



HASTINGS HAPPENINGS

NEWS FROM HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON UFSD

August 22, 2024

Welcome to the 2024–25 Academic Year

From the Desk of the Superintendent

Dear Families and Staff:

Ready, we are.

Ready for what one veteran teacher aptly calls, “the joyous chaos of the return of Hastings students.” On Tuesday, September 3, nearly 1,610 students will arrive brimming with energy and spirit for the first day of school. Our goal, keep that energy and spirit pulsing through June 27, 2025.

Entering my fourth year as Superintendent, I will double-down on raising up and celebrating our students. For educators, students must be at the heart of what we think, what we feel and what we do. In Hastings, we are fortunate to have remarkable, striving, curious, multi-talented students, whose diversity and varied gifts are the prime ingredients of our dynamic school district. I cherish my role in Hastings—it allows me to connect individually with students, while fostering a community centered on collaboration, growth, excellence and dignity. Echoing the *Portrait of a Hastings Learner*, my commitment is to nurture students who are bold, collaborative, empathetic, empowered, inquisitive and inventive.

I am pleased to share our *Back-to-School Greeting*, highlighting the *industry and product* of so many this summer on behalf of Hastings students. You will read about the efforts of staff and administrators to advance the *Portrait of a Hastings Learner*, update school and district plans, hire and train new staff, prepare for a new Capital Bond, and refresh buildings and grounds.

Onward and upward into 2024-25, with energy and spirit for each and every student.

Be well.

District News



Portrait of a Hastings Learner: Preparing for 2024–25

The Portrait of a Hastings Learner (POHL) enters its second full year in 2024-25 as the district's strategic framework. POHL consists of multiple action steps focused on: Authentic Learning, the Behavioral Charter and Restorative Practices.

“One of our key goals is to move the needle on POHL. We are beginning to unify around a coherent vision that will support individuals to be creative and connected,” said Dr. Melissa Szymanski. “We are deepening our work to understand the landscape of teaching and learning and we are seeing the Portrait of Hastings Learner come to life.”

Authentic Learning Opportunities

During the summer break, members of the Leadership Team and small groups of staff have been working diligently to plan and enhance curriculum, refine instructional methods and materials, review data, and prepare engaging, student-centered, learning materials.

“Our team has been focused on further enhancing the curricula and instructional materials for the upcoming school year. We have been reviewing and strengthening all subject areas including literacy, math, science, social studies, and social-emotional learning. Our work will never be done,” said Principal Amy Cazes.

At Farragut Middle School the staff have been working on curricular coherence. The goal is to align horizontally and vertically to create a more cohesive experience as students progress from fifth grade through eighth grade.

One lead example is transforming Courageous Conversations. “The Middle School has historically had a course that all of the students take called Courageous Conversations, a racial equity course,” said Principal Scott Wynne. “We have revised and updated it to be a course that is much broader in focus and aligned to the NYSED Culturally Responsive-Sustaining (CR-S) Framework. Renamed as Exploring Equity, the course provides students a full perspective so they are better prepared as they continue into adulthood.”

At Hastings High School, Principal Andrew Clayman has taken an “authentic learning” start to his principalship—ensuring in depth, real knowledge and understanding of HHS. He has spent the summer meeting with staff and getting to

know all about Hastings High School to ensure a smooth start to the new school year.

“My number one priority is to get to know everyone, students, and faculty, as well as the community. I’m coming into a community that cares for each other and I want to create the conditions that allow the school to continue to flourish,” said Principal Clayman.

Behavioral Charter

During the past school year, a committee has been developing the Behavioral Charter with the goal of supporting social emotional learning and students' sense of belonging.

“The charter is centered on how we want to feel in our learning environment and the behaviors that will help support us to feel that way. We are deepening a nurturing culture that will promote positive behaviors in the learning environment,” said Dr. Szymanski. “It continues to be a work in progress. We have made good headway and we will continue refine what has been designed.”

Advisory, a common approach in middle and high schools to support students' social-emotional growth, is a priority for Hastings. We are not prepared yet to launch a full-blown Advisory. However, in the new school year, FMS will implement a modified version of the pilot Advisory that was offered last year. The updated approach will be monitored to inform what might be an eventual Advisory for FMS and HHS.

Restorative Practices

In order to accomplish enhanced use of Restorative Practices, the district partnered with Duke Fisher, a mediator, facilitator, and trainer whose work is centered on creating meaningful conversations in academic settings. Mr. Fisher worked with small groups of staff to provide professional learning around the use of Restorative Practices across the K-12 system. This work is critical for supporting student success in building relationships and productively resolving conflicts.

“We thank HEF for the generous grant for this work and look forward to training additional cohorts in the coming year,” said Dr. Szymanski.

Work in Progress

POHL’s progress will be a through-line in nearly all communications this school year. Look for updates in *Hastings Happenings*, as well as letters, reports and memos from the district and individual schools.



Capital Bond Update

Over the course of the last couple of months, the Hastings-On-Hudson Facilities Committee has been working diligently to address the growing needs of the district.

For all NYS school districts, it is standard to have money allocated each year in the operating budget to address facility needs through annual operating budgets.

In the case of larger capital needs and targeted capital projects for instructional needs, districts issue bond referendums. The capital bond is designed to match a term of costs more fairly with the longer-term use of a building, field, or other capital improvement. They are essential to ensuring school districts provide educational facilities and grounds conducive to high-quality teaching and learning in a safe, secure and up-to-date educational environment.

Hastings School District has secured capital bonds judiciously for many years. The most recent provided for the impressive renovations of Hillside Elementary School, the FMS Auditorium, and the Music Rehearsal Rooms in FMS/HHS.

PBDW Comprehensive Analysis

Recognizing that there remain significant facilities issues going beyond what operating budgets can address, the district requested analysis from PBDW Architects, the same firm which guided Hastings with the Hillside expansion and renovations. PBDW was retained through an RFP process to develop a detailed Master Plan, including Site Documentation and Programming Analysis, which drew on extensive administration and faculty input.

PBDW's analysis and reports underscored the need for a new Capital Bond to finance required improvements, including air conditioning in the gym, a new boiler at Hillside Elementary School, as well as other mechanical systems upgrades. The analysis also emphasized serious overcrowding and sub-optimal learning spaces within the Farragut Complex, which houses Farragut Middle School and Hastings High School. Structural bottlenecks, small classrooms and an outdated and inefficient cafeteria are among problems. In addition, special education program needs require modified spaces. Lastly, the District must weigh playing field options, including the addition of lights and the replacement of at least one natural field with turf, to ensure safe, usable spaces for students. Indeed, last fall alone, nearly 50 athletic contests had to be canceled or relocated to other districts due to the fields not being functional after heavy rains.

Pre-Bond and BCS Analysis – LAN Associates

Building on PBDW's analysis, the District issued a request for proposal (RFP) in June to solicit bids from architectural engineering firms that would assist the District in completing the work needed for a well conceived and cost-effective capital bond project. This was the first step in a multi-step process to bring the district's buildings up to the ever-changing state standards.

The District received eight proposals from highly qualified firms specializing in architectural and engineering services. After careful review, four of the firms whose proposals best aligned with the District's needs and expectations were interviewed.

Following a rigorous evaluation process that included thorough assessments of each firm's qualifications, experience, proposed methodology, and cost-effectiveness, LAN Associates was selected to perform the Building Conditions Survey (BCS) for the District. New York State Education Law and regulations require a BCS for all occupied school buildings to be conducted at least every five years.

LAN Associates stood out among the candidates for their demonstrated expertise in educational facilities, commitment to safety and compliance, and innovative approach to building assessments. Their proposal exceeded the District's requirements for a comprehensive evaluation of structural integrity, mechanical systems, electrical infrastructure, overall building safety and their capacity to meet

the District's specific project requirements.

“Part of what we wanted to know when we interviewed LAN was their transparency. Will they come to public meetings, what's their ability to present to the community, and their capacity to help secure a positive outcome for the bond,” said Business Official Maureen Caraballo. “We were looking for a team that would assist the district and ensure that we are transparent and listening to the community and the stakeholders.”

LAN Associates has a proven track record of providing Pre-Bond Services including assessment of capital and bond priorities; planning for referendum structure, public outreach, and final referendum design and content; and, engagement of the community through digital and in-person marketing and outreach.

“We're excited to partner with the architects because it will give us a better understanding of what needs to be done and how much it will cost,” said Director of Facilities Joe Martorana.

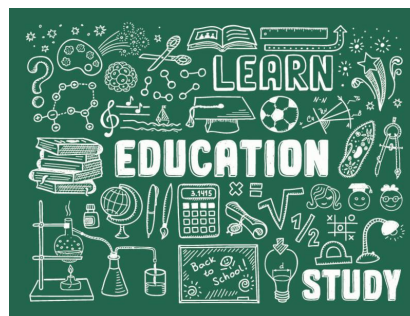
Melding the BCS with Design Concepts – The Pending Bond

LAN started on the BCS during August. They are analyzing the physical structure of the buildings and determining the best course of action. They will then create a suggested prioritization list with a timeline along with estimates and conceptual designs. LAN's report will be submitted to the state as required and presented to the Board of Education.

Simultaneously, design concepts are being developed for long-term (not stop-gap) solutions to the space needs in the Farragut Complex and the usage problems with the district's athletic fields. The proposed concepts will be combined with the BCS reporting and presented to the Board of Education as the first draft of a proposed capital bond this fall.

Next Steps – Public Outreach and Final Decisions

Over the fall, the BOE Facilities Committee will be meeting to consider the BCS, design options and emerging final plans for the Farragut Complex and playing fields. Public information sessions, supplementing BOE Meeting discussions, will be hosted to provide ample opportunities for introducing plans and gathering feedback. Pending Board deliberations, we anticipate bringing a recommended capital bond to the residents of Hastings in Spring 2025.



Buildings and Grounds Summer Maintenance

While students are out for summer recess, the Buildings and Grounds staff are hard at work ensuring that all buildings and grounds are a safe and clean environment. Under the supervision of Director of Facilities Joe Martorana, they have been working tirelessly to refresh all spaces within each building. From fresh coats of

paint to the renovation of different areas, students will be pleasantly surprised by improvements throughout the district.

“Each summer we take on this huge maintenance project. We have a group of 19 full time custodial, maintenance, and grounds staff, along with eight summer helpers that have been moving items out of each room so we can work in those designated areas. It’s a little stressful at times, but we have the skillset and the talented people in the department to get it done,” said Mr. Martorana.

At Hillside Elementary, the location that once housed the library is taking on a new form. After sitting vacant for the past year following the introduction of a new Learning Commons, the area has been transformed into a Student Services Wing. Twelve new rooms will provide modernized spaces for students. Most of the rooms will be operational by the start of the school year. The remaining three will be completed in December.

Principal Amy Cazes describes the arrangement as ideal for collaboration and student support. “We had the opportunity to envision a Student Services Wing after we opened our Learning Commons. It is the perfect location, centrally located between our primary and intermediate sides of the building. This area will house the learning spaces of our speech and language pathologists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, reading specialists, math specialists, school psychologists, and school counselor.”

At Farragut Middle School, the multipurpose room that houses some of the special education programs received a full makeover. The room has been completely renovated to enhance the learning environment.

“We are trying to spruce things up to be as nice as things can be upon returning. The Facilities Department works tirelessly to make that happen,” said Principal Wynne. “The summer is always a quieter time and we miss the students and staff. We are thrilled to welcome them all back at the end of the summer.”

All buildings have been deep cleaned and sanitized to ensure a safe environment for students and staff upon their arrival in the fall. Floors have been polished, and fresh coats of paint have been applied to areas showing wear. At the high school and middle school level, the focus has been on inspecting all spaces and providing maintenance where applicable.

“The summer is a busy time of year for us, but we have been working hard to get everything ready for students arriving in the fall,” said Mr. Martorana.

Dr. McKersie is on campus all summer, bearing witness to the tireless, talented work of the Building and Grounds team. “Walking the halls and classrooms in July through August is like being in a theater, behind the curtain, watching what occurs to make the production gleam on opening night. Every inch of these buildings will be ready by the return of faculty in late August and students on September 3. We owe a big thank you to the Building and Grounds team!”



First Day of School - Tuesday, September 3, 2024

Start Times:

Hillside Elementary School - 8:20 a.m., supervision begins at 7:40 a.m.
Please send students in with their dismissal plan.

Farragut Middle School - 8:15 a.m.
Students will report to their assigned homerooms.

Hastings High School - 8:15 a.m.
Students will report to their first period class.

Stay up to date with academic events and school closings.

Check out the [2024-2025 School Calendar](#) for holidays and breaks!

Check out the [2024-2025 District Calendar](#) for upcoming events.

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