



Bulletin Board

Middle Country Central School District

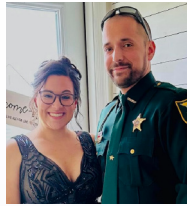
ISSUE VIII OF DISTRICT HIGHLIGHTS

CELEBRATING OUR STUDENTS' ACHIEVEMENTS

This edition of the Middle Country Central School District Bulletin Board features the impressive achievements of our students. These stories display the fruits of our students' hard work and dedication to their studies and extracurricular pursuits throughout the school year. Whether our students are conducting research projects; participating in group community service efforts; competing in robotics, science and athletics competitions; or shining at arts and music festivals, our students never fail to amaze us.

Our Middle Country alumni, too, are individuals who continue to provide service and give back to their community. Some of our graduates provide service to our country in the military, while others have remained in the community to work here in the District. Their successful and diverse careers are a testament to the educational foundation that the Middle Country School District has provided them over the years and our mission statement to build good character in our students. To add to the accomplishments, our newest cohort of graduates, the Class of 2023, was awarded \$7.8 million in scholarship funds, which enables them to pursue their career paths.

Thomas Alejo, Newfield High School Class of 2008



After graduating from Newfield High School in 2008, Thomas Alejo joined the Marine Corps, where he was deployed to Afghanistan in 2009 and again in 2010 on the 31st Marine Expeditionary Unit. He married his high school sweetheart, Michelle Leavens, who also graduated from Newfield High School as part of the Class of 2008. They now have four children. Mr. Alejo separated from the Marine Corps in 2015 to pursue a degree at the Law Enforcement Academy in Florida. He spent a few years on patrol as a Deputy Sheriff, and is now a detective for the Lee County Sheriff's Office Special Victims Unit. His wife also works for the Lee County Sheriff's Office in community outreach.

Vanessa Williams, Centereach High School Class of 1995



Vanessa Williams earned her bachelor's degree from Winthrop University in South Carolina after graduating high school, and later earned a master's degree at Adelphi University and a project leader dual certification from St. John's University. Ms. Williams recently joined the West Islip School District as the new principal of Manetuck Elementary School, after serving as an assistant principal in the Riverhead School District since 2017, and earlier working as a literacy coach and elementary teacher. A 2014 honoree of the SCOPE Teacher Service Award, she recently served as the guest speaker for the Centereach High School Black History Month program, where one of her three daughters, who is the Black History Club president, introduced her.

Dr. Harold Goldstein, Newfield High School Class of 1999



Dr. Harold Goldstein is in his 20th year as a music teacher at the very same school he graduated from, and serves as the band director. He leads the Newfield High School Wind Ensemble, Symphonic Band, Musical Pit Orchestra, and co-directs the Jazz Band, Pep Band, and World Drumming Club. Dr. Goldstein earned a Doctor of Musical Arts degree from Boston University in 2013 and bachelor's and master's degrees while studying music education at the Crane School of Music in SUNY Potsdam. He remains very involved in the music community, performing in the Atlantic Wind Symphony, conducting the SCMEA All-County Band, and serving as a NYSSMA adjudicator, co-chair of the NYSCAME/SCMEA Band, chairperson of the NYSSMA All-State Band, and chair of the MCPL Island Idol.

In this newsletter, we have provided you with examples of achievements of Middle Country students. For more information about our students' achievements, scan the following QR code or visit mccsd.net/bulletinboards.



Elementary-Level Student Achievements

Literacy/Humanities Expo and STEM Celebration

To celebrate the outstanding literacy and STEM accomplishments of elementary students across the Middle Country School District's two kindergarten centers and eight elementary schools, Middle Country holds annual Literacy/Humanities Expo and STEM Celebrations. These events involve over a thousand participants, including educators, students, parents/guardians, and community members. These events stand as a popular tribute to the talents of our youngest authors, historians, geographers, scientists, mathematicians, and engineers. In addition to showcasing the work of our students, these community events include a diverse array of interactive activities and presentations by experts in their field. Students also have the opportunity to compete in literary contests and to participate in collaborative engineering and design challenges which are made possible by faculty and student volunteers. In our 9th year of showcasing student achievement in literacy, we have expanded the Literacy Expo to the Humanities Expo to reflect the interdisciplinary nature of the elementary program. We are also excited to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the STEM Celebration where students' creativity is activated as they design solutions to real-world problems in alignment with their *National Geographic* science units. The Humanities Expo will be held on Monday, March 25th and the STEM Celebration on Monday, May 20th.



Character Education: Citizenship Service Projects

Each year, our Middle Country fifth graders lead a school-wide Citizenship Project in their own buildings. This gives them an opportunity to demonstrate the leadership qualities that we discuss during our weekly Character Education lessons. The students are expected to lead the entire project from start to finish. They start by creating posters to display around the school, and then they make regular morning announcements to explain their projects, garner support, and encourage participation. The fifth graders are responsible for sorting and organizing the collections as they come in. Students also prepare scripts and speeches for various speaking engagements related to their projects. The service projects that are currently being conducted across the District include the Soles for Souls Shoe Drive at Jericho Elementary School;

Birthday Boxes at Oxhead Road Elementary School; Ronald McDonald House Charities Craft-in-a-Bag at New Lane Elementary School; Ronald McDonald House Game Collection at Hawkins Path Elementary School; Cohen's Children's Hospital Toy Drive at North Coleman Road Elementary School; Save-a-Pet Supply Drive at Stagecoach Elementary School; Book Drive at Holbrook Road Elementary School; and Ronald McDonald House Charity Toiletry Collection at Eugene Auer Elementary School.

Holbrook Road Junior Leaders

The goal of the junior leaders of Holbrook Road is to raise awareness of important issues, inspire others, and hold charity events. This year, our junior leaders wrote letters to veterans and created a lobby display for Veterans Day. They also produced Kwanzaa, Hanukkah, and Christmas crafts, as well as cards for residents at two local assisted living homes. Our junior leaders are also in charge of the diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) Bulletin Board at Holbrook Road, and recently created a display which involved students researching games from around the world. Currently, our junior leaders are making finger puppets, cards, and painting inspirational messages on rocks to give to children with cancer in local hospitals. Our hope is that our junior leaders continue this work long after they leave Holbrook Road.



Middle School-Level Student Achievements

National History Day Symposium

Select students at Dawnwood and Selden middle schools presented their research projects to an audience of visitors, including teachers, administrators, and members of the Board of Education, as part of our National History Day Symposium in each school. Participants were chosen by their social studies teachers for their level of dedication to and the uniqueness of their research projects. Projects reflected the theme of “Turning Points in History.” Project formats



included websites, presentations, and papers—each a product of extensive historical research. These projects are part of the District’s Capstone Research Initiative. Participants will earn credit towards the Seal of Civic Readiness. A number of students will continue to work with their National History Day advisors to hone their projects for Long Island History Day at Hofstra University in March.



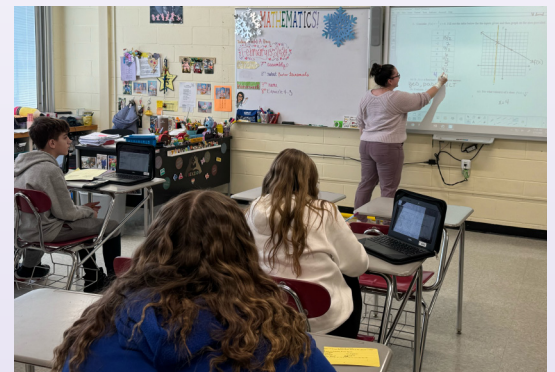
Best Buddies

The Middle Country Best Buddies program shows us all that we can be successful and have fun when we work together. Best Buddies is an organization that creates opportunities for one-to-one friendships, integrated employment, and leadership development for people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. The goal of the Best Buddies Clubs at Selden and Dawnwood middle schools is to help

our “Buddies” meet new people, make friends, share new experiences, and be an important part of the middle school community. At Selden Middle School, club members took part in a quiet bingo activity and interacted with the girls’ soccer and kickline teams. The student-athletes demonstrated their sports skills, taught our Buddies and mentors soccer moves and dance techniques, played games with them, and overall, had fun together. Club members also teamed up to build a device that could catch a raw egg without it breaking, and worked together on creations made from Legos. At Dawnwood Middle School, the Best Buddies Club has been meeting with their Buddies in the PRAISE program after school one or two times a month. They took part in a Halloween pumpkin craft and candy contest, a Thanksgiving turkey art project, a tie-dye snowflakes craft, a friendship bracelets activity, sing-along and dance activities, board games and puzzle time. The members also explored a sensory room, and earlier in the year during warmer weather, enjoyed outdoor activities like basketball and running races. Our Buddies continue to embody the tenets of our mission statement in providing service to the community.

Universal Algebra and Living Environment

Our universal Algebra program is structured so that students learn additional content and problem-solving skills in grades 6 and 7 in order to succeed on the Algebra I Regents at the end of grade 8. By having students start high school with credits, we enable our students to have access to upper level math courses in their junior and senior years; as such, students are more likely to remain on track for graduation. Our middle school students outscore their peers at both the state and county levels, indicating the success of our program. Additionally, our spiraled science curriculum provides students with content and skills needed for successful completion of the Living Environment in 8th grade. Throughout the course, students have the opportunity to complete laboratory investigations where they learn about structure and function of beaks of finches, diffusion through a membrane, and so much more. Upon entering high school, students have the option of choosing from a variety of courses, including AP courses, in advance of their senior year.



BOARD OF EDUCATION

Dawn Sharrock, *President*
Robert Feeney, *Vice President*

TRUSTEES

Arlene Barresi Robert Hallock
John DeBenedetto Deborah Mann-Rodriguez
Doreen Feldmann Kathleen Walsh
Denise Haggerty

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Roberta A. Gerold

Non-Profit
Organization
U.S. POSTAGE
PAID
Permit No. 04
Centereach, NY

ECRWSS

POSTAL CUSTOMER

High School-Level Student Achievements

Unified Basketball

The Middle Country Unified Basketball program is a shining example of an initiative that fosters positive relationships and a sense of community within the District. Unified Basketball welcomes general education and special education student-athletes to compete in friendly games of basketball. The program helps to break down stereotypes about people with intellectual disabilities and promotes social inclusion, friendship, and understanding. Our Unified Basketball team holds practice two to three times per week and competes against other schools in an effort to win a playoff spot. Our team was crowned the Suffolk County Champions last spring! Our coaches teach our special education and general education students how to work as a team and take home the win.



The High School Capstone Experience



The Middle Country Capstone Experience is a demonstration of students' research skills through an inquiry-based learning process. A part of the District's curriculum since the 2014-2015 school year, the Capstone Experience is designed to prepare students to research answers to questions that interest them. The skills acquired throughout the process support student success in all of their classes, like Public Speaking, and establish a foundation for their future careers. Middle Country is the only Long Island school district that requires the completion of a Capstone Project for graduation. Students independently determine the path for their own culminating Capstone Experience which includes access to a vast

array of courses that require extensive research around a topic of student interest. Capstone courses include Advanced Photography, Entrepreneurship, Cosmetology, College Statistics, Science Research, Leadership, and Robotics, and more. Students also have the opportunity to work independently with a Capstone Advisor or Library Media Specialist to develop their projects. These projects are showcased in a variety of ways, including in-class presentations and competitive performances.

Athletics Achievement

The Middle Country Central School District hosted a successful National Letter of Intent Signing Day on November 15. Our 2023-2024 college-bound athletes proudly committed to the top colleges and universities of their choice to continue their sports careers on athletic and academic scholarships. During the ceremony, the group of students were thrilled as they announced their commitments and excitement in moving up to participate in their chosen sport on the collegiate level. Their achievements are a strong testament to our student-athletes' dedication to their passions, their studies, and their future. Additionally, \$1.1 million dollars in academic/athletic scholarship money has been earned by Middle Country student athletes so far this year.



Student Achievements Continued

Arts Achievements

Dawnwood Middle School sixth grade student Brielle Badum recently won first place in the AFAF International Music Competition “Golden Voices Of America!” Brielle competed against 4,000 others for this win, and as a result, sang at Carnegie Hall in March.

Centereach High School seniors Alessandra Cesa and Nadine Torillo were named Long Island Scholar Artist/Merit Recipients. Alessandra has been recognized as a Long Island Scholar Artist in Media Arts, and Nadine has been recognized as a Long Island Merit Scholar Artist in Music. Each year, the Long Island Arts Alliance recognizes only 20 students in each of the five areas of the arts—music, visual arts, media arts, theater, and dance—as Scholar Artists and an additional 20 students as Merit Scholar Artist Recipients across Long Island. Students are selected based on a rigorous review of their academic and artistic portfolios. This means Alessandra was one of only two students in Suffolk County selected in Media Arts and our very first Middle Country Media Arts Recipient. Nadine was one of only four students selected in Suffolk County for Music. Both students were honored at an awards ceremony in April at the Tilles Center at Long Island University/CW Post Campus. Congratulations to Brielle, Alessandra, and Nadine for all their well-earned success!



LIFE Program

Centereach High School’s LIFE program focuses on strengthening our students’ vocational and daily living skills. Students learn and master skills that enable them to be successful in their personal and professional lives. Our program collaborates with many local businesses, allowing students to engage in hands-on vocational training and equipping them with the necessary expertise to achieve employment upon graduation. The LIFE program aims to bridge the gap between school and real-world education by providing students with functional academics.

Students Featured on Radio Program

Middle Country students and teachers were invited to speak on the radio in February. Taking part in a virtual interview with Bob Vecchio, the host of the *Spotlight on Long Island Schools* radio program, four groups of students represented our District with pride. Elementary community service projects students, the Middle School National History Day Club, the Dawnwood Middle School American Sign Language Club, and the Newfield High School musical leads from *Hairspray* all had their chance to shine over the airwaves. The interview took place virtually, with Middle Country students meeting in the Centereach High School library conference room and speaking with Mr. Vecchio using a SmartBoard. Some families even attended to watch as the interviews took place. Their interviews will be aired on 103.9 this spring!



Student Achievements Continued

Long Island Sound Connection at West Meadow Beach

Sixth grade students at Selden Middle School participated in the Long Island Sound Connections program through the Ward Melville Heritage Organization. This STEM-focused conservation program challenged students to explore the local wetlands around the community, where they collected and analyzed data including water quality, turbidity, and animal and plant species diversity. In the weeks of preparation before the wetlands visits, students were engaged in classroom activities within their school building. They applied their findings to make recommendations about reducing the human impact on these fragile ecosystems and environments. Students then participated in a culminating summit, where they shared their ideas with a partner school in Connecticut across the Long Island Sound. Conducting this research of the local wetlands and studying the ways in which plant and animal health is affected is just another way the Middle Country Central School District supports hands-on learning for our students.



Growing Beyond Earth Research Project Captivates Students

Middle school students recently participated in a citizen science project aimed at advancing NASA research on growing plants in space. Students used a plant habitat similar to those used on the International Space Station and potentially on future lunar bases. Students collected and analyzed their data of the plants through photospectroscopy to determine how lighting affects plant growth and then created a presentation to share their findings.

The team presented their observations while participating in a conference alongside NASA scientists and students from all over the world. NASA scientists discussed the challenges associated with growing plants in space and how the students' research helps with crop readiness levels on the International Space Station, tested at the Kennedy Space Center and Johnson Space Center.



Students' favorite part of the investigation was observing the growth of the plants, conducting research to figure out why the plants could not survive in certain conditions, and brainstorming possible solutions. The best part was seeing how their fertilizer affected the downfall of the plants and looking at their experiments to see what impacted it.

Student Achievement Data

Post-secondary plans for the Class of 2023:

Four-Year College — 44%
Two-Year College — 33%
Trade/Technical Education — 6%
Military Service — 2%
Full-Time Employment — 14%
Other — 1%

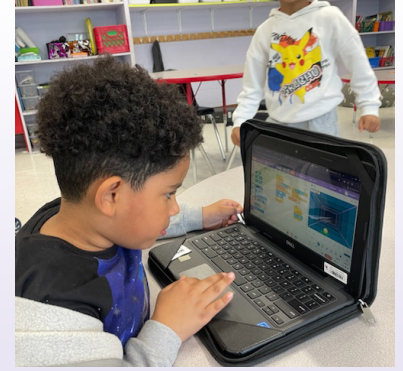
2023 Awards and Commendations:

AP Scholar with Distinction: 45
AP Scholar with Honor: 22
AP Scholar: 83
AP Capstone Diploma: 8
AP Seminar and Research Certificate: 5
National Merit Scholar Commended: 2

Student Achievements Continued

Hawkins Path Coding Club

Students in the Hawkins Path Elementary School Coding Club were introduced to the world of programming in a creative, hands-on way. Students have learned various skills during their Coding Club meetings to develop computer games and programs on their Chromebooks. The students were tasked with utilizing their logical and analytical thinking skills to develop their games through trial and error. They learned to troubleshoot and revise their programming to develop the best game.



Alumni Achievements Continued

Dr. William E. Gioia, DO, Newfield High School Class of 2001



A Newfield High School Class of 2001 graduate, Dr. William E. Gioia attended Boston University after high school and the New York Institute of Technology College of Osteopathic Medicine for medical school. He practices heart surgery in Pennsylvania, where he lives with his wife and two children. He is a passionate

metalhead and serves on the board of directors for Headbang for Science, a charity that awards scholarships to heavy metal aficionados going into science and health-related careers. He attributes much of his success to his Middle Country education, specifically the dedicated teachers, coaches, and staff members.

Laura Melfi, Centereach High School Class of 1986



A 1986 alumna of Centereach High School, Laura Melfi has been a math teacher at Centereach High School since 2001. She coached field hockey alongside her longtime mentor and friend, Nancy Cole, for many years. As an athlete, she won the state championship twice, and

attributes her success to the support from her teachers and coaches during her time in Middle Country Schools. She takes her life lessons about totally committing to whatever you want to pursue, and instills them in her own students today.

Anthony McGrath, Newfield High School Class of 2020



After graduating from Newfield High School in 2020, Anthony McGrath joined the United States Army as a Patriot Missile Launcher. He has been stationed in Oklahoma, Texas, and South Korea, proudly protecting our freedoms. He recently earned an associate degree in engineering. Mr. McGrath attributes his success to the school spirit and sense

of camaraderie among Middle Country Schools. Teachers, administrators, coaches, and staff members encourage each student to succeed and show support to do just that.

Richard Gabriel, Newfield High School Class of 1980



A 1980 alumnus of Newfield High School, Richard Gabriel graduated as the valedictorian of his class. He is now a Justice on the Colorado Supreme Court. He graduated from Yale University in 1984 after graduating from the University of Pennsylvania Law School in 1987. After practicing law in New York, he moved to Denver in 1990, where he practiced

law for 18 years before being appointed to the bench in 2008. At Newfield, he played the trumpet, performing in the concert band, jazz band, and the school musicals. He still plays the trumpet and keeps in touch with Larry Lonigan and Mark Fuhr, both of whom were in Mr. Gabriel's kindergarten class at Stagecoach Elementary School—they have been friends for 56 years.



For additional alumni bios, please scan the QR code.