



SOMERS CENTRAL  
SCHOOL DISTRICT  
NEWS FOR FAMILIES

# TUSKER NATION

## Big Win for Primrose and the Giants



*Olivia Ponzio interviews Giants defensive end Brian Bruns while teammate Kayvon Thibodeaux observes.*

Interviewing players at the New York Giants draft party was a huge win for Primrose second-grader Olivia Ponzio, and an opportunity to do something many people dream of.

"I'm a Giants fan," said Olivia. "They're my favorite team."

Olivia entered the New York Giants Junior Reporter contest along with 200 other applicants. To win, Olivia had to submit a 30-second video saying, "Hi, I am Olivia Ponzio and I'm reporting live from my backyard." That entry made her the sole winner of the competition.

"My mom saw the contest on Facebook," Olivia said. "She asked if I wanted to do it and I said, 'Yes!'"

Olivia was invited to the Giants draft party at MetLife Stadium, where she went on

stage to interview players Kayvon Thibodeaux and Brian Bruns. She asked them, "Were you excited when you got drafted?". She was also featured on the jumbotron.

"I got to get the crowd excited, and I said, 'Let's go Giants!'"

Along with interviewing the players, Olivia says she spent time in the VIP suite, eating good food, and enjoying the party with a friend. As part of the experience, which was sponsored by Wendy's, she received a Giants Junior Reporter jersey, blanket, football, towel, water bottle, cornhole set, and a \$500 gift card to Wendy's.

Olivia hasn't had the opportunity to attend a Giants game yet, but she hopes to soon.

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## Students Researching Belonging in Somers



*Freshman Millie McCormack talks about inclusivity with second-graders as they build a tower out of marshmallows.*

Building a tower out of marshmallows can help build relationships. That's what the Superintendent's Student Advisory Council (SSAC) found after leading a group of Primrose students in an activity to assess the young students' sense of belonging in school.

"Afterwards we did a reflection with the kids and discussed whether there was anyone that didn't get to share their ideas, whether one person did all the work, and any different strategies they might have used," said SSAC member and freshman Millie McCormack.

The findings of the marshmallow research will be part of a larger body of work currently underway by the 26 members of the SSAC.

"We are trying to figure out how to better promote belonging throughout the district," said Sam Parson, a junior on the council.

Parsons was part of a team that led focus groups with teachers at Primrose to discuss the challenges of fostering a sense of belonging in their classrooms.

"We found that often times things that might inhibit a sense of belonging are things that teachers might not necessarily have control over," said Parson. "We found the most important way to support belonging is the way teachers respond to student differences."

The SSAC was formed this year by Superintendent Ray Blanch and Claire Comerford, director of learning – secondary, to give students voice and direct impact on the school community. Their work this year to foster more belonging in Somers schools will be presented to district administrators and the Board of

Education, with recommendations on how to put their findings into action.

"This group of students has undertaken this research with dedication and enthusiasm," says Dr. Blanch. "They sincerely care about making all students feel they belong in Somers and their insights will make a noticeable difference in our schools."

Sam Parsons says that a feeling of belonging helps students be themselves and reach their full potential. "I hope our work will help students go through their school career with more open minds, more kindness, and less judgment."

To hear more from the students about their research, [click here](#).

## A New Addition to Math Class



*Eighth-graders work through math problems together on white board tables.*

The newest addition to the eighth-grade co-teach math class at Somers Middle School are whiteboard tables. These tables were provided by a grant from the Somers Education Foundation (SEF).

"They're easy to use and we have a lot of space to write," said Sam Giliberti. "And you don't need a charger for it."

SEF has purchased these tables for several classrooms at the high school in the past and they are a big hit. Whiteboard tables allow students to work together more collaboratively since they can practice equations on the surface between them. This allows all classmates to observe their peers' work, rather than working individually on their tablets or paper.

"You can see what everyone is writing," said Hana Kamenickova.

"It's more useful and more efficient," Olivia Spadini added.

Teachers help facilitate conversations and collaboration by writing hints and helpful reminders on the tables, differentiating for groups or individuals, and easily checking and correcting students' work. Students appreciate having another tool

to support their personal learning styles and needs.

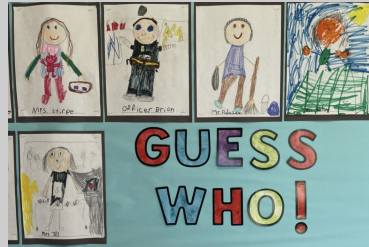
"I think it's pretty helpful," Eliana Contreras said. "If I can't do something in my head, I can use the whiteboard table."

Whiteboard tables also help students reinforce their International Baccalaureate learner profile attributes of thinker and communicator by facilitating an open line of communication and encouraging teamwork with their classmates.

## □ Seen Around Somers □



Dumpster Doug helped students at Somers Intermediate School learn about the importance of taking care of our planet during an ecology assembly. Through audience participation, magic tricks, volunteer cooperation on stage, and a silly-yet-serious attitude, students explored how to be "Pollution Preventers". Thanks to the PTA!



First graders have been exploring the concept of community. A Tusker is a part of many different communities, including home, school, classroom, and town. As part of their studies, they created pictures of someone in their school community.



For the first year, all 8th graders participated in the Middle Years Programme Community Project, a months-long, creative, academic and intellectual experience. Each student developed a service project to make a difference in our local community.

## Wiz-Fit with the Harlem Wizards



*Students at Primrose attempt some of the Harlem Wizards' basketball tricks.*

The Harlem Wizards basketball team, known for their "trick hoops and alley-oops," visited Primrose Elementary School and Somers Intermediate School (SIS) to share the WizFit challenge with students.

"We got to meet the players," Mackenzie said.

All students in both Primrose and SIS participated in the WizFit Challenge over the course of two weeks. The challenge is designed to be high-energy, engaging, fitness-forward, and inclusive, providing activities for everyone. The Harlem Wizards held assemblies to kick off the challenge and get students excited to get fit.

"You have to watch these WizFit videos," Mackenzie said. "We got to learn new exercises."

Another set of assemblies was held again at the end of the challenge. During the culmination assemblies, the basketball players did tricks and engaged the students and staff in physical activities such as jumping jacks, high knees, dancing, and reaching with their basketballs.

"The most challenging part was moving the ball around your back and trying to balance it on your finger," Mackenzie said.

All students received prizes for participating in the WizFit Challenge, regardless of their level of involvement.

"We did the WizFit Shuffle," said Cooper.

"It's a dance the Wizards do," Mackenzie added. "You win prizes like a water bottle and a basketball."

Proceeds from the WizFit Challenge go directly to the Somers Education Foundation (SEF). SEF is a not-for-profit, tax-exempt organization that raises funds for student- and teacher-initiated projects that are not otherwise funded within Somers Central School District's budget.

Primrose raised enough money to win what some consider the ultimate prize - sticking Coach Mallon to the wall with tape.

"I would do WizFit again," said James.

Once the challenge was complete, the Harlem Wizards returned one last time to take on administrators, faculty, and staff known as the Somers Wiz Busters in a friendly head-to-head basketball game at Somers High School. Despite a valiant effort from the Somers Wiz Busters, the Harlem Wizards took the win.

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## Fostering Inclusivity with Buddy Benches



*High school senior, Isabella Milojevic with her kindergarten buddies on the bench she created.*

Everyone needs a buddy, and Isabella Milojevic, a Somers High School senior, is helping Primrose students find one. She created buddy benches for Primrose to give back to a school she still loves many years after attending herself.

“I wanted to create a safe space for these students on the playground,” said Isabella. “These buddy benches will give students a place to develop friendships with other students.”

In 2020, Isabella was in eighth grade and working toward her Girl Scouts Silver Award with the buddy benches project. The Silver Award is an individual project that finds a need locally and works to develop a solution that better the community. After reading the book “The Day the Crayons Quit” by Drew Deywalt, she was inspired.

“In this book, ideas of inclusivity and diversity are some of the main themes,” Isabella said. “After reading this book, I came up with the idea of making buddy benches that looked like crayons.”

Once her idea was approved, she held a bake sale to raise money for bench supplies including wood, nails, and paint. She enlisted the help of her uncle, a carpenter, and the use of his tools. From conception through planning and creation, the process took approximately three months.

“These benches have been on the playground since 2020, but due to COVID, I was never able to come in and talk to the kindergartners about them until recently,” Isabella said. “When I got invited back to Primrose, I was extremely excited.”

During Primrose’s No Place for Hate Week, Isabella finally saw her bench in action and spoke to the kindergarten students about the importance of including new friends during recess.

“During my time visiting Primrose, I was visited all the kindergarten classes and attended their recess,” Isabella said. “I felt extremely fulfilled that something that I did for the school has made an impact on the friendships of these students. I hope my project inspires them to help the community like I did.”

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## Making a Case for Hard Work and Preparation



*The high school mock trial team presents its case to the judge during the competition.*

The Somers High School Mock Trial team recently competed in the Westchester County Bar Association (WCBA) Mock Trial Competition against schools throughout the county.

Every year, mock trial teams are given either a criminal or a civil case. This year’s trial was a criminal case. The students worked hard all year, learning courtroom procedures such as speaking

with the judge, presenting things into evidence, and impeaching a witness. They also studied legal terms, objections likely to be seen in a trial, and even what to wear to court.

“There is a lot of work that goes into preparing for the competition outside of our meetings,” said Allie Lusthaus. “We write direct- and cross-examinations and opening and closing statements.”

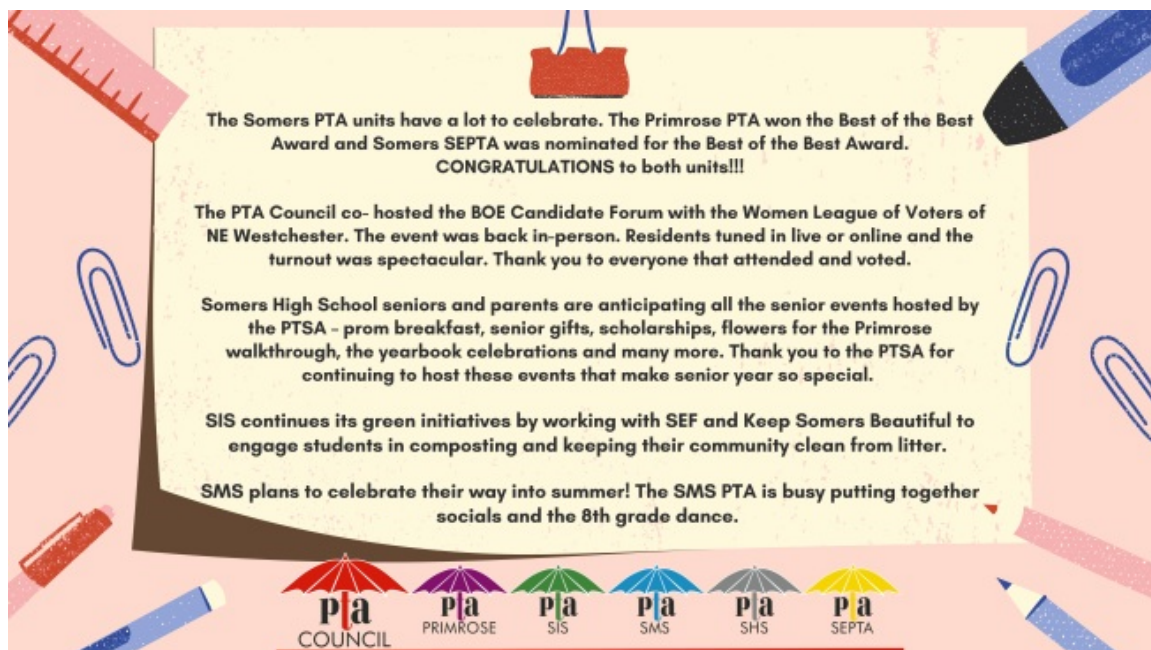
Students memorized questions and answers for different roles in the mock trial and worked closely with a local attorney who helped them with different aspects of the trial.

“Mr. Foley is a lawyer who helped us write cross-examination and direct-examination questions,” said Jake Combs. “He also taught the student witnesses how to strategically help our side in the case when the opposing school is cross-examining them. Mr. Foley used his expertise to prepare us for the trial.”

After months of careful preparation and planning, the team competed in a real courtroom in front of a real judge, representing both the prosecution and the defense.

“The competition itself was a very energizing environment,” said Allie. “Everyone was nervous but excited to be there.”

The Somers Mock Trial Team did a great job in the competition, but eventually lost to the top overall seed in the knockout stages. The winners of the Westchester County Finals will compete in the state competition in Albany.



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