

Learning at...



Wallkill

A PUBLICATION OF THE WALLKILL CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT BOARD OF EDUCATION

In-Person Concerts Return, Bringing Sounds of the Season!



Wallkill students showed off their musical talents during a series of Winter Concerts. Performers included Plattekill Elementary School xylophone player Michael Winfield (left, pictured during a rehearsal), the Grade 8 Band (center), and the High School Madrigal Choir.

IN-PERSON CONCERTS RETURNED TO THE WALLKILL CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT just in time for the holiday season! They were very special events, since in-person performances had been halted in March 2020 due to COVID-19 concerns.

"It is so nice to be able to see students playing music together again," said Meredith Rubinstein, who is Director of the Grade 5-6 Bands at Plattekill and Leptonale Elementary Schools. "Music is such a communal experience."

Kirsten Rolon, the Director of Music for the District, noted that multiple precautionary measures against COVID-19 spread were taken to ensure the health and safety of everyone during the performances, including distanced seating, masks, and sanitation stations. Woodwind players wore special double-layered masks, which allowed them to play through their mouthpieces as they normally would, while flute players sported a special plastic guard in front of their mouthpieces.

"These students, many of whom performed in several groups throughout their concerts, were amazing!" said Mrs. Rolon. "They are so dedicated and have worked very hard. We are extremely proud of them!"



Panther Players Take the Stage

The Panther Players, the Wallkill Senior High School Drama Club, put on an impressive production of *You're a Good Man, Charlie Brown!* this fall.

Senior Capstone Initiative Helps Students Explore Passions, Chart Post-Graduation Paths

HOW CAN A SCHOOL HELP PREPARE STUDENTS FOR POST-SECONDARY ENDEAVORS?

How can it engage students in individual areas of interest, and encourage them to become lifelong learners? And how can young people be encouraged to cultivate the skills they need to be college or career ready? At Wallkill Senior High School (WSHS), the answers to these questions, and many others, can be found in an innovative initiative called Senior Capstone.

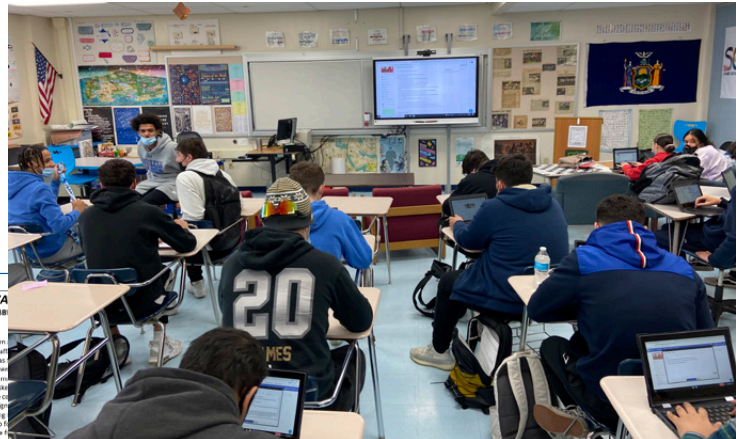
According to WSHS Principal Brian Masopust, Senior Capstone is an interdisciplinary course that gives students a voice in their own

education. “The course, which is the culmination of students’ time at Wallkill, is designed to expand their critical reading, thinking, and writing abilities, and to promote, further develop, and showcase inquiring habits of mind,” he said.

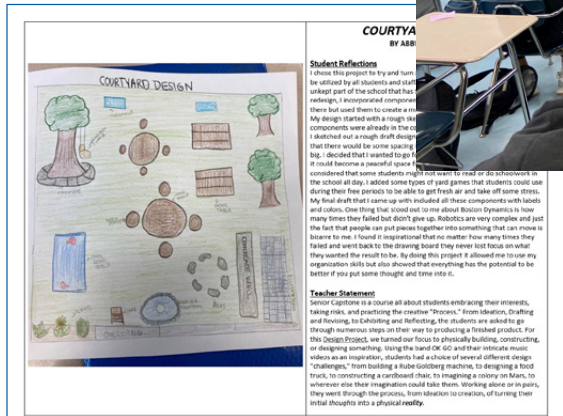
Brian Vegliando, one of the Senior Capstone teachers, explained that Capstone participants work on developing their creative abilities while sharpening their questioning, critical thinking, collaboration, critiquing, and curating skills. “Through a series of projects as well as daily problem-solving activities, students work to master the process of completing projects, from ideation through presentation and reflection,” he explained.

“The final product of Senior Capstone,” Mr. Vegliando continued, “is an independent, open-ended, interest-driven ‘Passion Project’ that the students will put on display in a public presentation.”

Some of the “mini-projects” completed this year include designing and building furniture out of cardboard; redesigning classroom layouts for optimal student comfort and engagement; recognizing and recording both good and bad habits (changing the undesirable ones); and interacting with guest speakers like “Top Chef” Eric Adjepong and Dandelion Energy Principal Engineer Ryan Carda.



Students in the Senior Capstone course (above) master the process of solving problems and completing projects. Capstone participant Abby Annacone's project focused on how the school's underutilized courtyard could be redesigned (left).



For her final project, Lilianna Cullen envisioned a welcoming learning environment for young learners that included modern classroom furniture, a Socratic seminar setup, and a library full of essential children’s literature. She also created several lesson plans.

“This project,” said Lilianna, “allowed me to expand my aspirations as a future childhood educator and plan how to impact the lives of students in the most influential way possible.”

Kyle Krebs engaged in a data analysis project using film and statistic technology such as HUDL software. He wrote code to create an algorithm that combined several categories of individual basketball statistics to determine player effectiveness, including a “points per attempt” statistic. “This class gave me the opportunity to do something I truly enjoyed, and I was able to help my own basketball team in the process!” said Kyle. “Taking this class was a win-win!”

The feedback from Capstone’s end-of-course surveys has been extremely positive, noted Mr. Vegliando. “Students have embraced their freedom to choose their own topics of interest,” he said, “and they’ve embraced the experience of being pushed outside of their academic comfort zones. They liked being able to explore future undertakings, focus on real-world, practical issues, and bring outside interests into the classroom.”

Ostrander Afterschool Program Offers Academic Support

THIS YEAR, OSTRANDER ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS in need of a bit of extra support in Math or English Language Arts (ELA) have a valuable new tool: an afterschool program that is providing targeted academic assistance, based on students' needs.

Seventy-seven students, in Kindergarten through Grade 6, are enrolled in the four-day-a-week program. On Mondays and Tuesdays, students have been brushing up on their ELA/reading skills. On Wednesdays and Thursdays, youngsters have been increasing their proficiency in Math. Some students have been attending all four days, while others have only been coming in on the two days that focus on their particular area of academic need.

Mirroring what is happening in the school this year, the afterschool sessions include a mixture of Special Education and General Education students. "This year, the school has moved to an ICT, or inclusion, model in Kindergarten through Grade 6," explained Principal Natalie Harjes. Under the ICT (Integrated Co-Teaching) approach, a General Education teacher and a Special Education teacher jointly teach a class that includes students both with and without special needs. There are three sections for each grade, and one of those sections is considered the ICT classroom.

On a recent afternoon, Ashley Nordahl (the program's third grade teacher), Amanda Grogan (the ICT teacher for Grades 3 and 4), and Jennifer Ippolito (the English as a New Language teacher who is the program's Grade 4 teacher) peppered the students with questions, which the youngsters answered eagerly.

"This is the first time we've had this type of program," said Mrs. Harjes, who noted that last year, the school only offered online homework help and academic assistance. In contrast to last year's program, where teachers simply acted as facilitators, the new program has teachers giving direct instruction. "Teachers give pre-tests, plan lessons based on student needs, and then give post-tests to monitor their progress, because we are looking at growth," she explained.

The afterschool program's ICT approach, said Mrs. Harjes, is working well. "The teachers are working well as a team, and the students are really benefiting!"



Teachers Amanda Grogan (left) and Ashley Nordahl leading an afterschool lesson aimed at increasing students' proficiency in reading.

Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Wallkill Community,

This issue of *Learning at Wallkill* highlights the balanced approach we take in our District regarding programs we offer to our students. You will find articles with a focus on positive youth development and academics. This approach to learning is preparing our students to have long-term success both in and outside of the classroom. They are acquiring the skills the future workforce is requiring, such as analytic and critical thinking, creativity, problem solving, and emotional intelligence.

Over the next couple of months, we will be developing our 2022-2023 budget with the goals of preserving programs and staying within the tax cap. In May, we will be presenting our budget to the community in preparation for the May 17, 2022 Budget Vote. We are so fortunate to have a community that supports the education we are providing to our students. We will continue to make every effort to improve upon what we are offering students, as well as being fiscally responsible to our taxpayers.

I would like to thank our parents for the high level of participation at our open houses, parent forums, athletic events, and music concerts. Together, we will continue to make our schools the best educational experience for our students. Thank you for your continued support!

Sincerely,

Kevin Castle
Superintendent of Schools

Plattekill Elementary School Students Celebrate National Fire Prevention Week

SIRENS BLARING AND LIGHTS FLASHING, a caravan of emergency vehicles arrived in style at Plattekill Elementary School on October 5. The visitors showed off their life-saving equipment and helped the students learn about fire safety during National Fire Prevention Week (October 3-9).

The students learned about the different kinds of emergency vehicles as well as the firefighters' special equipment, including helmets, hoses, oxygen tanks, self-contained breathing apparatuses, and "jaws of life" (which help rescue people who are trapped inside of crashed vehicles).

They also learned about the importance of planning a home fire escape plan. "A house can be replaced," said Anthony Carubia, a first lieutenant with the Modena Fire Department. "You have to have a plan to get out safely in the event of a fire."

The youngsters also had the opportunity to check out the inside of a fire truck and an ambulance, and to pose for photos with the official mascot of the National Fire Protection Association, a spunky Dalmatian called Sparky.

After visiting with the firefighters and emergency medical technicians (EMTs), the students headed to the gymnasium, which was full of booths and learning stations set up as part of the school's Health and Safety Fair. The activities, which were sponsored by the PTA, included an entertaining Zumba class, a kickboxing experience, a visit from representatives of the Plattekill Public Library, and a lively game that required the players to quickly negotiate a path



Anthony Carubia, a first lieutenant with the Modena Fire Department, talks to Plattekill Elementary School students about fire safety during the school's Health and Safety Fair, which took place during National Fire Prevention Week. Looking on intently, from left to right, are Kindergarten students Gareth Deck, Lukas Nordahl, and Angel Delgado.

through rope "fire ladders" set up on the gym floor. The children could also pick up a number of treats, including fire safety-themed activity books and flying discs emblazoned with "Plattekill Fire & Rescue."

"It was wonderful to go back to an in-person Health and Safety Fair," said Plattekill Principal Monica Hasbrouck, who noted that an in-person event was not possible last year due to COVID-related health and safety concerns. "We started our day with a fire drill where students got to watch the fire trucks come to our school with sirens on," she reported—an experience that led one youngster to exclaim, "That was cool!"

Both the Modena and Plattekill Fire Departments, as well as the PTA, have always been very supportive of Plattekill Elementary School, Mrs. Hasbrouck noted. "We love when Sparky visits. Our students always enjoy this day and walk away with so many free goodies!"



Leo Club Helps Spread Some Warmth

members of Wallkill Senior High School's Leo Club collected 450 pairs of socks for their "Socktober" fundraiser. According to Leo Club Adviser Amanda Murphy, the socks were donated to Fearless! Hudson Valley, an organization that aids local victims of domestic violence and abuse.

Middle School Students Take Advantage of Afterschool Programs

THIS FALL, THE LEARNING—AND THE FUN—DIDN'T STOP ONCE THE REGULAR SCHOOL DAY WAS OVER AT JOHN G. BORDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL. Some students took advantage of an academic afterschool program offering project-based classes and targeted support in Math and English Language Arts. Middle schoolers also had the option of signing up for Co-Rec (co-recreational) sessions, which are being offered quarterly during this academic school year.

One November afternoon, a classroom of young learners brushed up on their graphing skills during a math review session. Meanwhile, in other parts of the school, students immersed themselves in a variety of recreational activities, including watching a showing of the holiday classic, *Home Alone*.

In the Library Media Center, students worked in teams to solve “Escape Room” challenges. “We’re trying to break into a box to get candy,” said Grade 8 student Landyn Pietras. “We have to open the locks by solving puzzles on paper or on a tablet. It’s fun!”

In the Technology classroom, Grade 8 student Landon Baldwin chose to make a foam car, one of several options offered in the technology session that day. “I like technology, and I like making stuff,” he said. Other students chose projects involving Legos, wood-burning, educational robots, or 3-D printing.

Stringing together beads during a jewelry-making class, Grade 7 student Vanessa Goll explained why she signed up for the Co-Rec. “I thought it would be a fun thing to do with my friends after school,” she said. “I normally just take the bus home.”

According to Middle School Principal Nick Pantaleone, both the academic afterschool program and the Co-Rec programs are especially welcome in light of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted in-person schooling and extra-curricular opportunities. “The students are so happy to be back at school, having fun, learning, and sharing experiences with their friends and teachers,” he said.



Middle School students (from left to right) Owen D'Amico, Joseph Davis, and Cameron McKenzie participating in a Co-Rec class focusing on technology.



Grade 8 students Emily Miller and Sarah Wohlrab sharpening their Math skills as teacher Colleen Keesler looks on.

COVID-19 Rapid Tests Distributed to Wallkill Students

Ulster BOCES Building Maintenance Supervisor Victor DeStefano (left) and Steve Rossi, a Building Maintenance Leader from the Wallkill Central School District, worked together to load a truck with rapid COVID-19 tests, which were distributed to Wallkill schools. New York State provided the tests in an effort to help minimize in-school spread and to support school districts' ability to continue in-person learning.



Wallkill Training is Giving Educators More Tools for Teaching During a Pandemic

THIS YEAR, WALLKILL TEACHERS AND STAFF AT THE ELEMENTARY, MIDDLE, AND HIGH SCHOOLS

have been receiving training on how to better educate all of their students, including ones who may be dealing with problems that are not readily visible. Such “invisible” problems, which can hinder a child’s ability to learn, can run the gamut from anxiety to abuse, depression to divorce, bullying to a host of pandemic-related stresses.

Working with Dr. Matt Maher of Kingston, a mental health counselor specializing in trauma and crisis intervention, the educators have been learning about teaching techniques and strategies they can use during a time when education has been deeply impacted by COVID-19.

A recent professional development session for Middle and High School staff, held in December, kicked off with Dr. Maher having the participants view the Adverse Childhood Experience (ACE) questionnaire, which asks about any negative events that may have occurred during the first 18 years of one’s life. “The point of the exercise,” explained John G. Borden Middle School Principal Nick Pantaleone, “was to demonstrate how toxic stresses can impact children and their educational development.”

Earlier in the school year, he added, Middle and High School staff had come together to watch a powerful documentary, *Resilience: The Biology of Stress and the Science of Hope*. The film viewing was the beginning of an ongoing collaboration between High School and Middle School staff focusing on becoming trauma-informed.

After discussing the ACE questionnaire,

Dr. Maher gave what he called a “fireside chat” about how COVID-19 has affected the mental health of children and adults alike. “The last few years have put everyone—adults, children, caregivers, teachers, parents—under a significant amount of stress, and long-term stress has the exact same effects as trauma,” he declared.

Building resilience, in students as well as educators, was next on Dr. Maher’s presentation agenda. “Resilience is the idea that we can withstand these pressures,” he said. Among the resilience-building

strategies he recommended for the Middle School/High School level was having teachers perform what he called “targeted check-ins” with their students each morning. “Don’t just ask students how they are doing,” he said. “Ask them about sleep, ask them about anxiety, depression, hunger.

Ask them if they feel supported, if they have enough people looking out for them.”

Pairing each student with a “buddy” is another beneficial strategy, Dr. Maher suggested. Under this system, a student regularly checks in with his or her buddy to make sure they are not struggling. He also encouraged teachers to check on the well-being of their own colleagues, who have been under extraordinary pressure since the onset of the pandemic.

Carrying out “mindfulness” activities with students is another useful strategy, said Dr. Maher. “Get them to focus on what is here and now, rather than worrying about the past or being anxious about the future,” he counseled.



During a December professional development session, teachers and staff from the Middle School and Senior High School brainstormed ideas for addressing some of the challenges presented by the pandemic.

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Wallkill Training is Giving Educators More Tools for Teaching During a Pandemic

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After listening to a presentation by a mental health counselor, teachers and staff from the Middle School and Senior High School discussed effective teaching techniques and strategies.

Dr. Maher's presentation also focused on the importance of teaching classroom routines, like taking notes in class and writing down homework assignments. COVID-related burnout and trauma, he suggested, have affected some students' ability to carry out these routine skills, which are crucial to their academic success.

Creating staggered assignments is another way teachers can help students get back on track academically, he suggested. For a research paper, for example, students would be given a period of time to conduct research, and then be given a series of sequential deadlines to submit a hypothesis, hand in a rough draft, and turn in the finished paper.

Dr. Maher also invited the participants to share strategies that they utilize in their own lives or in their classrooms. The classroom activities, which were displayed on a screen, ranged from having a confidential comment box in the classroom, to taking classes outdoors for walks, to making sure to "check-in" with each student every day, providing plenty of positive feedback, and having the students keep journals. Gardening, yoga, listening to music, and reading for pleasure were some of the many ways the workshop attendees said they themselves decompress after work.

The participants then broke into breakout sessions, where they talked about activities that had worked well for them in their own teaching, and brainstormed additional ideas that might help them become more effective educators.

Speaking about the trainings shared by the Middle and High School staff, Principal Pantaleone talked about the value of having Wallkill professionals collaborating across buildings. "It's important for us to come together to share resources and come up with ideas and best practices we can implement to better educate all of our students," he said. "As a learning community, we firmly believe that together, we can make a difference."



Middle School Panthers "Rise Above!"

middle School students Emilie Boyd and Isabella Guerra show off an artistic display entitled "Wallkill Panthers Rise Above," which holds a place of honor in the school's front hallway. Grade 7 students in Leanne Cerbone's Art classes used the "zentangle" technique to create each balloon. According to Mrs. Cerbone, "Zentangle is a form of artistic meditation using patterns and designs. It is part of mindfulness and being in the moment, to focus and be creative. The students can take pictures of themselves holding the balloons. The mural is designed to encourage students to uplift themselves and one another."



Wallkill Central School District

Office of Educational Services

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www.wallkillcsd.k12.ny.us

Leptondale Elementary School Holds a Boo Bash

It was a boo-tiful day for a pre-Halloween celebration at Leptondale Elementary School on October 22, as children, parents, and staff celebrated the season with creative costumes, spooky music, and trunks full of treats. During the school's annual Boo Bash, the campus was transformed by a parade of fanciful creatures, including witches, dinosaurs, fairies, and superheroes, who happily gathered treats from the back of cars and trucks that had been decorated with cobwebs, skeletons, cauldrons, and much more. There was even a pirate ship, piloted by Captain Snack Sparrow (also known as Leptondale parent Saul Nieves), who invited the brave youngsters to walk the plank, past menacing sharks, to claim their pieces of treasure.

The event, said Leptondale Principal Scott Brown, was a rousing success. "We're so grateful to the Parent Teacher Organization, which organized the festivities," he said. "The Boo Bash really tapped into the excitement that our students were feeling as Halloween was approaching, and channeled it into a fun, safe, family-friendly event."



Grade 1 student Sanaa Knott dressed up as a cat for Leptondale Elementary School's Boo Bash event.

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Important Telephone Numbers to Know

Leptondale Elementary School.....895-7200

Clare F. Ostrander Elementary School..... 895-7225

Plattekill Elementary School..... 895-7250

John G. Borden Middle School 895-7175

Wallkill Senior High School.....895-7150