



Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS
FOR SCSD FAMILIES

Important Updates

- Dec. 3 - Dec. 7 - Inclusive Schools Week
- Tuesday Dec. 4 - Facebook Live on SHS Schedule Change at 7 p.m.
- Wednesday Dec. 5 - Half day (PES/SIS conferences and SMS/SHS PLC Day)
- Tuesday Dec. 11 - Board of Education meeting, SMS Library at 7 p.m.

A blue rectangular graphic with a white speech bubble in the center. The speech bubble contains the text 'LET'S TALK...' in red, bold, serif font. The background of the graphic is decorated with small white and red triangles. Below the speech bubble is the Somers Central School District crest, which features two elephants flanking a shield with a red 'S' and a blue 'C'.

LET'S TALK...



TUSKER TALK, A NEW PODCAST FROM
SOMERS SCHOOLS.

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IB Swings Into Second Year



Watch the high school IB Dance class perform 'Thriller' for SIS students

All eyes, some filled with tears, are transfixed on the screen at the front of the room in Cheryl Rinaldi's International Baccalaureate dance class. They are watching a dance choreographed to the song "Fix You" by Coldplay.

"While you're watching," instructs Rinaldi, "Remember that your learning target is to be able to describe how a dancer uses space, energy and time in a dance."

The dance class is one of four new classes introduced as part of the International Baccalaureate Programme (IB), in its second year at Somers High School. Katie Hill, a junior in the dance class, says she couldn't wait to sign up because she spends so much time out of school dancing.

"It's such a supportive environment," says Hill. "We create together, collaborate and teach each other. It's not teachers lecturing and giving tests. We test ourselves every day."

Not only is there collaboration within the classes, there is collaboration among the new IB classes as well. The students in the newly-offered IB film class recently used their specialized equipment to record a video of the dance class performing "Thriller" in the auditorium for other students. Now they are using that video to practice editing and other post-production techniques.

A business class focusing on marketing, finance and ethics, as well as a sports exercise class are the other two new offerings in the IB Programme.

"We chose these four subjects because they are an opportunity for students who might not take IB classes otherwise," says IB coordinator and English teacher Alison Scanlon. "There is so much athletic participation in school we wanted to bring in the academic side."

The Sports, Exercise, and Health Science IB class is co-planned by physical education teacher and athletic trainer Kevin Mullen, and science teacher Rachel Sirwatka, who has a nursing degree. For example, Mullen will have students record their own activity during the PE class, and then Sirwatka will help the students analyze and discuss their findings. After completing the class, students will have the credentials to take an exam to become a certified athletic trainer.

There are currently eight seniors and fifteen juniors going for a full diploma in the IB Programme, and hundreds more taking at least one IB class at the high school, with several of the classes at maximum capacity.

Mental Health Matters



School counselors and psychologists discuss removing the stigma around mental health

Moving the conversation about mental health out from behind closed doors. That was the goal of the 3rd annual Wellness Summit organized by the Somers Central School District.

"If you have a family," says Phil Kavanagh, Director of School Counseling and Student Support at Somers High School, "You understand the importance of mental health. The point of this Summit is to begin the conversation and understand that we're in this fight together."

A crowd of approximately 75 parents and school administrators gathered in the Somers Middle School auditorium on Monday, October 29 to watch a presentation by school psychologists and counselors, along with a local private practice psychologist, followed by a question and answer session.

The panelists reported a rise in anxiety and depression in students in the district, even in the youngest grades. More children are avoiding school, struggling with resilience, friendship and social/emotional skills, as well as engaging in more risk-taking and self-injurious behavior.

"As parents we tend to blame ourselves," says Kavanagh. "Wondering what we have done wrong. So we feel shame, and that prevents us from reaching out and focusing on solutions. We have to get past that - it is not your fault."

"We are seeing a lot of young children experiencing disappointment and failure for the first time, and they don't know how to cope," says Primrose Elementary School counselor Katie Bergin. "A lot of kids are coming in to school late because of anxiety," adds school psychologist Regina Kaishian, "We see so much pressure on families, from financial, to commitments, to family dynamics, and that translates into stress on the kids."

The rise in mental health struggles among school children in Somers is mirrored by national data. According to The Child Mind Institute, one in five children ages 13-18 have or will have a serious mental illness. Eleven percent of youth have a mood disorder, 10% have a behavior or conduct disorder, 8% suffer from an anxiety disorder, and there has been a 37% increase in depressive episodes in teens between 2005 and 2014. Kavanagh said the most alarming of these statistics is that despite these challenges, the average delay between the onset of symptoms and intervention is eight to ten years.

In response to the growing mental health problems, in recent years the district has focused on identifying social and emotional struggles, and teaching students coping and self-regulation skills.

"Brain studies show that people who practice cognitive behavioral therapy physically change the structure of their brains," says middle school psychologist Dr. Samantha Morrison. "So that those skills, that tool kit, is essential for them to handle stressful situations wherever they encounter them. That tool kit can save a life and last forever."

In grades K-8, counselors run small groups where students in similar situations, from coping with divorce, to anxiety, to social struggles, can get together in a casual, but facilitated setting. At the elementary level every child has contact with a school counselor a minimum of 15 times each year. The teachers use the Responsive Classroom model, which addresses feelings, coping and self-regulation skills, as well as teaching a growth mindset, diversity acceptance and anger management.

The middle school uses the Success Highways Resiliency Solution and Brainology curriculums, which provide a way to identify students' social and emotional needs in order to target interventions more effectively. The middle-schoolers follow those programs in small advisory groups each week. Counselors and social workers also visit classrooms to work with kids on self-esteem, stress and mindfulness, substance abuse, cyberbullying and peer relationships.

At the high school, counseling is available for individual students and through classroom lessons. Counselors and social workers go to ninth and tenth grade classes to talk about stress and good decision making. This month the student support staff will again visit every ninth grade English

class to talk about recognizing the signs of depression and knowing the steps towards suicide prevention.

"We're trying to be as proactive as possible," says high school counselor John Fleck.

This year the high school has a full-time student assistance counselor who focuses on substance abuse, as well as a Student Life Coordinator whose job is to promote engagement and connection among students, and help kids reduce stress.

"There is a lot of internal stress and pressure the kids put on themselves, from observing others in their environment" says local psychologist Jennifer Pritt.

Moving forward, the district is investing even more resources into promoting the social and emotional well-being of all students. The district is reviewing more research-based programs and strategies that will most effectively support kids' mental health, including Youth Mental Health First Aid Training, parent and community partnerships, Restorative Justice and the continuation of the recently established Social Emotional Wellness Team. Handouts from the Wellness Summit, as well as other Mental Health resources will be available under each school's website. Mental health support staff in each building will be creating a catalog of resources for parents to access much needed information.

Thanks For Giving



Peer Leaders at the high school prepare Thanksgiving baskets. [Watch video.](#)

Brightly colored ribbons, cans of food, and small gifts overflowed in baskets gathered in the high school lobby. Giving was in abundance in all four schools for the district's annual Thanksgiving Food Drive. It was one of the most successful years yet, thanks to the generosity of students, families and staff. The food drive helped feed more than 50 families with children in the school district.

"They're going to love the coloring books and games in this basket," says a high school Peer Leader, carrying a basket to the waiting van.

At Primrose, each class was assigned to bring in a specific kind of food - canned beans, boxes of stuffing, etc. At the intermediate school, the classes created baskets of food, as did the Advisory Groups at the middle school and the Peer Leaders at the high school.

District social workers Theresa Reda and Kristen Rigaglia organize the drive every year and spend many hours coordinating collections, picking up donations, and delivering them to the Food Pantry at St. Luke's.

"We are eternally grateful to the Food Pantry at St. Luke's," says Reda. "They let us use their space each year to sort all the donations and create a kind of grocery store for families to come 'shop'."

Each family gets a turkey, or a gift card to buy a turkey, along with a basket full of Thanksgiving dinner fixings and a pie.

"People don't realize how many of our neighbors are in need," says Kristen Rigaglia. "Many local families are struggling to provide Thanksgiving dinner for their kids. Think of all the other days in the year they are struggling just to feed their families."

In addition to the donations from within the district, many local businesses and organizations donated food and money, which is coordinated by Kay Staplin and members of the Somers Women's Club. Those donors include: The Lions Club, Primrose PTA, Il Forno, The Burger Barn, Sweet Delights Bakery, Harvest Moon Orchard, Grandma's Pies, Turco's Supermarket, Stop and Shop Supermarkets in Mahopac and Mount Kisco, Shop Rite in Bedford Hills, Edward Jones Investments, Panera in Bedford Hills, and M and R Deli in Mount Kisco.

Another food drive will be held for the December holidays.

Student Athletes Commit to Division 1



Seven Somers High School seniors signed letters of intent to play a sport at a division one college or university next year. Pictured left to right: Nathan Han, golf at Columbia University. Katrina Kurtz, soccer at Siena College. Alexandra Kalayjian, soccer at Florida State University. Emma Kittredge, lacrosse at Sacred Heart University. Alexandra Pittman, lacrosse at College of the Holy Cross. Hannah Lustig, lacrosse at University of Massachusetts, Amherst. Gabriella Mazzotta, softball at Manhattan College. Congratulations to you all!

Happy 46th Birthday SIS!



The SIS PTA held the SIS Birthday Party Fundraiser on 10/26. All who attended had a fantastic time. Featuring games, a haunted hallway, club sis, bake sale, silent auction and numerous raffles - there was something for everyone. The money raised from this event helps the SIS PTA fund assemblies, purchase a planner for each SIS student, field trips, field days and fifth grade t-shirts. Thank you to all who contributed to make it such a success.

Spotlight on Somers: Safety and Security



Watch Superintendent Dr. Raymond Blanch and Altaris Group security expert John LaPlaca discuss improvements in safety and security in Somers Schools, as well as plans for the future.



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