

Eastchester Eagle

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE EASTCHESTER UNION FREE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Soaring into the Future

After years of anticipation and growing enrollment, Eastchester School District officials celebrated the expansion of the high school on October 9, with a Ribbon Cutting and Grand Opening Ceremony.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. Walter Moran, School Board President Mary Messner-Martin, and High School Principal Dr. Jeffrey Capuano ushered in a new era.

"I am so proud of our community, and I am so happy for our students," said Dr. Moran, "that they finally have a facility commensurate with the level of achievement and learning that they deserve. To see that happen is one of the best feelings I have ever had here."

Ms. Messner-Martin described her impressions walking through the new cafeteria. "It is light filled and joy filled. I would like to thank the community for all the support you provided. The project will keep on giving for years to come."

Voters approved an almost \$27-million-dollar bond to expand the high school building in October of 2015, and construction work began in June of 2017.

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Eastchester School Board President Mary Messner-Martin, Eastchester School Superintendent Dr. Walter Moran, Eastchester Government Organization President Miranda DeLeon and Vice President Aaron Asiedu-Wiafe, High School Principal Dr. Jeffrey Capuano

National Merit Scholars



Ten Eastchester High School seniors were named Commended Students by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation Program (NMSC) for their outstanding performance on the October 2017 PSAT/NMSQT. They are among 34,000 students across the nation receiving this honor and rank in the top three to four percent of scholars.

The 2019 Commended Students are: Olivia C. Bishop, Noelle Butler, Samantha Grace Dell'Imperio, David Ewing, James Fong, Alexander P. Kim-Koutsis, Juliet N. Liao, Ryan F. Martin, James L. Poletti and Ashley Tang.

In addition, senior Michael Zeolla was named a Scholar in the National Hispanic Recognition Program, scoring in the top 2.5 percent among Hispanic and Latino students who sat for the PSAT/NMSQT last year. The NHRP academic honor is received by only 5,000 out of 250,000 Hispanic and Latino juniors who take the test.

The NMSC's mission is to promote scholastic excellence and recognize students who achieve these goals.

Soaring into the Future

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The three-story addition includes eight new classrooms, four small-group-instruction rooms, three biology labs, three chemistry labs, and a state-of-the-art cafeteria with traditional and high-top seating. Adjacent to the cafeteria are three newly designed earth science labs and the new student commons, housing a study center and digital lab. The Guidance Department has been relocated adjacent to the student commons for better student access.

Dr. Capuano recalls his first week as principal when “temporary” walls were put up in the old gym to transform it into classrooms. Fifteen years later, the walls are about to come down and the old gym will soon be utilized for its intended purpose.

“What we do here is one step short of sacred,” said Dr. Capuano, “and the building needs to reflect the importance of the education. Now it does.”

EGO President Miranda DeLeon and Vice President Aaron Asiedui-Wiafe joined school leaders and cut the ribbon. “The school felt really old. The new wing is modern and it puts you in a better environment. I used to go to the library for lunch but now I come here. There’s room for everyone,” said Asiedui-Wiafe.

“I was in awe when I first walked in,” said DeLeon. “This really transforms the learning environment because so many teachers had to share classrooms with one another. Ceiling tiles were literally falling as teachers were teaching.”

Major improvements were also made to the high school auditorium including new seating, carpeting, lighting and sound



Eastchester High School Principal Dr. Jeffrey Capuano, Eastchester Town Supervisor Anthony Colavita, Eastchester School Superintendent Dr. Walter Moran.

systems, painting and the replacement of the stage floor.

The project also created energy efficiencies in the building with a new roof for the “new” gym, constructed in 1984, and new boilers, heating and lighting.

Architects from KG&D drew up the plans for the new addition. Contractors included: Piazza, Inc., L J Coppola, All Bright Electric, Bertussi Plumbing, Tri-state Contract Sales.

Thinking Outside the Box

Second grade students in Brigid Rice’s class at Greenvale couldn’t wait to join their classmates and work on their Maker Space Project.

“Are we doing it right now?” shouted one student. “Yay!” The children then divided up into groups, sat on the floor and at their desks and got down to business.

Maker Space activities allow students to create something from materials they are given with minimal guidance from teachers.

“They need to be independent, to think outside the box and to come up with their own ideas,” said Rice.

During this class, the students were tasked with helping Sam, the gummy worm, get into a Life Savers candy using paperclips, a paper cup and no hands.

“Can You Help Sam?” taught students important skills: how to listen to each other, come up with a plan, and try something new if the original solution doesn’t work out.

After completing the project, student Ahkil Shembekar said, “I enjoyed it because it was a challenge.”

It took the children several attempts to bring Sam to safety without touching him, but the look of pride on their faces when they accomplished the task was worth it.



Staying Curious



Climbing mountains in China, flying a hot air balloon over Mt. Everest, traveling alone through the Himalayas and Sahara Desert. Jan Reynolds has done it all, and on October 16, the former US Biathlon Team member, photographer and author shared her love for adventure and the world with sixth-graders from Eastchester Middle School.

“Stay curious. I think that is what broadens people’s awareness. My theme is always explore,” said Ms. Reynolds after presenting a video of her travels and experiences to the students.

Ms. Reynolds, who has authored nearly 20 books and photographed some of nature’s wonders, doesn’t expect all of Eastchester’s children to climb Mt. Everest, but she had some sound advice: “Sometimes it is uncomfortable to put yourself in the adventure zone, but it might be going into a different neighborhood, trying a new food or learning a new language.”

Growing up on a dairy farm in Vermont provided Ms. Reynolds with the perfect opportunity to roam and explore. She trained with a national ski team in high school, and after graduating from the University of Vermont, she joined the U.S Biathlon team.

The list of her accomplishments seems never ending: three-time Mountain Man triathlon champion, the only female member of the expedition to circumnavigate Mt. Everest, setting a world record when Ms. Reynolds climbed up and skied down a 25,000-foot mountain in China.

After an injury Ms. Reynolds decided, “Meeting people was more exciting than breaking records.”

She has traveled the world, learning about the cultures of indigenous people. “We might look different, but we are much more alike than different,” said Reynolds.

Eastchester School librarians coordinated Ms. Reynolds’ visit, which was funded by the Eastchester School Foundation.

The students were taken aback when they learned that Ms. Reynolds had eaten snakes, but sixth-grader Chase Palumbo was awe struck. “I never thought I would meet anyone who had done these things. Now I want to go to these places and see them for myself.”

Alexandria D’Ambrosio already read one of Ms. Reynolds’ books and can’t wait to devour more. “I think it was amazing to hear about the different cultures and that people share different traditions.”

Dear Eastchester Community,

As the first quarter of this school year closes, I’d like to highlight some of the successes we have enjoyed as well as challenges we have faced in these opening months of school. Certainly among the highlights has been the opening of the new high school addition and renovated spaces. Our high school students and staff now enjoy the benefits of modern, spacious classroom accommodations and much needed student common space. The completion of wiring for technology within the new construction and the installation of classroom technology is expected as we approach Thanksgiving. With students now situated in the new wing classrooms, the old high school gymnasium is undergoing renovations that will return this space to its original purpose. We expect this renovation to be completed in January.

We are proud to have 10 Eastchester High School seniors named as Commended Students by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation Program, an honor accorded to the top 3-4 percent of scholars across the nation. Events on our calendar in the weeks ahead will showcase the talents of many students across the District in areas such as academic honor societies, drama, music, and athletics. Innovative, creative learning experiences abound in our schools and are frequently highlighted on the District’s website and in our new eNews publication.

The re-routing of bus schedules to meet the new elementary school starting times has presented challenges and been a subject of concern for some families. We continue to work in addressing these challenges and concerns and appreciate the timely feedback we receive from parents whenever problems occur. In a short time, the Board of Education will be reaching out to the community to enlist its thoughts about a broader transportation issue related to the approved distances for which bus transportation may be provided. In keeping with New York State Education Law, the community will be required to vote on these approved distances during a referendum sometime this school year.

I never cease to marvel about the energy and resilience of our students, the talents and dedication of our staff, and the support and encouragement of the Eastchester parents and community. Being a part of this vibrant educational community is a source of great pride and something I never take for granted. Thank you for your commitment to quality education as we endeavor, together, along this journey – Soaring to Excellence!

Respectfully,

Dr. Walter Moran
Superintendent

Dear Eastchester Community,

As we start our new school year, we do so with anticipation of the many experiences that will enrich our school community over the months ahead. Our open houses have been very successful, and we have had the official opening of our much anticipated new high school wing.

As previously announced, Dr. Walter Moran will be retiring at the end of the school year after 19 years of service. Dr. Moran joined us in July of 2000 as the Principal of Eastchester Middle School and assumed the role of Superintendent of Schools in July of 2013. We thank him for his devotion to educating our children and wish him the best during his retirement.

The Board of Education has selected the search firm of School Leadership, LLC, to assist us with the important mission of choosing a new chief school officer who will offer the best to our students and the District. However, choosing a search firm is only one aspect of the process. The input of community members is paramount to the proper selection of a professionally qualified individual to lead our schools. It is for that reason that the BOE sponsored a forum at the end of October and solicited input by way of an online survey, to better learn the needs and challenges of the District. As much as we appreciate all that Dr. Moran has brought to our District, we also see this as an opportunity to consider where the future lies for the District. Your input provides us with vital information to choose our next leader.

After gathering that invaluable community input, we will be moving forward with our search firm to advertise for candidates and start the interview process. We expect to report back to the community at regular intervals regarding the status of the search.

We ask for your continued support during this extremely important endeavor, and we thank you for your participation in this important process.

Sincerely,

Mary Messner Martin
President, Board of Education

Eastchester Appoints Supervisor of Humanities

You only need to spend a few moments with Susan Chester to see her passion for students and education. She joined the Eastchester Union Free School District in July as the Supervisor of Humanities and immediately started reviewing the curriculum.

"I think it is really exciting that in the world where there is a focus on STEM that we are also concentrating on the humanities and how they impact the students' lives," said Ms. Chester. In this newly created role, she said she wants to preserve what's already successful and see what adjustments can be made. "As the world changes and the needs of students change for college and career, we must be responsive and see where we can evolve."

Ms. Chester supervises the English and Social Studies Departments at the middle and high school and collaborates with all the elementary school teachers to develop ELA, literacy and social studies programs.

She has toured all the schools, participated in secondary department meetings, and met face-to-face with the elementary teachers. Each week she spends time in multiple classrooms, across the five district buildings.

"I see really passionate teachers," Ms. Chester shared. She hopes to inspire them with her own enthusiasm. "I will roll up my sleeves and work with them and even develop specific lessons and assist them to implement the lessons if they choose."

One of her goals is to ensure that teachers share what they are doing in the classroom with each other. "As a school district grows larger you want to understand the unifying forces. Not every teacher is doing the same thing on the same day but we are having conversations," she said.

Ms. Chester was a middle school social studies teacher for 19 years at the Hommocks Middle School in the Mamaroneck Union Free School District before coming to Eastchester. She earned a Master of Science in Education Leadership from Long Island University, a Master of Arts in Social Studies Education from the University of South Florida, Tampa and a Bachelor of Arts from Binghamton University.

She was named Outstanding Middle School Social Studies Teacher by the New York State Council for the Social Studies and the Westchester Lower Hudson Council for the Social Studies.

When she is not in the classroom, Ms. Chester enjoys traveling with her husband and teenage daughter. She also loves reading and is a member of a book club with friends. Welcome Susan Chester!



Caring For Others

"I know that you are stronger than me, and you should have more stamina every day. Good Luck." Samia Washwell wrote these words of encouragement to a sick child at St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. Instead of playing during recess, the fifth-grader at Anne Hutchinson and many of her classmates made these "Caring Cards."

Students drew hearts and other pictures with markers on construction paper and the handmade messages will be delivered to patients.

"When these kids are sick in the hospital, this helps cure them," said student Melina Kokkalas. "I know they are going through a tough time, and making these cards also makes me feel good too."

The students are members of the school's student council, moderated by Felicia Maldari and Bobbi Iacovelli. For several years now the school has partnered with the Loukoumi Make A Difference Foundation as a way for students to give back to their community, and "Caring Cards" is one of their activities.

"The children are really dedicated. Many of them are real leaders, and I am so proud of them," commented Maldari as the students collected their markers and handed in their cards at the end of recess.

Students are also accepting \$1 donations for the hospital as part of this project.

Sahil Baghari hopes his card will brighten someone's day. "I really feel bad for them because they cannot come out for months or years. I am making a card so they feel better."



Going to the Greenhouse

Most children love to play in the dirt, and kindergarten students at Waverly are no exception.

On September 26th, many little hands kneaded through soil in Sara Mastocciolo's class as the children planted lima beans.

"Inside the bean there is a plant that grows!" exclaimed Christopher Parisi as he fingered the dirt.

Nora Ritchie explained what she and her classmates were doing. "We got the soil and the beans. We are going to see if they grow." Then the students followed Mrs. Mastocciolo and Teaching Assistant Toni Ann Varvaro to the greenhouse right in their classroom where they placed the flower pots.

"This project allows the students to become natural observers," said Ms. Mastocciolo. They will water the plants and see how they develop." The school acquired the greenhouse a few years ago through an Eastchester School Foundation grant.



The activity works in conjunction with Waverly's Science 21, a hands-on, project-based curriculum developed locally and regionally at Putnam | Northern Westchester BOCES. When the children study the lesson about plants in the spring, Ms. Mastocciolo said they will be prepared and "dig deep".

Growing plants in their own greenhouse also teaches the students about responsibility – they need to water the plants, and that responsibility is part of living in a community.

Eagle Spirit Soars!

The crowd cheered as the Eastchester High School Band filled the gymnasium with upbeat sounds and the cheerleaders practiced their intricate moves. Just moments before the start of the annual Pep Rally you could feel the energy in the air.

"It is my last year, and I want to go out on a high note," said senior Varsity Cross Country runner Ethan Gatrell as he prepared to join his teammates on the gym floor.

Members of all the Varsity fall sports teams filled the stands on September 21 for this time-honored tradition that takes place the night before the Homecoming Games. During this event, the athletes participated in a different kind of competition – a dance contest that allowed them to show off their creativity.

Senior members from Jazz Co got the night started and Varsity Soccer and Volleyball teams used inflatable soccer balls and volleyballs to start their routines. The Girls Varsity Tennis team members were a crowd pleaser, using some forehand magic to send candy flying through the audience.

Parents and students shouted and cheered as students competed against each other in games of rock/paper/scissors, tug-of-war and musical chairs.

"It is a real community event. The grades compete, but everyone comes out as a winner," explained Principal Dr. Jeffrey Capuano.

For the senior players, the night is nostalgic but also full of promise.

"It is sad but exciting," said senior Anna Russo who is a member of the Varsity Swim team. She's been participating in the Fall Pep Rally for years. "I like that everyone comes together as a team. The school spirit is great, everyone helps each other out and supports each other."

Enxhi Hajdarmataj agreed. "Everyone looks forward to it. It is our time to shine."



Science and Nature

Joseph Garba, Catherine Donovan and Ella Mazzone kneaded clay in their hands as their teammates Kaya Nolan and Adi Rajil did some more research for their STEM project.

The sixth-graders are studying the concept of Biomimicry, an approach to innovation where designers and engineers take an idea from nature and apply it to a problem.

"The puffer fish takes in water and we are using that idea to make a water filtration plant that will bring water in and then filter it out," explained Donovan.

The students research with teacher John Blaser and then go into the classroom next door to build with Tom Boissonnault. The two paired up about four years ago.

"It is the best way to teach," said Boissonnault. "This draws on their strengths allowing them to be creative. The students come up with the idea, and we watch it develop."

Boissonnault said the concept of Biomimicry can be seen all around us. For example, Velcro fasteners were based on the way that burrs stick to an animal's fur, and the Bullet Train in Japan was modeled after the beak of the kingfisher bird.



Bringing History to Life

You normally wouldn't find Thomas Jefferson, Thomas Paine and Jane Addams sitting together in an Eastchester classroom, but that is what happened in Michael Boyle's AP Politics class.

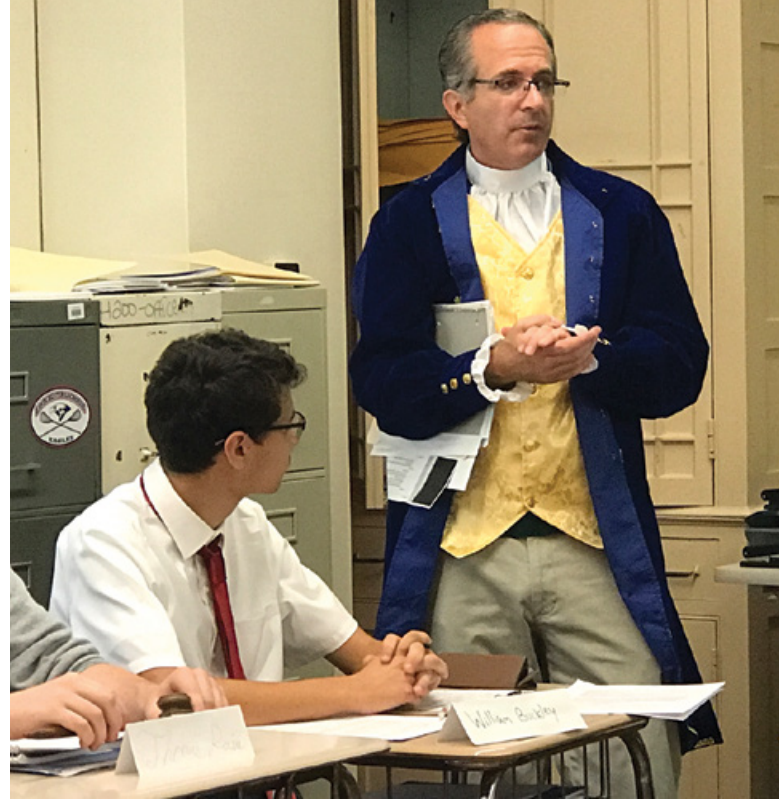
During the week of October 21, students researched and dressed the part of historical figures to learn more about the Constitutional Convention and other major events in American history.

The Eastchester High School seniors participated in lively discussions about topics that framed the real life event and the impact it has on our world today.

"I knew about this before, but I did a lot of research for this class. Wearing the costume really brings the character out," said Erica Reith, who wore a Native American headdress as she took on the role of Sitting Bull.

Mr. Boyle explained that participating in this lesson provides students with multiple viewpoints of the same issue.

"By looking at different perspectives, there is a greater opportunity to interpret and contemplate what happened over time," he said. "They view documents and analyze the different aspects of the process."



Celebrating Italian Heritage

A sense of history and pride filled the Eastchester High School auditorium on October 16th as students and educators from Westchester County celebrated Italian Heritage and Culture month.

Eastchester Middle School students Melina Cavaris and Samantha Poli, along with Eastchester High School students Sofia Mottura, Isabella Rizzo, and Michael Romano and more than 60 students from schools throughout Westchester were honored for excellence in their study of Italian heritage and culture.

Scholarships were awarded by John DeCicco, Sr., and Sons, and Carmine International Hair Salon.

Students sang both the American and Italian National anthems, and Jefferson Elementary School students performed traditional Italian songs.

This year's theme was A Salute to Italian Women in America. Professor Carlo Scalfani, Co-President of the Westchester Coalition of Italian American Organizations, reflected on the Italian-American experience.

"Despite obstacles and challenges, Italian-American women preserved family values, tradition and still had so much success in every field of endeavor," Scalfani said.

Special guests included New York State Comptroller Thomas DiNapoli who said, "No county does Italian Heritage like Westchester." He also encouraged the young women in the audience to take advantage of all the world has to offer today and urged the young men to continue in their ancestors' footsteps.

Westchester County Executive George Latimer recalled his Italian roots as he presented a proclamation to the Coalition.

Many thanks to Judge Francis Nicolai, who presented awards to the students; Vincent Zuccarelli, Co-President of Italian American Organizations; Mario Cermele, President of the Antonio Meucci Lodge #213; OSIA, Master of Ceremonies; Mara Persampieri and Lucrezia Lindia, the Chairperson of the Eastchester High School Foreign Language Department and National President of the National Italian Honor Society.



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Eastchester creativity was on full display at the Anne Hutchinson, Waverly and Greenvale Halloween parades, where students dressed as everything from foods like donuts, M&Ms and hot dogs to scary witches, ghouls and ghosts, to comic book superheroes like Spiderman and real-life heroes like police officers and doctors. Teachers joined in the fun as well, with costumes of their own.