

Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS
FOR SCSD FAMILIES

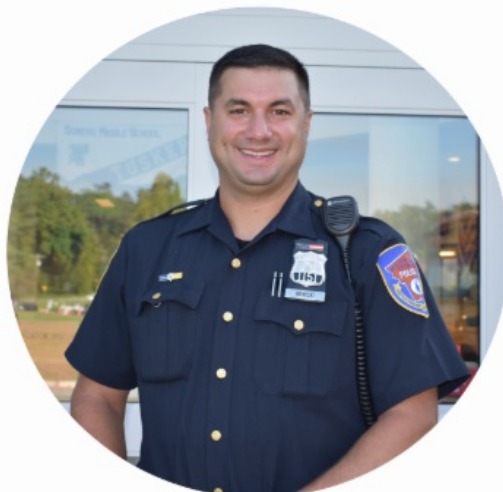
Important Updates

- Board of Education meeting: October 2, 2018 at 7p.m. in SMS Library
- No school October 8 & 9 - Columbus Day and Professional Learning Day



Lots of smiles and excitement heading into the first day of school

District Hires Security Coordinator



New School Resource Officers Matthew Rokicki (middle school) and Brian Pavletich (Primrose)

As a result of the work done by the Safety Task Force this summer, the Somers Central School District, in partnership with PNW BOCES, has hired an on-site Safety and Security Coordinator. Retired police officer Dan Corrado will be in the district part time starting in November, collaborating with Altaris Group security experts, district and building-level administrators, School Resource Officers,

and emergency response agencies. Mr. Corrado is a 23-year veteran of law enforcement in Westchester County, including extensive experience as a youth officer and a detective sergeant overseeing a detective division.

"We are fortunate to have Dan Corrado in the district," says Superintendent Dr. Raymond Blanch. "Our primary responsibility is to ensure a safe and secure environment for students. Having a dedicated security expert will keep us current with best practices in school safety, and the opportunity to hone our safety drills, procedures and protocol."

The Safety Task Force presented all its findings and made recommendations to improve safety and security in Somers Schools to the Board of Education on August 28, 2018.

"Our Somers community should have some peace of mind knowing that the SCSD is taking a proactive, comprehensive approach to school safety and overall wellness concerns of our students rather than a reactive position," says Bob Ondrovic, one of the Safety Task Force leaders.

Volunteers on the task force included law enforcement officials, security experts, mental health professionals, the PTA, school administrators and Somers Town Council members. The group met four times over the summer, along with representatives from Altaris, the security experts who conducted a security audit in the district. The committee's goal was to better understand the current state of school safety in Somers, discover best practices in school safety from experts, review research, and finally, provide next-step recommendations to the Superintendent and Board of Education.

The task force grouped its recommendations in six categories: districtwide, interior, exterior, equipment, technology, and after school.

Based on those suggestions, the district made some immediate changes, including the use of portable radios to improve communication, safety vests for designated staff to improve the admittance and dismissal process at each building, and a more detailed visitor policy.

Other recommendations include:

- Single point entry for each building.
- Improved procedures for employee sign-in/sign-out.
- Safety/security film on exterior windows and doors.
- Swipe card access at the classroom level.
- A lockdown panic system.

The task force noted that Altaris specifically does not recommend the use of metal-detectors or door-stops as security features.

Other recommendations made by the task force were already in progress within the district, including hiring two additional School Resource Officers, installing of a Voice-Over-Internet-Protocol system for better communication at the classroom level, building security vestibules at Primrose Elementary and Somers Middle Schools, and hiring more staff to monitor the buildings during after-school hours. [Read the Safety Task Force presentation here.](#)

The Board of Education is studying the task force's report and will work with Dr. Blanch to prioritize next steps, including the consideration of a bond to finance the higher priced security recommendations.

District Wins Drug Free Grant

The Somers Central School District and the Somers Partners in Prevention have been awarded a federal grant by the Drug Free Communities Support Program. The \$125,000 grant is aimed at reducing substance abuse among students, in part by strengthening collaboration among community groups.

The grant will fund substance abuse awareness programs and speakers at the schools, vape detectors in bathrooms, staff training, student conferences and surveys, and additional police officers at some activities and events outside of school hours.

Additionally, the grant will expand the Youth-to-Youth club to the middle school and enable the previously part-time student assistance counselor at the high school to be there five days a week.

"This funding will allow us to do things that were financially out of our reach," says Phil Kavanagh, director of counseling at the high school. "One of our goals is to help our students better understand how substance abuse and mental health are intertwined, often going hand-in-hand."

Kavanagh will work closely with Kathy Cucchiarella, who is the Chairperson for the Town of Somers Partners in Prevention.

"We are very excited to receive this grant," Cucchiarella said. "The Somers Partners in Prevention has made significant strides in raising awareness about alcohol and substance abuse. We will continue those efforts as we face new and emerging substance abuse challenges such as youth vaping and marijuana abuse."

The grant is administered through the annual Drug-Free Communities Support Program which gave 731 grants totaling \$90.9 million this year. Somers Central School District and the Somers Partners in Prevention were among 17 grants awarded in New York.

The grant encourages different sectors of communities to work together to combat substance abuse. There are plans in Somers to hold town-hall style events, inviting not only students, but their parents, and any other interested community members.



Teachers Focus on 3 R's



Curriculum leaders create visual representations of the 10 traits associated with International Baccalaureate Programme learners

Teachers and administrators are beginning the new school year with a focus on the 3 R's: recommitment, revision and resilience, after an energizing curriculum leaders' retreat this summer. The retreat focused on emotional resilience and leadership skills as teachers reviewed the district's vision and explored how their own building success plans contribute to that goal.

Social, emotional and physical wellness have been critical components of the district's vision for many years and educators realize that focusing on these key areas promotes safe and healthy learning environments for all students. As part of the retreat, the leaders explored their own emotional resilience as they navigate the challenges of educating students for the 21st century. The district's focus on "global awareness" promotes an understanding of different viewpoints and respectful dialog around

differences of opinion.

Programs such as "Responsive Classroom" in the elementary grades, advisory classes in the middle school and peer leadership groups in the high school help students feel recognized and respected while exploring topics related to their lives. These programs, along with safety and security measures in our school buildings, highlight the importance of feeling safe in school so students can learn. As adults, our own emotional resilience is critical in creating a calm and safe classroom.

"If I can take some time to step back from a situation and take a breath," said high school world language teacher leader, Lisa Siano, "It will help me be a more effective leader and teacher."

The retreat also allowed teacher leaders to explore important leadership skills. Workshops led by teams of school administrators included "Active Listening," "Building Consensus," "Creating Action Plans," and "Navigating Change."

"Through discussion and conversations with fellow leaders," said middle school teacher Christine Velez, "I realized the importance of being proactive. Approaching an action plan by identifying the main issue or problem along with possible root causes and then considering possible solutions and outcomes even prior to fully developing and instituting an action plan is key."

Finally, building a thorough understanding of the curriculum from kindergarten all the way through senior year is important for teacher leaders in every school.

"Most students in our district are with us from kindergarten through 12th grade," says Julie Gherardi, Assistant Superintendent for Learning. "So it's important for teachers in all four schools to understand the purposeful and strategic flow of learning from the students' early years until they graduate."

"As a first-year curriculum leader," said high school English teacher Matt Benedetto, "I was inspired by the dedication I saw in my colleagues at this retreat. Clearly, we all care about our profession, and I am fortunate to count myself among such a passionate and nurturing group. Thanks for a great start to the year!"

Two National Merit Semi-Finalists



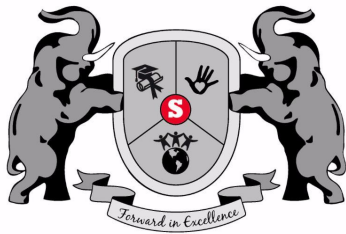
Congratulations to high school students Noah Sanz and Katherine Taylor, semi-finalists in the National Merit Scholarship Program.

PTA Welcomes Back Students and Staff



Families celebrate the new school year at Primrose Elementary School

The Somers Parent Teacher Association Council hosted the annual Back-to-School Breakfast for staff on August 29, 2018. On September 4th, the freshman class was welcomed to Somers High School by Peer Leaders and staff. The SHS Parent Teacher Student Association Class of 2022 provided snacks for the students as they learned about the high school. On September 14th, Primrose Elementary School families enjoyed food and games at the Back to School Picnic sponsored by the Primrose PTA and Summer Trails. Thank you to everyone who made these events a success.



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