



HASTINGS HAPPENINGS

NEWS FROM HASTINGS-ON-HUDSON UFSD

November 1, 2024

From the Desk of the Superintendent

November 1, 2024

Dear Hastings Families and Staff:

Less is more, often. Okay, work with me; it is the morning after Halloween, a spirited and excitement (sugar) loaded late evening for millions of us with young children. So, less is more with my opening today to a robust *Hastings Happenings*.

Through Theater – HHS Students Teach Us

Sixty-plus HHS students put forth a vital *Big Idea* this past week. In compelling, challenging and accessible ways, the cast and crew delivered a remarkable performance of *Inherit the Wind*. I was fortunate to take in the Saturday production, along with Andy Clayman, Melissa Szymanski and a packed house of families and friends. The *Big Idea* at the heart of this “old chestnut” of a play is best conveyed by two quotes, one from a student, the other from the director:

- *“The Scopes Monkey Trial [the inspiration for Inherit the Wind] was one of the most sensational events in American History because it discussed the conflict between science and religion..The [1925] case was significant because it advocated the inclusion of science in education..The Scopes Trial illustrated something now even more important: critical thinking is a product of different kinds of education that support the integrity of science in today’s world of ‘fake news.’” Nai Wells, 9th Grade, HHS.*
- *“Imagine my surprise when a play written in 1955 about a trial that occurred in 1925 wasn’t ‘an old chestnut’ but alive and well and living in our times...as I dug into the text, I realized the play is about the polarization in our society... while we have always been a country with divides, what is different is the demonization of those who don’t agree.” Rachel Wineberg, Director.*

Through theater, HHS students, deftly guided by directors and teachers, raised up

the fundamental values of a healthy democracy: to think critically, to debate, to discuss, to disagree, but to ultimately treat each other with dignity and respect—the connective tissue in a proudly diverse nation.

Embracing Diwali

Students are on vacation today in recognition of Diwali. It is new for Hastings to recognize the Hindu festival of light, which marks the beginning of the new year in the Hindu calendar. As conveyed in the *Hasting Happenings*, some classes covered Diwali. From my district wide perch, I ask that you take time this weekend to delve into [a dedicated resource the National Museum of Asian Art \(Smithsonian\) has created for Diwali](#). You will find an introduction to Diwali and a range of virtual tours about Indian Art and Culture. I am confident you will be engaged in understanding an essential holiday for our Indian neighbors and friends.

Technical Update – November 6 Presentation on the Athletic Fields

I have been providing regular updates on presentations to the BOE regarding proposed capital improvements for the Farragut Complex and the Athletic Fields. At the November 6 BOE Meeting, major concepts for enhancing the playing fields will be presented by [LAN Associates](#) and [The LA Group](#). This presentation follows the conceptual overview presented at the October 8 BOE Meeting on the renovations of the Farragut Complex by [PBDW](#). Subsequently, on October 22, Andy Clayman and Scott Wynne provided the BOE with an analytical overview of the renovations from their perspectives as building principals.

The [PTSA/SEPTA Superintendent Forum on November 12 \(6:30 p.m, Hillside Multi-Purpose Room\)](#) will provide an opportunity for families to hear more information on the full set of conceptual proposals. There will be ample time for questions and discussions.

The BOE will begin grappling with more detailed plans for each focus area (Farragut Complex and Athletic Fields) as we move deeper into November and December. We will provide the BOE with an updated action plan and calendar at the November 6 meeting.

You can find [HERE](#) the material presented to the BOE over the past several meetings. We are developing a dedicated website for the Bond and Capital Improvements, which will make access to all related materials convenient.

Be well.



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

District News

An Outstanding Educator Inspires Students



Each year, newly admitted University of Chicago students have the opportunity to reflect on their time in school and nominate an educator who played a significant role in their education, made a positive impact in their lives, and influenced them to reach where they are today. Bennie Feldman, a graduate of the Hastings High School (HHS) class of 2024, knew exactly who he would nominate: his eleventh-grade English teacher, Ross Abrams, for the Outstanding Educator of the Year Award.

Bennie nominated Mr. Abrams for the guidance he received during their time in class together which helped him along his path toward intellectual growth. Hundreds of students nominated educators who had positively impacted their lives, but Mr. Abrams stood out among them.

“I was so happy and excited for Bennie when he was accepted into the University of Chicago. I’m truly touched by all of this and I felt so moved that he took the time to nominate me,” said Mr. Abrams. “For me it was particularly meaningful because I had some medical issues in the past, and I only taught him for a quarter of the year. It was wonderful to come back from this challenging time to this supportive environment. This award is special because it represents the support I have gotten during this difficult time in my life. I am truly grateful.”

Mr. Abrams will receive a commemorative award, certificate, and letter that includes details from the student they were nominated by.

“The University of Chicago is honored to recognize excellence in teaching and sincerely congratulates this year’s Outstanding Educator Award winners, who are exceptional in their field and role models for all students,” said Trevor Ross, Senior Assistant Director of Admissions at The University of Chicago. “The University deeply appreciates the lively minds who thirst for knowledge that these educators have nurtured and inspired. We thank them for going above and beyond the call of duty every day and leaving an impression that will be carried over a lifetime.”

HHS Senior Leads Westchester Youth Climate Summit



Hastings High School senior, Oona Spaeth, coordinated the first-ever Westchester Youth Climate Summit. The summit, part of the [Bloomberg Philanthropies Youth Action Fund Grant](#) awarded to the Village of Hastings-on-Hudson, took place at the Farragut Middle School auditorium on Saturday, October 26. The event focused on youth involvement in the climate movement, and the goal is to encourage high school students to take action addressing climate change in their communities. More than 25 schools from across New York State participated. Several local environmental organizations, including Bedford 2030, the Greenlight Award, Groundwork Hudson Valley, and Sustainable Westchester, set up informational booths.

“Creating this Summit was about bringing people together to learn, connect, and find inspiration in each other,” said Oona S.

Hastings-on-Hudson Mayor, Nicola Armacost welcomed the students, and Hasting's resident Seth Godin, author of *The Carbon Almanac*, delivered the keynote speech. Mr. Godin spoke about the systems of climate change and how to overcome them.

“Oona’s Youth Climate Summit is one of the many projects started this summer with funding from our Youth Climate Action Fund (YCAF) grant. I’m thrilled that Oona took the opportunity to not only feature climate experts but also feature the great work of fellow students who were also recipients of microgrants,” said Mayor Armacost.

Hastings 2024 graduate Erik Ghalib moderated a panel discussion with youth activists Lucy Whitney (New Roots Institute), Sofia Choudhri (Sunrise Columbia University), and Mae de Villemejane (Sunrise NYU). The discussion focused on the challenges of being a youth activist, how to have hope, and how to find community. Students also engaged in a workshop led by Leo Bachinger of the New York State Department of Environmental Conservation to develop climate action plans for their communities, which focused on climate mitigation and adaptation. Adrian Segura, representing Bloomberg Philanthropies, was also in attendance.

“I am so proud of Oona and her classmates,” said Mayor Armacost. “They truly are

the climate leaders of the future.”

The event concluded with recipients of the Bloomberg grants presenting their projects to the public.

“Many students came up to me after the summit and told me they connected with so many new people with the same passions as them, and that they felt really motivated and inspired to start their own environmental project,” said Oona S. “My goal for the summit was to make an impact in other students' lives and give them a community they could connect with, and I am so grateful I was able to do that.”

Inherit the Wind: History and Debate Brought to Life



For two nights, Hastings High School was transformed into the small town of Hillsboro, where theatergoers became members of the community from the play *Inherit the Wind*, written by Jerome Lawrence and Robert E. Lee. The interactive event, held on October 25 and 26, turned the lobby into the town center and the auditorium into the courtroom.

“The way the play was organized was very interesting. Ms. Wineberg, the Director, set it up so that the scenes outside the courtroom took place outside the theater. Stepping into the theater felt like stepping into the courtroom, which brought the production to life even more,” said senior Valentina Dimnet, the Assistant Stage Manager of the play.

Inherit the Wind, based on the 1925 Monkey Scopes trial, tells the story of science and religion clashing when a small-town educator is jailed for teaching evolution. The town is in turmoil, and two of the country's most powerful lawyers arrive for a battle of wit, wisdom, and rights.

“The play relates to many real-world events, if not directly in meaning, then through the concepts and ideas behind it. There are several current political figures and policies trying to take us backward, going against the great strides we've made in the world today. This play represents the forces opposing these ‘clock-stoppers’ by broadening and advancing our thinking,” said sophomore Minah Choi-Phillips, who plays Helen Drummond, the Defense Lawyer.

Inherit the Wind enriched the classroom curriculum by connecting Language Arts with Social Studies. It complemented text analysis skills like character motivation and interpretation while tying into American history and current events. Students explored the 1925 Scopes Monkey Trial, the differences between state and federal laws, and topics such as gay marriage and marijuana legalization. The play highlights how public opinion shapes political power and societal influence. Rehearsals had been exciting, blending emotional character insights with a deeper understanding of society's impact on our lives.

Senior Frances Kastner, the Assistant Director, said she wanted the audience to leave the show feeling empowered and inspired to start conversations.

“This true historical event, which the show is based on, took place in 1925, yet the ideas in the play are still relevant and debated today. It's important to understand that this play doesn't create another war between science and religion, but instead defends the right to think. By doing so, both religion and science can be celebrated without invalidating the other,” Frances said.

Fifth-Grade Students Focus on Their Mind and Body



Early this week, fifth-grade students spent a day focusing on their overall well-being during the annual Wellness Day. Wellness Day, which began in 2019, is an opportunity for students to learn strategies and techniques that will help them not only now but also in the future.

“What I loved this year was that students all had a different favorite event. Each event was a favorite for someone, which to me shows that the day was a success,” said Fifth-Grade Teacher Shannon Gray.

Students attended several workshops throughout the day, which included hands-on and physical activities. Teachers Arianna Grassia, Tyler McDonald, and Shannon Gray ran a Mindfulness activity, where students learn breathing and focusing techniques, and then practiced mindful coloring. Teacher Tyler McDonald and Assistant Principal Dan Waldeck taught students about healthy hygiene habits and proper hand washing. Students also learned about kindness and how to send positive messages. School Counselor Danielle DalCero read a story, and the fifth-graders wrote "smile-a-grams" to each other, as well as wrote positive messages on the windows.

Never Stop Moving, a company that provides children’s fitness classes, encouraged students to get up and participate in team-building and cardio activities. Fifth-grade parent Amanda Kupillas also joined in to provide a mind and body activity. Students learned about various parts of the body before learning the “Thriller” dance.



Hillside Halloween: Students Show Off Creative Costumes



Elementary students gleefully paraded outside the school in their Halloween costumes, showcasing everything from superheroes to spooky ghosts. Laughter and excitement filled the air as they proudly waved to their parents, who lined the school grounds, smiling and waving back. The festive atmosphere, full of community spirit, brought families and the school together, making it a Halloween parade to remember.

“It’s such a special experience to see students and staff joyfully parade down our Hillside driveway to the applause and cheers of family and friends.” said Principal Amy Cazes. “Community is what Hillside is all about and our Halloween festivities give us just another reason to celebrate together!”

Celebrating Diwali: The Festival of Lights



Kindergartners learned all about the Indian holiday Diwali, the festival of lights. They made paper diyas, small oil lamps that are typically made from clay, to honor the holiday.

Mrs. Nagrath and Ms. Morais' class welcomed special guests, grandparents of one of their students. They were adorned beautifully in Indian clothing and read a book to the class. Each student in the class was given clay diyas by our visitors.

Quick Links

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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 for holidays and breaks!

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

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