

# Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS  
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The talented musicians at the middle school treated students and staff to holiday cheer as they arrived at school on December 16. Members of the 7th and 8th Grade Chorus, Chamber Orchestra, and the Bell Choir performed in the lobby. [Click here to listen to the seasonal sounds of the chorus.](#)

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## 'Tis the Season for Giving Back



***Students in Carolyn Grodio's third grade class display the gifts they wrapped in customized wrapping paper.***

'Tis the season for giving and third graders at Somers Intermediate School are working to brighten the holidays for many groups in our community.

The Third Grade Holiday Give Back is in full swing and classes are putting the final touches on wrapping items they have collected to donate to a local preschool, the Ronald McDonald House, Incredible Pet Rescue, and the Putnam Humane Society.

One group of third graders collected enough money to purchase books and pajamas for boys and girls in a local preschool. "Every night I can read a nice book in my pajamas and I know that there are some kids who don't have that," said student Ryan Sabanosh. "I feel happy doing this for those kids."

"I feel really good about helping someone out when they need something more than I do," said student Ann Dugmore. She and her classmates were excited to decorate the packages for the preschool kids. Emma Curry added that she thinks the kids will be happy to get a new pair of pajamas and a book.

Down the hall, another class is readying its donations to the Ronald McDonald House. "We collected food, snacks, and cleaning supplies for the families there," said Nicholas Chiappetta. Charlotte Salmon said she thinks the donations will help the families and kids there. "They are there for a while, and it's free to stay but the kids are sick, and these things might make it easier for them," she said.

The Third Grade Give Back has been a staple at SIS for several years to help the community but also as a way to reinforce to the students the importance of giving to others.

"This is all about teaching our students that there are people out there who are less fortunate who need our help," said teacher Joanne Makar, whose class is donating pajamas and a book for a local preschool. "After the holidays when we get a thank you from them, the students get to see how they positively impacted them."

Teacher Carmela Harris agreed. "This is a really tangible project for them to see where the help they are offering goes," she said.

## WIN Period a Big Win at Middle School



*Emil Klein, Albion Selimaj, and Liam Colderbanks display their final structure from the bridge building class they took during the WIN period.*

Enrichment or intervention? Sixth and seventh-grade students at Somers Middle School can opt for what they need each week during a designated WIN period and the choices are abundant. It might be bridge-building, writing challenges, open art studio, collaboration space, relaxation, library, extra help in math or science. Maybe it's just a fun session of karaoke.

WIN, an acronym for What I Need, is a new program that gives middle school students choice in how they spend a 45-minute period each day. WIN was implemented at the start of the school year with class offerings that change each week and vary by grade. The enrichment program has been embraced by students who are enjoying the freedom to choose new classes or extra help each week and by teachers who are seeing how students can take charge of their own learning opportunities.

"Students self-select what they need each week," said assistant principal Jen Mangone. "Teachers are doing a great job giving students a variety of different experiences to try. As for the intervention, extra help is based on student initiative and that is a really positive thing."

A recent session of bridge-building had sixth-grade students using popsicle sticks and brightly colored straws to create bridges. The lesson included many STEAM (science, technology, engineering, art, math) elements as students explored truss bridges, bridge spans, the usefulness of triangles in bridge design, and the need for flexibility. To see if the design was successful, students used large batteries placed on the span to see how much weight the bridge could support.

Emil Klein, Albion Selimaj, and Liam Colderbanks worked together to build a sturdy drawbridge that could sustain several batteries. They said they were happy to take the bridge-building course in WIN and the trial and error adding and removing the straws for flexibility was interesting.

Alex Donnelly said he was inspired to take the class because of another recent STEM-related offering. "I took the egg drop design class and wanted to try bridge building," he said.

## Brunch Honors Veterans at High School



*Junior Timmy Lee sits and chats with veterans from different military branches during brunch in the Somers High School Commons. Below, active military members and older veterans share stories about their time in the service.*

Smiles, handshakes, and cheerful greetings filled the Commons at Somers High School during a recent brunch organized for local veterans by the Student Council. More than 100 veterans and their family members were served by student volunteers and entertained by different musical groups and the high school dance team.

"We had a very positive reaction from the veterans and their families," says Student Council President Megan Spencer. "Lots of veterans were excited to be with people that they have a common story with. It was amazing meeting veterans who served as recently as 6 months ago and veterans who served in World War II."



"The food, company, and entertainment were exceptional," says Col. Tom Colella, U.S. Marine Corps, Retired. "Thank you for recognizing all of the vets."

The members of the Student Council notified local veterans and veterans' groups about the brunch with help from the town of Somers, and they also put a notice in the Somers Record newspaper and posted the invitation on the school district's Facebook page.

The response was outstanding and spanned all service branches. Four veterans who are in their 90s and served in World War II attended, as did two members of the National Guard who just returned from active duty in the Middle East.

The event was held after dismissal on Wednesday, December 8, which was a half-day of school for students. With the help of the school district's Food Services Department and a crash course on waiting tables, students brought guests their food, drinks, and dessert. Of the 40 volunteers who participated, many were members of the Student Council and National Honor Society. Senior Lily Carino sang the national anthem, and members of the music honor society Tri-M performed throughout the brunch. Students spent time at the tables, getting to know the visitors and hearing stories about their experiences.

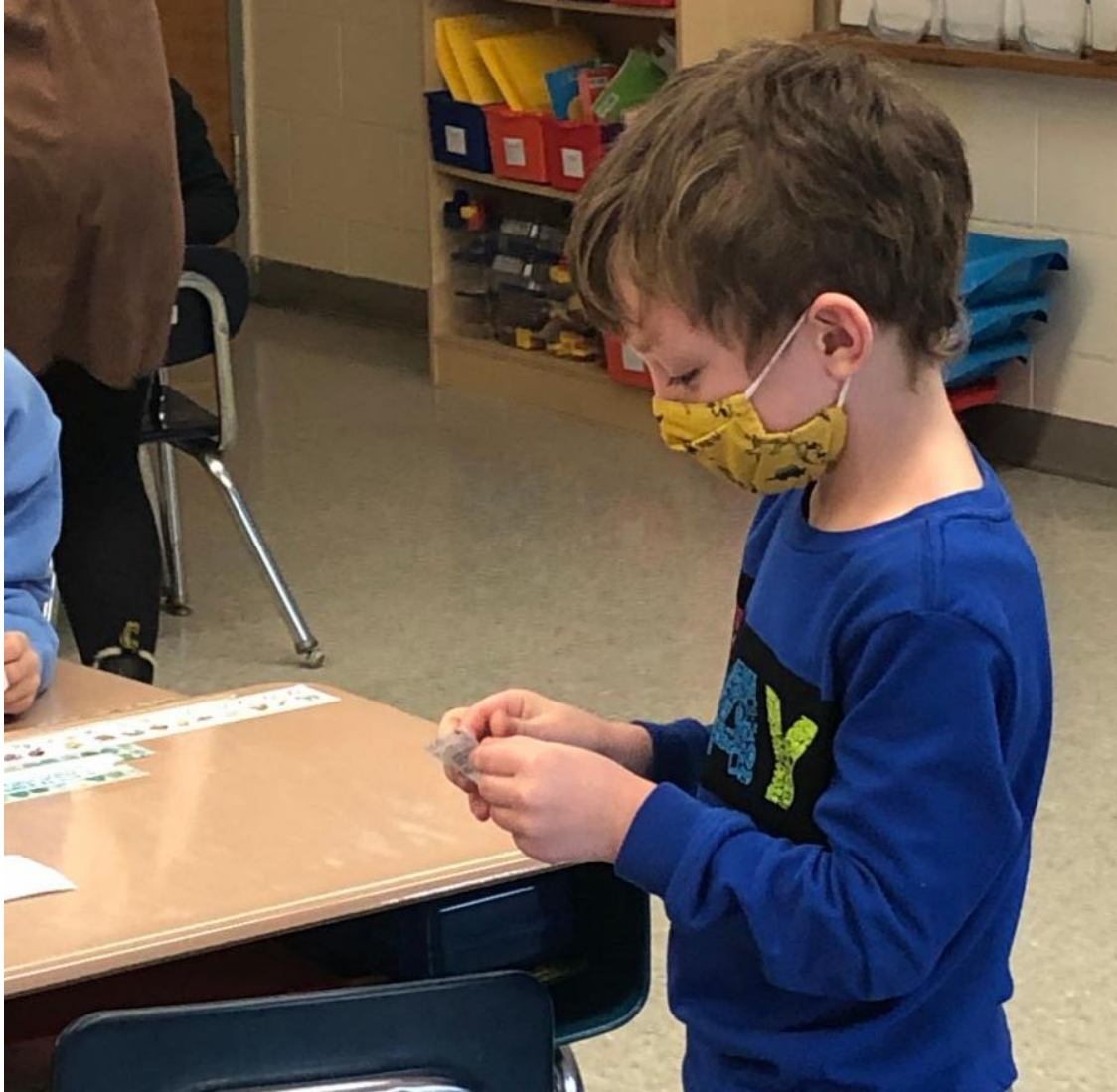
"It is very encouraging to see young men and women honoring our local veterans," says Paul Lozito, a Vietnam veteran who served in the Army Infantry. "The food, music, and dancing were great."

"Being part of a project that brought the community together is an experience that I, and many other members of the student council, will remember," says Spencer. "Students got to learn about a huge part in our history and meet some amazing people who have done so much for us. Students who volunteered got to feel a sense of community and a part of something that made a positive impact on people who have done so much for us."

The event was funded by the Student Council, which raises money at the concession stand during football games, as well as other events throughout the year. Plans are in the works for next year's event, and organizers are hoping it will become an annual tradition.

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## **Band-Aids Help with a Lesson on Fairness at Primrose**



*Camren Kramer, a student in Keri Cash's first grade class, unwraps a Band-Aid as part of a lesson on fairness during Inclusive Schools Week.*

First graders at Primrose Elementary participated in a short program for Inclusive Schools Week where they each received an injury card and a Band-Aid for treatment. No matter the “injury” – a scrape, a cut finger, a cold, a food allergy, a fever, a toothache – students were given the Band-Aid. The lesson was that ‘fair’ is not always equal.

“Do you think it’s fair to give everyone a Band-Aid for their injury?” asked teacher Keri Cash. “Is it what everyone needed?” One student pointed out that her Band-Aid was not going to help with her injury – a sore throat.

The Band-Aid lesson taught the students about fairness and explained that not all students need the same things in the classroom. Some need extra wiggle time, a pencil grip, or a different chair.

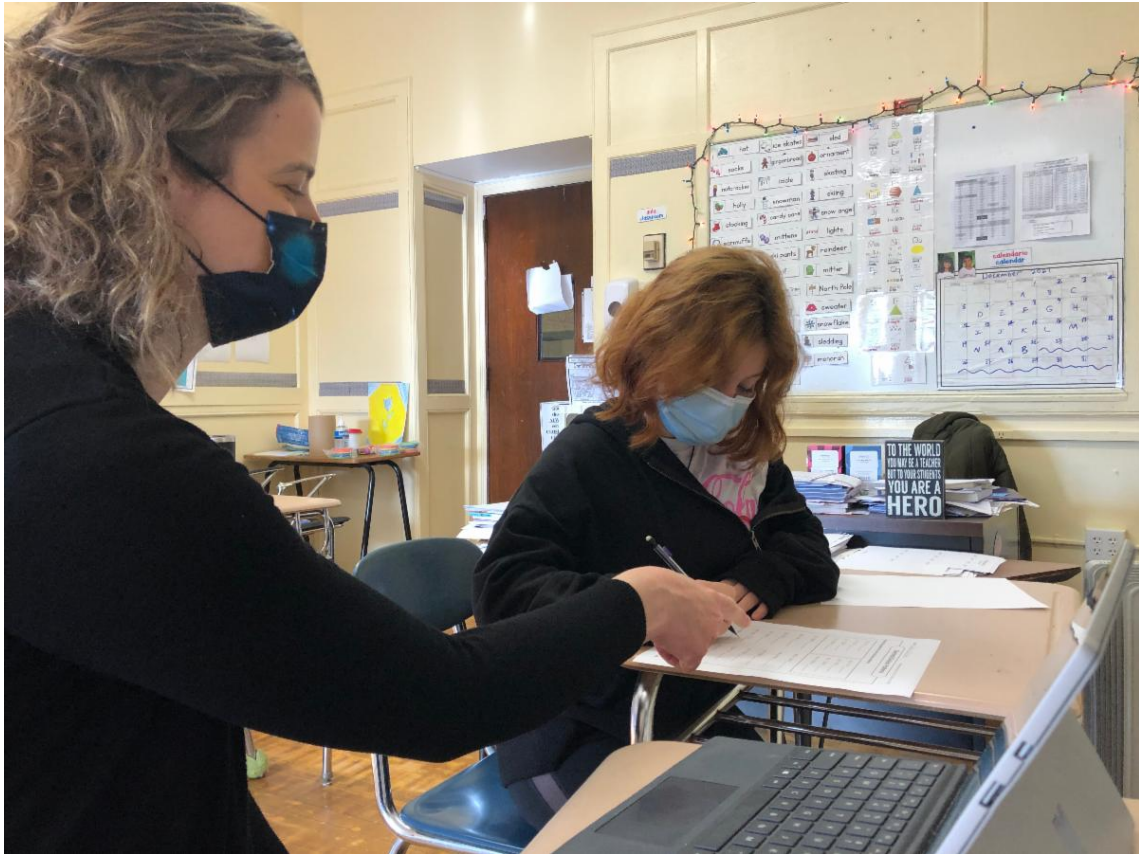
“We focus on including everyone, especially if they need something different to feel included,” Cash said.

Students then watched a short video about a young boy with disabilities named Matthew who uses his wheelchair to race. Cash and the class discussed how they race around with their feet but Matthew, who was just like them, needed something different – his wheelchair -- in order to race.

“Fairness is when we get what we need,” Cash said.

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## **Technology Helps Get the Conversation Started**



*English as a New Language teacher Rebecca Pitke works with a student on her school work at Somers Middle School.*

For the growing percentage of international, non-English speaking students in Somers schools, translation services help bridge language barriers, promote inclusivity in school, and make communication easier in the classroom and at home.

There are currently 67 English Language learners in Somers and the district uses a variety of online translation programs and applications to reach them. Tools vary by school and include pullout one-on-one sessions, bilingual teachers and teaching assistants as well as platforms like Microsoft that offer translation programs in many of its applications.

“This is extremely helpful to present students with documents in their native language as they are still learning English,” explained Rebecca Pitke, ENL instructor at Somers Middle School. Pitke said she often uses translation tools for class documents and handouts. “These tools are helpful during class activities and presentations.”

These services proved to be a valuable resource for two eighth-grade students who are learning English. Maylin Mora and Andrea Ruiz Velasquez completed their middle school health class project and presented it to their class and a panel of teachers entirely using available translation implements.

Somers has also begun a pilot translation program using Langogo, a small pocket-sized digital translator that gives students real-time conversion of the lesson as spoken by their teacher as well as the ability to translate text and audio lessons as they happen.

Langogo also offers a two-way translation conversation mode that gives students the ability to “speak” to each other regardless of their native language. The portable nature of the Langogo device is helpful for students to bring home each night for both homework and to promote communication between school and home for those families who have limited or no English-speaking proficiency.

