



HASTINGS HAPPENINGS

NEWS FROM HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON UFSD

September 20, 2024

From the Desk of the Superintendent

September 20, 2024

Dear Families and Staff:

My biweekly “Friday Letters” derive usually from my *walkabouts* in the district. Between these letters, updates on pressing issues may be sent, as has occurred twice since my September 6 walkabout missive. In the Friday Letters, I aim for the good news that is so prevalent, so obvious among and between students, teachers, staff, administrators and families in Hastings. On Fridays, I will “go high” – Hastings deserves it, even demands it.

Five National Merit Semifinalists

Each fall we are fortunate to congratulate the select set of students who have achieved National Merit Semifinalist status. This is a compliment for all our staff—Hillside, FMS and HHS—since nearly all the honorees have been students in Hastings since elementary school. On September 11 it was announced that five seniors – **Frieda Belasco, Charlotte Cho, Benjamin Emtage, Natalie Garson and Jasper Zimmerman** – were named Semifinalists in the 70th Annual National Merit Scholarship Program. See it as an accomplishment built on years of stretching to the limits, guided by Hastings teachers and the families of these five students.

Over 1.3 million juniors from 21,000 high schools entered the 2025 competition by taking the 2023 Preliminary SAT (PSAT) / National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (NMQT), the initial screening used to designate a pool of more than 16,000 Semifinalists representing less than one percent of high school seniors nationwide. Hastings' Semifinalists now have the chance to compete for a Finalist title by submitting scholarship applications. About 95 percent of the Semifinalists are expected to attain Finalist standing, and approximately half of these students will win a National Merit Scholarship, earning the prestigious Merit Scholar title.

Homecoming All Week Long

Spirit days, spirit wear, spirit tasks, spirit cheers. Walking HHS these five days, inside and out on the fields, it is impossible to miss the energy of Homecoming Week. Athletic contests—several under the lights each night—will culminate with the Varsity Football Game on Saturday at 6:00 p.m. A Friday afternoon Pep Rally for HHS students and staff (and a cheering superintendent) will be a feature. I have been on the sidelines for many of the contests, enjoying the play of our student-athletes and the support of their friends and family. Special applause for the Student Union leadership all week, who will be in full form at the Student Activity Fair accompanying Saturday's Football Game. Before, during and after all the events and contests, the Athletic Department, coaches, Buildings & Grounds and the Hastings Boosters have made it happen. And, a new, cutting-edge sound system at Reynolds Field, courtesy of the Hastings Education Foundation, has boomed crystal clear announcements and music. Thank you!

BTSN - Soup to Nuts Good Vibes

My best walkabouts the past two weeks were in and around the Back-to-School-Nights at Hillside, FMS and HHS. Teachers, staff and administrators stepped up with extra effort and energy to ensure the evenings were informative, productive and enjoyable for families. That is what I witnessed, soup to nuts each night; most importantly that is what many parents reported to me as they headed home each evening. May the spirit and connections fostered on these three evenings carry through the entire year.

National Hispanic Heritage Month

While we celebrate Hispanic and Latino communities beyond this month, from September 15-October 15 we give extra attention to the many contributions made to the history and culture of the United States, including advocacy work, vibrant art, popular and traditional foods, and much more. ([National Museum of the American Latino, Smithsonian](#)). For us in Hastings, I ask that we take time to explore and consider the talents, gifts and histories of our Hispanic and Latino peers, colleagues and families. We are enriched as a school community for their vital part in our diverse, human tapestry.

Heads-Up – BOE Meeting Topics

When not on a walkabout, I have been working with Melissa Szymanski, the principals and other administrators on two significant presentations for the BOE at its September 24, 2024 meeting. The first examines the performance and growth of Hastings students during the 2023-24 school year. This will be the first of several sessions this year with the BOE on data and evidence regarding student progress and well-being. The second provides an update on Digital Learning & Instructional Technology, with attention to each building and district-wide initiatives. Additional updates on this topic will follow across the school year. Both presentations will be viewable in [BoardDocs](#) as of Monday.

Be well.



William S. McKersie, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

District News

2025 National Merit Scholarship Semifinalists Announced



The National Merit Scholarship Corporation (NMSC) announced the names of more than 16,000 Semifinalists in the 70th annual National Merit Scholarship Program. Hastings High School students Frieda Belasco, Charlotte Cho, Benjamin Emtage, Natalie Garson, and Jasper Zimmerman are among the academically talented high school seniors who now have an opportunity to continue competing for approximately 6,870 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$26 million, to be awarded next spring.

“This process really started after we received our PSAT results. I was pretty surprised and definitely honored when I learned I was a semifinalist,” said Jasper Zimmerman.

“I was surprised and really happy when I found out. I’m really grateful for this opportunity because it’s students from across the country. I find myself lucky to be one of them,” added Natalie Garson.

NMSC, a not-for-profit organization that operates without government assistance, was established in 1955 specifically to conduct the annual National Merit Scholarship Program. Scholarships are underwritten by NMSC with its own funds and by approximately 280 business organizations, higher education institutions, and individual donors that share NMSC’s goals of honoring the nation’s scholastic champions and encouraging the pursuit of academic excellence.

To be considered for a Merit Scholarship award the semifinalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the Finalist level of the competition. They must submit a detailed application, write an essay, and provide a list of leadership positions.

“We need to write an essay, put in our extracurriculars and the guidance department will provide recommendations,” said Frieda Belasco. “I’m grateful

for our counselors because they helped walk us through this process. We are seniors and we have a lot on our plates, and they are always there to answer our questions and provide assistance.”

About 95 percent of the Semifinalists are expected to attain Finalist standing, and approximately half of the Finalists will win a National Merit Scholarship, earning the Merit Scholar title.

“I am really excited. It's a big opportunity to be a part of this thing that's bigger than myself. I feel really honored to have made it this far in the process,” said Charlotte Cho.

More than 1.3 million juniors in about 21,000 high schools entered the 2025 National Merit Scholarship Program by taking the 2023 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT), which served as an initial screen of program entrants. The nationwide pool of Semifinalists, representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors, includes the highest-scoring entrants in each state. The number of Semifinalists in a state is proportional to the state's percentage of the national total of graduating seniors.

From over 16,000 Semifinalists, more than 15,000 are expected to advance to the Finalist level, and in February they will be notified of this designation. All National Merit Scholarship winners will be selected from this group of Finalists. Merit Scholar designees are selected on the basis of their skills, accomplishments, and potential for success in rigorous college studies, without regard to gender, race, ethnic origin, or religious preference.

“I'm pumped because this is really cool. I'm glad that I get to be part of these five people who are standing here right now,” said Benjamin Emtage. I put a lot of work into this, we all did. To be one of the 16,000 students out of the millions that took the PSA, it's pretty cool to have made it this far.”

Three types of National Merit Scholarships will be offered in the spring of 2025. Every Finalist will compete for one of 2,500 National Merit \$2500 Scholarships that will be awarded on a state-representational basis. About 770 corporate-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards will be provided by approximately 130 corporations and business organizations for Finalists who meet their specified criteria, such as children of the grantor's employees or residents of communities where sponsor plants for offices are located. In addition, about 150 colleges and universities are expected to finance some 3,600 college-sponsored Merit Scholarship awards for Finalists who will attend the sponsor institution. National Merit Scholarship winners of 2025 will be announced in four nationwide news releases beginning in April and concluding in July. These scholarship recipients will join more than 382,000 other distinguished young people who have earned the Merit Scholar title.

Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month



Students in Colette Smith's and Laura Cloherty's sixth grade Spanish classes are practicing their world language skills through interactive activities designed with Hispanic Heritage Month in mind. Each day, from September 15 to October 15, students are introduced to a person who has made a difference, not only in the Hispanic community, but in the world.

"Each student has a notable person and are writing facts about them in Spanish," said Ms. Smith. "They are working on a visual report that will be displayed in the Foreign Language hallway."

At the start of class the middle schoolers learn interesting facts about a particular person of interest, practice their Spanish speaking skills, and then work on their individual research project.

"We each choose a person, I have Laurie Hernandez, and we research what they are known for. We are writing about it all in Spanish," said Yasmine G. "It's really fun being able to color and draw, and I'm learning a lot."

"It's very exciting. When I come to class it's like who is it going to be about today," added Gabe A. "I'm researching France Córdova and she's an astrophysicist, which is what I want to be. This project is really fun, the fact that I get to write about someone who is an astrophysicist is even better."

The students are also doing crossword puzzles and are taking part in a scavenger hunt that involves countries and facts.

"I really enjoy this class and I like the projects we are doing because they are really fun, but I get to learn stuff too," said Jacob G.



Kindergarteners Celebrate The Tenth Day Of School!

In celebration of hitting double-digits days, Kindergarteners at Hillside were surprised with special guests and hands-on activities. On Monday, September 16,

Number 1 introduced her partner, Zero the Hero, and made an appearance in each classroom to greet students

While there, they discussed the new number 10, students enjoyed their tenth day of school with various activities. Students worked on their fine motor skills by coloring and cutting out images.

“The children created Zero the Hero out of shapes by using their fine motor skills. This is an important step in their understanding of the concept of place value,” said Kindergarten Teacher Nina D’Amato. “This is such an exciting time for the Kindergarteners in their development of math skills.”

Zero the Hero made the children feel special and helped them recognize the importance of the number zero because without it we couldn’t make a group of 10. The students enjoyed their interactive lesson and are looking forward to more events throughout the year.



Homecoming Under The Lights



Homecoming week isn't over yet, there's still plenty of time to show off your school

spirit! Be sure to join us at one of our upcoming games and cheer on our teams as they give it their all.

We're thrilled to debut our new cutting-edge sound system thanks to a grant from HEF, the Hastings Education Foundation. This upgrade will enhance our events and atmosphere. Huge thanks to HEF for their ongoing support of our students and community!

Don't miss the chance to watch our incredible Hudsonettes in action as they light up the field with their amazing performance during the half-time show. Let's keep the energy high and make this Homecoming week unforgettable!

See the schedule here: [Homecoming Under The Lights](#)

Quick Links

View the latest [Hastings Weekly Updates](#) online!

To view past communications visit the [Hastings Happenings Archive](#)

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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