



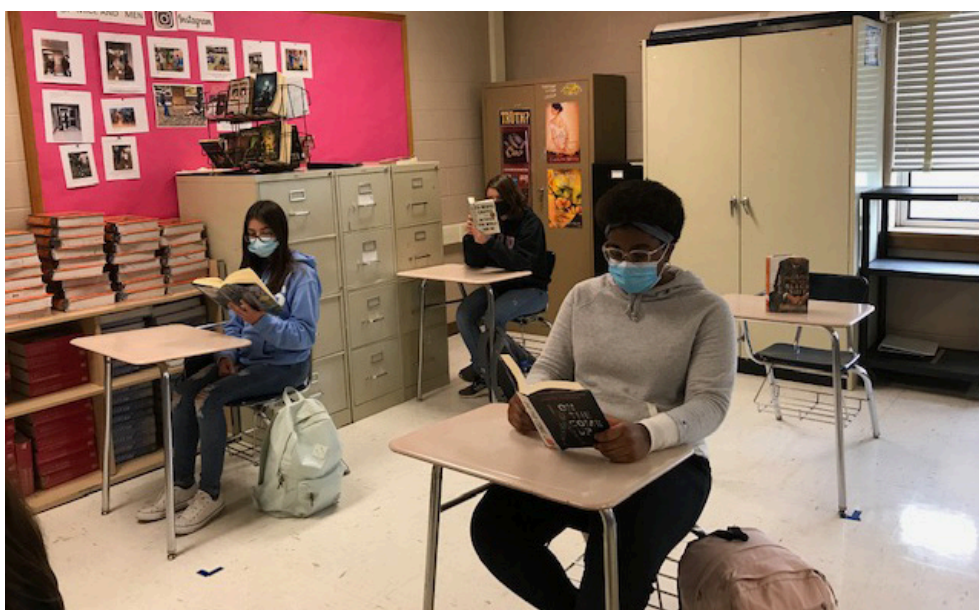
Wallkill Senior High School Committee Aims to Ensure Equity for All Students

THE WALLKILL CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT is committed to making sure that all of its students have an equal chance of succeeding both inside and outside of school. That's why the District asked each school to establish an Equity Committee.

The Equity Committee at Wallkill Senior High School (WSHS), which is composed of staff members as well as a representative from Ulster BOCES, began meeting in September.

The Committee has established a scope of work that includes data analyses; trainings on implicit biases; revisions of the English and Social Studies curricula; strategic partnerships; and an examination (through an equity lens) of everything from recruitment policies to special education services, social and emotional learning to restorative justice practices.

School Counselor Voleile Derisse, one of the Committee's 12 members, was eager to support its mission. "As a black male faculty member, I thought it would be a good idea to join the Committee so that I could offer a different perspective, share some of my experiences, and be the voice of



Grade 10 students in Karen DeKoskie's English class reading.

students who may feel disenfranchised," he said.

Nicole Rivera, who teaches English as New Language (ENL), believes the Committee has an important role to play. "I see a lot of opportunities for the District to better foster equity and further narrow the achievement gap," she said. "I hope this committee can bring about reforms that are not only best practices, but are also essential for my students—and all students—to be successful in the classroom and beyond."

"Regardless of a student's cultural background, language, abilities, or socioeconomic status," Ms. Rivera continued, "learning should be accessible and meaningful."

The Equity Committee is also looking closely at what kinds of books students are being asked to read in their English classes. "We are working on realigning the English curriculum to make it more inclusive," Principal Joseph Salamone said. "We need to provide students with mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors—so they can see themselves mirrored

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in books, read literature that offers a window to the world outside of Wallkill, and feel empowered to enter any world they see with confidence.”

Committee member Karen DeKoskie, an English teacher, noted that members of her department participated in a professional learning series at Ulster BOCES last year focusing on “Culturally Relevant Pedagogy.” That training, led by Dr. Jevon Hunter from SUNY Buffalo State College, is informing the Committee’s curriculum work. “After our learning series with Dr. Hunter, the English Department and members of the Special Education Department began collaborating to examine and reshape our English curriculum in Grades 9-12,” Mrs. DeKoskie recalled. “In addition, our Library Media Specialist, Libbie Werlau, participated by offering her expertise about resources.”

Work on the English curriculum is ongoing, said Mrs. DeKoskie. “As we revise the curriculum, the extended English Department has been able to work with Dr. Hunter and his colleague, Dr. Jim Cercone. Working in grade-level teams, we are reimagining our learning units. Our goal is to create opportunities that allow different voices and ideas to circulate in our English classrooms,” she said.

Social Studies teacher David DerCola is eager to help revamp his own department’s curriculum. “Coming from the Social Studies Department and specifically teaching U.S. History and Government, I feel that we need to make sure we are covering the material in a way that helps all students better understand the struggles of our country when it comes to race and equality,” he said. At the same

time, Mr. DerCola said, “We need to convey a message of hope and optimism that we all can make our school and our country a better place simply by demonstrating empathy and understanding for one another. We also need to convey the impact that just one individual can have on any group or society.

These students, with proper guidance, can go on to be true leaders for the changes needed for a better tomorrow.”

One of the Committee’s first activities was reading *Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools* (by Glenn E. Singleton), which provided a framework for conducting conversations about race and equity. The book’s author told readers to expect to feel some degree of discomfort, according to Ulster BOCES Youth Development Coordinator Joakim Lartey. “The author also asked readers to stay engaged, to speak their truth, and to expect

and accept a lack of closure or resolution in these conversations,” Mr. Lartey said.

Also on the Committee’s agenda is a study of *Blind Spot: Hidden Biases of Good People* (by Mahzarin Banaji and Anthony Greenwald). The readings, explained Mr. Salamone, are expected to guide difficult discussions, including how factors like race, gender, economic status, and other factors can impact equity in schools. Eventually, all Wallkill teachers will be trained to facilitate these kinds of discussions within their classrooms. “We believe that having these conversations will make school more engaging and help bring about change that needs to happen,” Mr. Salamone said.



A sampling of novels being considered for newly developed English units of study.

Middle School Helps Students Manage Stress, Develop Resilience

THE PAST YEAR HAS BEEN A STRESSFUL ONE FOR MANY OF US, INCLUDING STUDENTS AT JOHN G. BORDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL.

The pandemic has added stressors to the lives of youngsters who may already be worrying about grades, testing, and family and social issues.

Luckily, the Middle School is doing its part to help. "We're committed to

working to enhance our students' social and emotional well-being as well as their academic success," explained Middle School Principal Marjorie Anderson. In January, she said, the school introduced a learning unit that aims to help students to manage and reduce their stress and anxiety levels. Overseeing the program are Prevention Social Worker Sandi Hecht and Dean of Students Craig Ramsay.

Kicking off the program, all Middle School students viewed a 20-minute video that helped guide them through proven strategies to mitigate unhealthy stress. Among these strategies are developing time-management skills, practicing relaxation and meditation techniques, and adopting healthy habits like exercising daily, getting enough sleep, eating nutritious foods, and staying connected to others. After viewing the video, students participated in class discussions, where they talked about the signs and symptoms of stress and anxiety, shared what kinds of things they find stressful, and explored new coping strategies.

Ms. Hecht has also created a take-home calendar, which includes a month's worth of stress-reducing strategies and activities. "We hope this whole-school lesson and follow-up activities will allow students to develop new skills that will help during these difficult times," she explained.

Mr. Ramsay is continuing to teach the students about the importance of building resilience, which is a key component to handling setbacks and addressing challenges head-on. "Our overall goal is to help kids manage the curve balls that life will inevitably throw at them," he said.

"We'll be following up the stress-reduction work with virtual school assemblies that will focus on social emotional learning," said Ms. Hecht.



Prevention Social Worker Sandi Hecht (left) and Dean of Students Craig Ramsay are overseeing the new Middle School program.

Dear Wallkill Community,

It is hard to believe we have completed the first five months of this unprecedented school year. We began the year using a remote learning model, shifted to in-person learning in October, and since then have implemented a combination of both. I am so proud of our students, parents, faculty, staff, administrators, and Board of Education members, all of whom have shown tremendous resilience and persistence during this pandemic.

This issue of *Learning at Wallkill* highlights the wonderful programs and learning opportunities taking place in our hybrid learning environment. We will continue to approach each day with a positive attitude and a growth mindset. In doing so, we will not allow the pandemic to defeat us. I have hope that things will get better and we will once again be able to welcome our students back at full capacity. We are looking forward to that time!

Thank you for your continued patience with us. You truly have been a great partner during this "wild" ride.

Stay Panther Strong!

Sincerely,



Kevin Castle,
Superintendent of Schools

Leptondale Students Collaborate on Weekly Newscasts



Leptondale newscasters Kendra Devincenzi (left) and Emma Randolph.

THE SHOW MUST GO ON! That seems to be the philosophy of Leptondale Elementary School students, who are continuing their weekly newscasts, despite the challenges posed by COVID-19. The news programs, created by students in Grades 5 and 6, are being broadcast virtually on Fridays. They're also being recorded and posted on YouTube, with the links being sent out by teachers to all students.

According to Leptondale Principal Scott Brown, "The students' broadcasts are not only sharing important information about things like birthdays, school schedules, and PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) expectations, but are also promoting kindness and inclusiveness." The broadcasts also provide a way to reach all Leptondale students and to give them a sense of consistency and normalcy. "We really want to make sure our students are feeling good about themselves, and we are making positive connections," he concluded.

A recent broadcast featured interviews with two members of the District's Math League, a suggestion to donate to local food pantries, a reminder about an upcoming school break, and tips for maintaining a positive attitude.

"The volunteer newscasters write their own scripts and narratives, and then film themselves, either at home or in front of a green screen located in a studio at the school," explained Intervention Specialist Anita Hoyt, who advises the young broadcast journalists.

This year's broadcasts feature segments about kindness. Mrs. Hoyt proposed two names for these segments, and the journalists decided on KSWM, which stands for Kindness Starts With Me. "The students quickly embraced the idea that even a small act of kindness could help put a smile on someone's face and make students feel like they belong," she said.

Also lending a hand in this endeavor is Stephen Cabarcas, the District's Library Media Technology Integration Specialist, who compiles the segments.

To view the newscasts, please visit the following link: <https://bit.ly/Newscasts> and click on Leptondale/WPAWS.

Sounds of the Season

This winter, it wasn't possible for our students to show off their musical talents at in-person concerts. But that didn't stop the music!

Whether they were attending school in person or were learning remotely, our student musicians practiced diligently for their winter "virtual" concerts, which are posted on the District website (Select your child's school from the drop-down menu). You can also enjoy the sounds of the season by visiting the following links:

Wallkill Senior High School Winter Concert

<https://youtu.be/inRNcS8GyCQ>

Middle School Winter Concert

<https://youtu.be/eRKXJbQX67o>

Leptondale Winter Concert

https://youtu.be/s_QnRk29qb0

Ostrander Elementary School

<https://youtu.be/7W8wVzZHY2k>

Plattekill Elementary School

<https://youtu.be/Y0xIN-AUm2w>



Grade 5 Ostrander student Austin Romano practicing his cello in preparation for his school's Winter Concert.

Pandemic Prompts Plattekill to Re-imagine Fire Safety Week

IN PAST YEARS, PLATTEKILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENTS

would eagerly anticipate a visit from firefighters during National Fire Prevention Week. Arriving in their trucks with sirens blaring and lights flashing, the firefighters would show off their life-saving equipment and teach the children about fire safety.

But this year was different, due to the pandemic. "Instead of having the firefighters visit the school, the students were able to virtually visit a real firehouse," said Wallkill Intervention Specialist Lori Williams, who spearheaded the creation of a video taped at Plattekill Fire Department's Station 1.

The video, *Cubby Visits the Firehouse*, was made with assistance from Plattekill firefighter Chris Mancuso, NYS Trooper Ryan Benincasa, and Sparky, the Fire Department's mascot. Also lending a hand were Teaching Assistants Sol Hernandez and Karen Lillo.

During their tour, the students learned about emergency vehicles as well as special firefighting equipment, including helmets, hoses, and "jaws of life."

Firefighter Mancuso reviewed various safety

procedures, including checking home smoke detectors every six months, remembering to "stop, drop, and roll" in the event your clothes are on fire, and calling 911 as soon as it is safe to do so.



Fire safety was the theme of a video taped at Plattekill Fire Department's Station 1 this fall.

Trooper Benincasa urged the students to not be afraid of firefighters, policemen, or emergency medical technicians (EMTs) who are responding to a fire or other emergency. "They're here to help when you call 911!" he explained.

As the tour was coming to an end, the students got to see firefighters pile into a fire engine to respond to a real 911 call.

Plattekill Principal Monica Hasbrouck explained that *Cubby Visits the Firehouse* was a group effort. "During these

unprecedented times, it is important to be creative and think outside of the box," she said, adding that she was delighted when the Plattekill Fire House agreed to collaborate on the educational video.

The videotaped tour was a hit with the students, Mrs. Hasbrouck added. "They requested to watch it more than once!"

To view the video, please visit <https://video.link/w/1V6rb>.

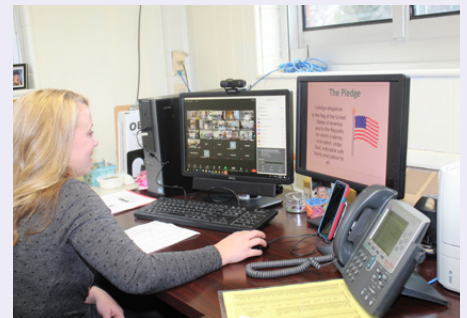
Good Morning, Ostrander Elementary School!

The morning announcements are just one of the many things that have received a makeover at Ostrander Elementary School this year due to COVID-19. While in the past announcements were simply read over the loudspeaker and broadcast into individual classrooms, these days they are delivered virtually by Principal Natalie Harjes (right) to an audience that includes remote as well as in-person learners.

"The change is providing me with an opportunity to connect with all the students, whether they are at home or at school," Mrs. Harjes said.

To start their school days, students log onto an interactive webpage on the District website. Mrs. Harjes greets individual students and various classrooms with waves and smiles as their pictures show up on her computer screen. She leads them in the Pledge of Allegiance, conveys birthday greetings, reminds students whether it is an A or a B Team Day, shares any "breaking" news, and in general sets a positive tone for the day ahead.

"During a time when students are separated by social distancing, remote learning, and masks, our new morning ritual is helping to bring the Ostrander community together," said Mrs. Harjes.



Wallkill High School Students to Attend Puerto Rican/Hispanic Youth Leadership Institute

FIVE WALLKILL SENIOR HIGH SCHOOL (WSHS) STUDENTS—Alexandra Avila, Hector Cedenó, Jennifer Marquez, Abbysai Sanchez Soto, and Zohal Sanchez Soto—have been selected to attend the Puerto Rican/Hispanic Youth Leadership Institute (PR/HYLI). The event, which will be held virtually, will take place March 13-14.

“We’re really proud of our students who were accepted into this program,” said Principal Joseph Salomone, who credited English as a New Language (ENL) teacher Nicole Rivera and Assistant Principal and Athletic Director B.J. Masopust with helping to guide the students through the application process.

Prior to the event, the students will participate in training sessions aimed at honing their leadership, advocacy, public speaking, and essay-writing skills. During the two days of the Institute itself, students will have the opportunity to debate bills within the New York State Assembly Chambers while assuming the roles of New York State legislators.

The accepted students, who are eagerly anticipating the upcoming Institute, gave various reasons for applying.

“I hope to learn more about legislation, to make new connections, and to improve my leadership and public speaking skills,” explained Grade 11 student Alexandra Avila. As a bilingual Latina, she said, she may be able to help give a “voice” to other members of the Hispanic community. “Helping others become more aware of the issues that Latinos face in our society, and advocating for having Latino representation in politics, is important to me,” she said.

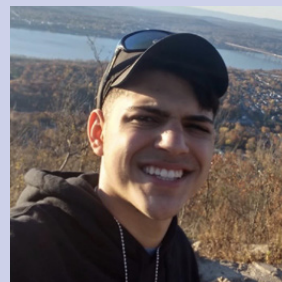
Grade 11 student Jennifer Marquez sees the program as an opportunity to bring about change and to speak out on behalf of other Hispanics. “I also wanted to prove to people that we Hispanics can make a difference and be someone in life,” she said. “Being Hispanic, I feel it is important for me to do my part in the world and become someone. I hope to help create a community where we can speak up and make a difference.”

Abbysai Sanchez Soto, a Grade 11 student, says he is looking forward to meeting new people, sharpening his leadership skills, and participating in new experiences. “I hope to advocate by presenting the beautiful people of my island, Puerto Rico, and most of all, the people I love,” he said.

Zohal Sanchez Soto, a senior, hopes the program will help her to develop her leadership skills. She is proud of her Puerto Rican heritage. “God gave me the privilege to be Latina,” she declared. “I hope to advocate by representing my Puerto Rican roots.”

Grade 12 student Hector Cedenó sees PR/HYLI as a unique opportunity to develop his skills and expand his knowledge. “With this program, I hope to further sharpen my leadership skills as well as build connections among educators, business leaders, and other students,” he said. “I also aim to better develop an in-depth knowledge of the State legislative process.” Hector is proud of being Hispanic. “Not only do I want to inspire other Hispanics and prove to them anything is possible, I, along with my fellow PR/HYLI members, hope to positively advocate for them as well as help make Hispanics a bigger part of our community,” he said.

For more information about the PR/HYLI program, please visit <https://prhyli.org/>.



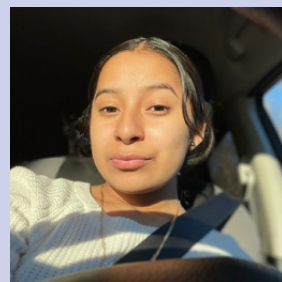
Abbysai Sanchez Soto



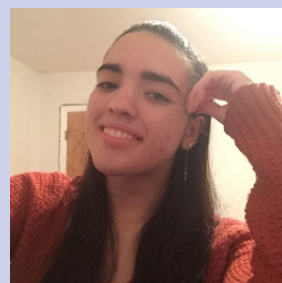
Alexandra Avila



Hector Cedenó



Jennifer Marquez



Zohal Sanchez Soto

Middle School Library Revamps Procedures

WALLKILL SCHOOLS ARE OPERATING A BIT DIFFERENTLY THIS YEAR—and that includes the District’s library media centers, which have changed their protocols and procedures so they can get books into the hands of students despite the pandemic.

At John G. Borden Middle School, for example, Library Media Specialist Debra Rosenfeld is leading a team that is safely delivering books to students who are learning remotely, as well as those who are participating in the hybrid method of instruction (a combination of remote and in-person learning).

Assisting Ms. Rosenfeld are Secretary Trisha Richner, who is addressing packages of books requested by remote learners, and Security Officer Peter Shea, who is making home deliveries. Also pitching in are two Sesame Street characters, Cookie Monster and Oscar the Grouch, who provided the inspiration for the book-return receptacles located in the cafeteria. “The kids love to get books,” observed Mr. Shea. “Sometimes I say I’m bringing a care package from the Wallkill Central School District.”

“It’s nice for families whose children are learning remotely to see that people here are thinking of them,” added Ms. Richner. “It’s different than just seeing someone on a computer screen.”

Safety is of paramount concern. Library staff use

gloves or hand sanitizer while handling books. Once items are returned, they are stored on wire racks for a minimum of three days. When removed from quarantine, materials are disinfected with Clorox wipes or UV light before being returned to shelves.



Library Media Specialist Debra Rosenfeld demonstrating the library's book-return system.

All students can request print books online, using the District’s online circulation system. Students who are in the school building can also check out books during one of Ms. Rosenfeld’s classroom visits, when she arrives with a cart filled with books. She also makes book deliveries during lunch periods.

To pique the readers’ interest, Ms. Rosenfeld is conducting virtual and in-person “book talks.” Some of the talks are being recorded, while others are being broadcast

“live” from classrooms. “The book talks are great, because some students may have a favorite hobby or other interest that they don’t realize may be the subject of a novel,” she said.

Principal Marjorie Anderson is excited about how well the new procedures are working. “It’s important for all our students, including the ones who are learning remotely, to have access to real books, not just materials they read on their computer screens,” she said. “We know that reading is at the heart of education!”



Elementary School Artists Capture the Essence of Winter

The weather outside may be frightful, but the art being made in Wallkill’s elementary schools is certainly delightful! Art teacher Kristen Phillips reports that her Grade 1 students recently used watercolors and Sharpie pens to make collages of polar bears, looking at the work of Canadian artist Ted Harrison for inspiration. They also created wintry trees as part of a color study of primary-to-secondary colors. Pictured is artist Elliana Curnan, a student in Kailin Stey’s class at Plattekill Elementary School.



Wallkill Central School District

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Online Kindergarten Registration

If you have a child or children who will be enrolling in Kindergarten next fall, now is the time to register them. To register, parents or guardians should visit <https://www.wallkillcsd.k12.ny.us/registration> and complete the online forms.

Children who turn five on or before December 1, 2021 are eligible to enroll in Kindergarten beginning in September 2021. If you need assistance or have any questions, please contact the Registrar at 845-895-7105.

Pictured is Leptondale Kindergarten student Broddy Stoner.



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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