events Club, the varsity lacrosse team, the choir and chamber choir, as well as Disney in Concert and Broadway in Concert.

"I cannot give enough credit to the incredible teachers, the Science Research Program, and the IB Diploma Program for cultivating eager, dedicated students," says Picco, "And for giving me a chance to explore a new avenue of learning and explore my own academic passions."

Congratulations, Kaeleigh!

□ Seen Around Somers □



Assemblies are for the birds (and snakes...and other creatures)! Kindergarten students were treated to an demonstration with animals of all shapes and sizes. The animal caretaker, Bill Robinson, explained what these animals need to survive, how each one meets its needs, and any adaptations that are unique to the animal.



The WizFit Challenge has begun for elementary school students. They will participate in six interactive videos led by Harlem Wizard stars Swoop and Broadway. This program helps kids enjoy fitness, learn tricks, earn prizes, and be coached by the Wizards. Don't forget the big game on May 12 - Wizards vs. Somers Teachers, 7p at SHS, benefiting the Somers Education Foundation.



They're off to see the Wizard! Nearly 100 middle school students from the chorus, band, and orchestra had a great day in New York City. After lunch at Carmine's restaurant they saw a matinee of the musical "Wicked".

Five Students Pursue Biliteracy Seal



Students pursuing the New York State Seal of Biliteracy, from left to right: Andrew Acosta, Lydia Wilke-Olsen, Zoya Khurana, Taylor Morrissey, David Bonato.

From the history of salsa dancing to the progression of the American family or the culture around food, five students at Somers High School are ready to present their research — in two languages.

Five World Language students in the Class of 2023 are in a position to become the district's first recipients of the New York State Seal of Biliteracy. The program, which is offered across the country but was first signed into law in New York in 2012, recognizes high school graduates who have attained a high level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading, and writing in one or more languages, in addition to English.

The culminating step consists of two formal presentations — one given in English and the other in a world language — in front of a panel that may include a language teacher, an administrator, and a guidance counselor.

The presentations will cover a wide variety of topics, all chosen by the students themselves.

"They have really had the opportunity to dive into something they are passionate about," World Language Department Chair Mónica Martell said.

The presentations will begin April 26.

"If you have proven your proficiency, it may open up more opportunities later in life — like when applying for a job," said senior Taylor Morrissey, who has pursued the Seal in English and Italian. "I also want to study abroad in Italy and this may help me get internships there one day."

The students are required to earn three points in English and three points in a World

Language. They have already met certain academic benchmarks based on a portfolio of their previous coursework and standardized test scores to earn one point in each language.

The presentation will account for the additional two points. They will be evaluated on a scoring rubric created at the state level. If they meet those standards, their names are submitted to the state for final approval.

“The students have been on board since the beginning,” said Melissa Golia, an Italian teacher who created the program along with Martell. “They’ve had a level of excitement to complete this.”

A key part of the presentation is a question-and-answer session with the panel.

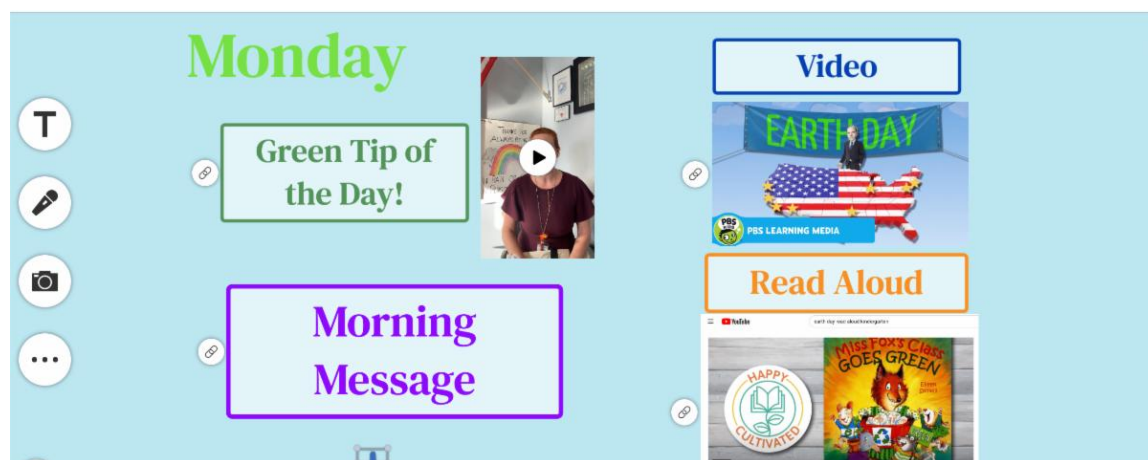
“Because we can choose the topic, it should make us a little more comfortable with that,” said Zoya Khurana, a senior pursuing her Seal in English and Spanish.

Khurana's classmates in Spanish, seniors Andrew Acosta and Lydia Wilke-Olsen, and Morrissey's Italian classmate, senior David Bonato, have also pursued the Seal of Biliteracy. Those who earn the Seal will have an actual seal affixed to their diploma and will be recognized at graduation. The achievement may have other benefits as well. Being a candidate or earning the Seal can bolster their credentials on college applications or for future employers.

The district first contemplated adding the program three years ago but those efforts were put on hold during the COVID-19 pandemic. Golia and Martell then spent the 2021-22 school year preparing to launch the program, which officially began last fall. They expect interest to grow in future years.

“This sets them apart from the rest of the students,” Martell said. “It really gives them an opportunity to showcase their excellence as scholars.”

Primrose Students Get Ready for Earth Day with Green Week



Every morning at Primrose Elementary the week before Earth Day began with a message. Actually, several of them.

Students first heard a schoolwide message on the loudspeaker about environmental protection. Then, they had lessons in the classroom highlighting Green Week. Those lessons were created by the school's Science Committee, which consists of six members: Sevahn Edwards, Ashley Eichel, Nancy Hannon, Joe Mahoney, Gina Sebastiano, and Jennifer Tetro.

Green Week focused on daily “Morning Messages,” which were grade-level specific and presented to students via the classroom app Seesaw. They were displayed on the class SMART Boards and contained a Green Tip from a Primrose guest star. There were

additional elements, including video and book resources and more.

"I think that all of us on the Science Committee are conscious of being sustainable and teaching our kids to live more sustainably," Tetro said. "It fits neatly into this timeframe of the week before Earth Day."

Earth Day was celebrated on Saturday, April 22. Thanks to Green Week, Primrose students were well prepared for the day, having learned how they could play a role in protecting the planet. They have been taught how to conserve water and paper and why it's important to store food and drink in reusable containers.

Tetro's kindergarten class tracked how much garbage they created each day at snack time and discussed possible solutions for creating less waste.

"There are even things that the young children here at Primrose can do to help," Tetro said.

From May 2-4, the school will welcome TICCIT (Trees Into Cartons, Cartons Into Trees), an educational outreach program comprising a series of assemblies for kindergarten and first-grade students and workshops for second-graders.

Each student will receive a red maple sapling to take home. Parents will receive a letter providing details about the tree variety and how it can be planted, as well as additional information on what students learned from the presentation.

"One way we can all help is by planting trees," Tetro said. "It's a great way to sustain and create a green space in our world."

9 Science Students Named GENIUS Olympiads



Nine students in the Somers Science Research program were named finalists for the International GENIUS Olympiad.

With just 726 projects accepted from 31 states and 63 countries around the world, the competition was stiff. But through countless of hours of planning and research, nine Somers High School students rose to the top.

The school's Science Research Program, led by Dr. William E. Maelia, has produced nine

finalists for this year's International GENIUS Olympiad. The event is scheduled for June 12-17 at the Rochester Institute of Technology and will host approximately 1,100 students.

"I think Maelia has done a really good job of pushing us to try our best and make sure our projects are up to standard," said junior Conner Entenberg, who is one of the program's nine finalists. "I think it also says something about the students. All the people here are really dedicated to science and willing to put in the work and effort to go that extra mile."

Entenberg also was one of just 15 students to receive a grand prize last month at the 22nd annual Regeneron Westchester Science and Engineering Fair (WESEF). Somers High School hosted the event for the first time and welcomed more than 550 students from 40 high schools in Westchester and Putnam counties.

Entenberg's honor earned him a trip to the GENIUS Olympiad, although he was also granted entry on the strength of his application, which requires the students to submit a college-level scientific research paper on the specifics of their project. Seniors Zoe Gutherman and Kiera Goff were accepted for the second straight year and were joined by newcomers Corryn Watt, Taylor Bassi, Sofia DiMella, Charles Heese, Lauren McCartin and Mary Grace Mahoney.

Gutherman, the class valedictorian, began her project two years ago amid the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. After finding a professional mentor, she learned software programs that allowed her to collect land surface temperature, population density and tree coverage percentage data and calculated trends.

It's an example of the type of ambitious research the students in the program have conducted. It has also taught them additional skills, like how to pursue professional mentors or how to present their findings in a public setting.

"I think the main thing for me was getting better at public speaking and gaining confidence within that realm," Gutherman said. "Especially with COVID, there was just less human interaction. I feel like this course and the program really helped with that sort of confidence."

Bassi, a junior, wrote her paper on biomaterials at the conclusion of an eight-week internship last summer at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Cambridge, Mass. She said the experience of finding a topic and a mentor, living away from home, working at the hospital, then summarizing her findings was invaluable.

"Getting hands on research this early on is really valuable, especially because I want to do research in college," Bassi said. "I feel prepared. We gain a lot of other skills from the competitions as well, like public speaking, and writing emails to potential mentors. These are skills that you really need to be a strong student in college that you would not necessarily get in other classes."

Middle School Maestro Publishes Album



Jason Graessle plays keyboard in his home studio.

"I've been playing the drums since I could hold my head up," said Somers Middle School seventh grader Jason Graessle.

The young artist, who plays the drums, piano, guitar, bass, and saxophone, released his debut album, "Jace," earlier this year on Apple Music, Spotify, Pandora, YouTube, and Deezer, with "more to come."

"We gave him a pair of chopsticks and he would rhythmically tap on whatever was in front of him well before his first birthday," said Christopher Graessle, Jason's dad.

Jason spent four months composing, recording, and mixing the ten rock songs on "Jace," which have piano and drums as the focal point.

"It felt magical," he said. "It's all just pouring out of your fingertips when you're doing it."

He released the album under his stage name, Jace James. Jason taught himself to play the guitar at age five and the piano at nine; he started formal drum lessons at nine. His first band experience came in the fourth grade at Somers Intermediate School, where he chose to learn the saxophone. Jason continues learning the saxophone at Somers Middle School.

Rachel Malara, Jason's band teacher, marvels at his musical abilities. "Watching Jason grow as a musician over the last few years has been a pleasure," she said. "Whether he is deejaying, drumming, composing, or playing the saxophone, his desire to create never stops. His energy is infectious."

Jason spends much of his free time in his home studio composing and refining his music.

"He tells us that the vibe has to be right to create, so he's also delved into stage lighting and has designed an advanced digitally controlled lighting and laser array in the studio," said his dad.

A career in music or the arts is highly likely for Jason. "I'm thinking there's nothing else I'd rather do," he said. High school is more than a year away, but he is already considering colleges. "I've been to the Berkeley School of Music in Boston, but another possibility is New York University because I also love the visual arts. You get to mix the two together and get the cinematics of it all."

To listen to "Jace", search on your music app, or [click here](#).

PTA Corner - Meet the BOE Candidates

Meet the BOE Candidates Forum



On May 1st Somers PTA Council will host the Somers School Board of Education Meet the Candidates Forum. The League of Women Voters of Westchester Co will moderate the event. This will be via zoom from 7:00pm to 8:30pm.

The Candidates are:

Dominick DeMartino

Thomasine Mastrantoni

Daryl Mundis

Patrick Varbero

Questions must be submitted by April 28th to somers.ptacouncil@gmail.com.

Please include your name and address to confirm that you are a Somers resident.

Questions should not be personal in nature or directed to a specific candidate. Each question will be answered by all candidates. We will not be accepting any questions or comments through the chat feature on the night of the forum.

If you are unable to attend the debate, it will be available for viewing on Channel 18 and on the district website.

Zoom Link:

https://us02web.zoom.us/webinar/register/WN_IzuVZYILRHHiHSX8u_StoaA

Click here to watch the forum on Zoom.

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Somers Central School District
250 Route 202
Somers, New York 10589
914.277.2400
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