

Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS
FOR SCSD FAMILIES

Important Updates

- Board of Education meeting March 5 at 7 p.m., SMS Library
- Stacey Elconin has been formally appointed the new Director of Special Services, with a start date of July 1, 2019.

Kindness Jars Are Social Emotional Learning in Action



Emma Steinberg and Gianna Comunale deliver a kindness jar to Stefanie Pacheco's second-grade class.

Gianna Comunale and Emma Steinberg stand in front of a second-grade classroom holding a jar filled with small slips of paper, on which kind affirmations are written.

"You are enough," reads Gianna. "You are special."

These two fourth-grade students at Somers Intermediate School are spreading kindness throughout the schools in the district by delivering these jars to classrooms, nurses' offices, main offices, guidance offices - anywhere a kind word might come in handy.

"If someone is having a bad day," says Emma, "They can take a piece of paper out of the jar and read a kind message. It will make them feel better."

The girls came up with the concept on their own and intermediate school counselor Alexandria Todorov supported them in bringing it to life. They have since been featured twice with their Kindness Jars on [News12 Westchester](#). Their kindness jar project is exactly the kind of thinking the Somers Central School District is hoping to foster in students with the Social Emotional Learning curriculum that is in place from kindergarten through 12th-grade and is a pillar of the district's vision for the whole child. The 'social' aspect is how we interact with the world around us. The 'emotional' aspect is our reactions to those interactions. Being aware of and learning how to manage the two aspects is crucial for a child's healthy development.

"When we create an environment where students feel socially and emotionally safe," says

Assistant Superintendent of Learning, Julie Gherardi, "They can connect with other children and be who they are. That is a really important part of being in school. It's a soft skill we nurture in children that will help them for the rest of their lives."

At the elementary level, students learn how to connect with others through Responsive Classroom, a curriculum that teaches them to interact with empathy, value differences, and manage their emotions. In middle school, each student is in a small advisory group with a school professional in which they discuss issues of importance in middle school such as relationships, bullying, making a difference, and fitting in. Both Somers Intermediate School and the middle school participate in TEAM Tuskers Mentoring, an opportunity for any student to be matched with a supportive adult from the community. At the high school this year, Brenda O'Shea has taken on the role of Student Life Coordinator, whose job is to make sure that all students feel connected socially, whether it be through a club, a group of friends, an adult or a sports team. The district is also employing the expertise of art therapist Lynn Cukaj. Art therapy is a valuable tool for allowing children to learn how to manage emotions in a low-pressure environment.

"We know when students are connected socially, they are more likely to feel resilient and strong and have a network of support as opposed to feeling alone when dealing with challenges," says Gherardi.

The Somers school district has many resources for parents who want to continue the Social Emotional Learning at home, including articles by mental health experts, book recommendations for parents, and, coming soon, a book list for elementary parents to read to children dealing with issues such as divorce, diversity or bullying. For high school-related resources, click [here](#). For middle school resources click [here](#). For elementary-level resources, click [here](#) and [here](#). To hear more about how the district is using art therapy, click [here](#) to listen to the [Tusker Talk podcast](#) on Social Emotional Learning with Julie Gherardi and Lynn Cukaj.

Keep Calm and Take a Break

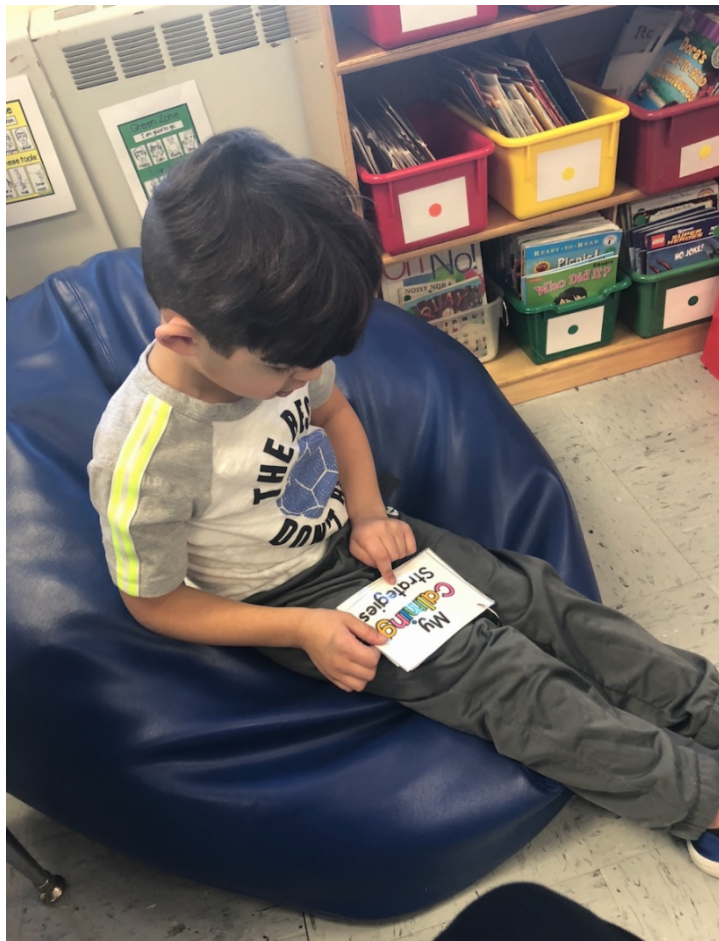
At any given time during the school day, kindergarten teacher Robin Gaudio might catch one of her students quietly showing her a "T" with his or her hands.

"We do a sign if we need a break or are in a mood," says a student. "You go over to the Take a Break chair and have choices of things to do to calm down."

The children volunteer emotions that might warrant a visit to the Take a Break chair, including mad, sad, worried, not focused, silly, out of control, and wiggly.

"The chair makes you feel calm and better so you can be a good listener," says another student. "It's soft, you get to be patient. It helps you every time."

The Take a Break chair is a new element of the Responsive Classroom curriculum at Primrose Elementary School, used to teach children to identify and manage their feelings. Responsive Classroom is a key component in the district's commitment to Social and Emotional Learning.



A kindergartner demonstrates the Take a Break chair in his classroom.

"It is not a naughty chair," says Gaudio. "It is not a consequence. The idea is to give them ownership of their feelings, because at this age they sometimes need a break, but we also want them to know that changing emotions are normal."

School Psychologist Regina Kaishian and School Counselor Katie Bergin are introducing the Take a Break concept to some classrooms at Primrose and in others they are connecting existing Take a Break chairs to Zones of Regulation, which help kids identify their own emotional and physical experiences. By dedicating time to talk about the chairs and zones to all students at Primrose, the counselors are normalizing the use of the chair.

The area around the chair in Gaudio's class is stocked with crayons, a timer, and cards suggesting different strategies to help a child get back into the "Green Zone", which describes the feelings and behaviors present when students can do their best learning.

"We saw a need for it," says Bergin. "We saw children struggling with feelings and struggling to be resilient. They need guidance that it is ok to feel this way, but they need to have strategies to deal with it."

The counselors at Primrose are creating calm kits for every classroom and shared space in the building, including specials areas, the cafeteria and the nurse's office. The calm kits are being funded with help from the Parent Teacher Association and the Special Education Parent Teacher

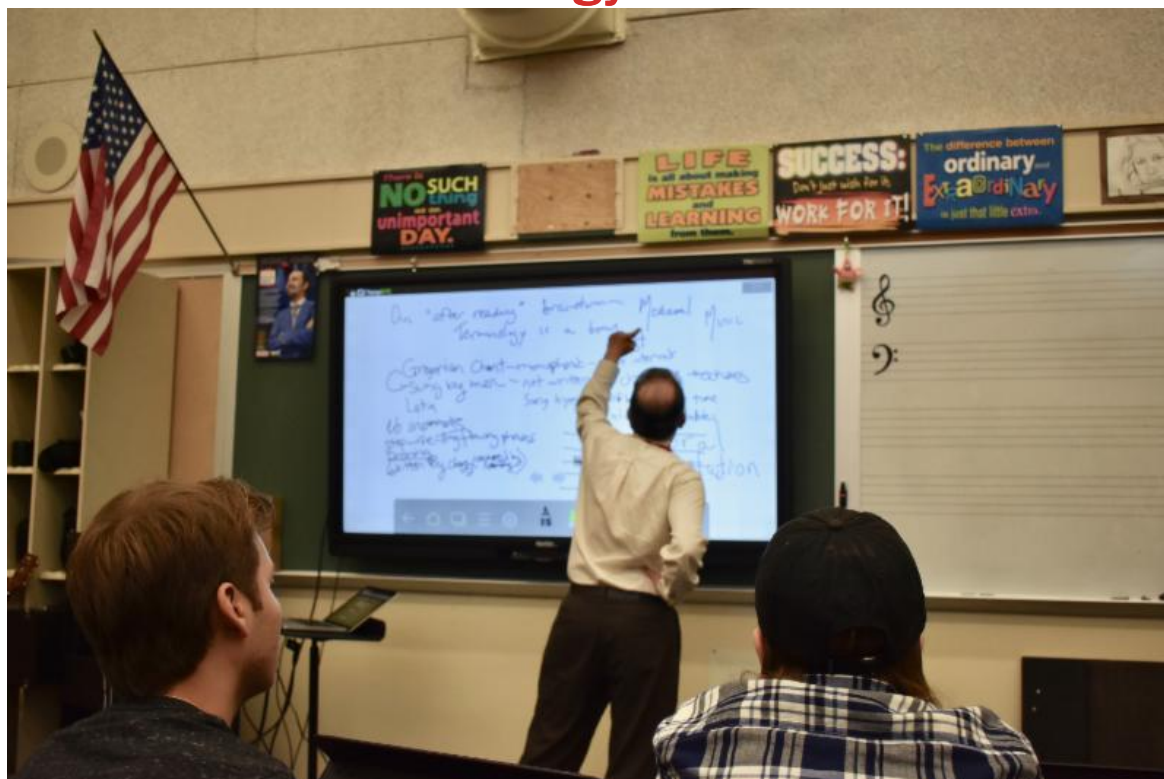
Association and will include tools such as timers, stress balls, glitter tubes and breathing exercises. The hope is that no matter where students find themselves, they will have tools to help them regulate their feelings and their bodies.

Scholastic Award Winners



Twenty-nine students from Somers Middle School and Somers High School have been recognized by the Scholastic Art and Writing awards this year. Eighth-grader Olivia Bilosi received a Gold Key Award for her novel. Her work will move on to be adjudicated at the national level of the competition. All winners are invited to attend the Regional Awards Ceremony held on Sunday, March 3rd at Manhattanville College in Purchase, NY. Click [here](#) for the full list of winners.

In Tune with Technology



Students in a high school music class watch as music teacher Terry Reynolds writes on the TruTouch board.

Two students stand at the front of their music class writing on the board. Not an unusual sight at Somers High School, except the kids are each writing their thoughts with an index finger on a digital screen, at the same time.

"That's just one feature of this board that is awesome," says music teacher Terry Reynolds. "Up to ten people can be writing at the same time.

The board is a TruTouch interactive display by Newline that is changing the way students learn about music at the high school.

"It makes the classes much more interactive," says Ethan Goldberg, a junior in the International Baccalaureate year one music class. "In the past, when Mr. Reynolds wanted to explain music intervals he demonstrated on instruments. Now he can play a note, and then have us reach our own conclusions by experimenting on the board."

The TruTouch board was recently installed by the district's maintenance and custodial staff. These devices are different from the more commonly used smart boards in that they are ultra-high definition, multi-touch, and they have integrated speakers and a self-contained operating system which means they can be used with or without a connected computer.

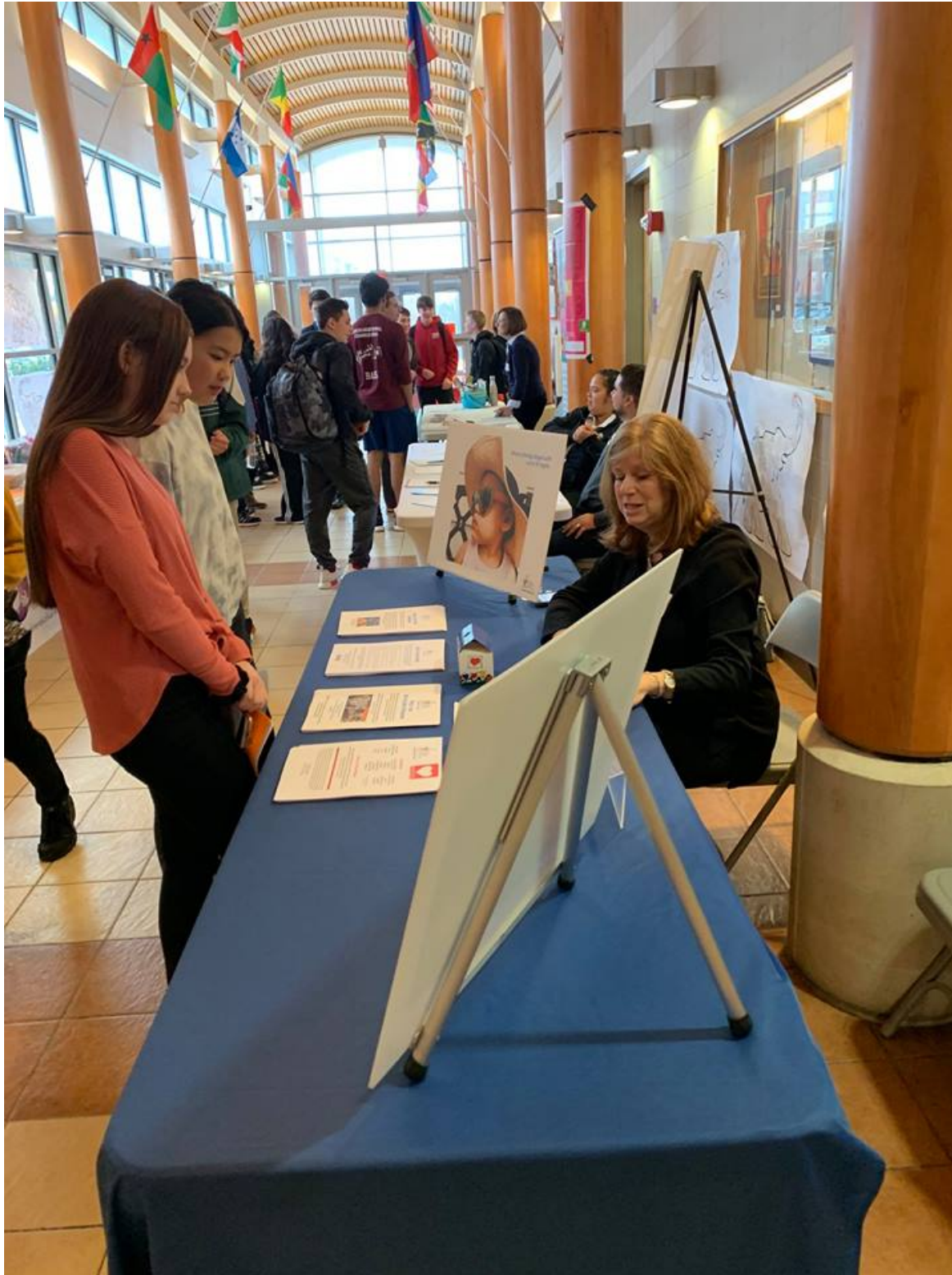
"Our band has watched a professional ensemble perform one of their pieces and the kids saw themselves in a Spirit Week panorama picture," says Reynolds.

Kevin Guidotti, the district's Director of Innovations in Learning, says these devices have a significantly longer life span and overall lower cost than smart boards with projectors. Still, don't expect a wholesale change across the district.

"The different display technologies all have different benefits," says Guidotti. "We are purposefully placing the appropriate technology in the appropriate classrooms. For example, a music or art room needs a high definition screen, whereas a math or science classroom is better served by a larger screen on which teachers and students can write out expanded problems."

There are approximately ten TruTouch boards in the district now, with more to be installed in the future. Different technologies are being piloted at Primrose Elementary and Somers Intermediate schools to determine which devices are best for those buildings.

Community Service Fair Well Attended



The Somers High School Parent Teacher Student Association Community Service Fair took place on February 8, 2019 during lunch periods. The purpose of the event is to introduce high school students to local not-for-profit agencies that offer volunteer opportunities to cultivate individual passions, curiosity, and career skills while promoting strong, community citizenship. Many great organizations attended, and students learned how they can help. Thank you to our organizers and to the organizations that participated.

Spotlight on Somers: Middle Years Programme



Somers Middle School is transitioning to the Middle Years Programme, the middle school extension of the International Baccalaureate Programme. **Watch** Superintendent Ray Blanch and middle school Principal Jeff Getman discuss why they are making the change and how it will benefit students.



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