



SOMERS CENTRAL
SCHOOL DISTRICT
NEWS FOR FAMILIES

TUSKER NATION

IB Middle Years Programme Approved for Grades 9 and 10

The International Baccalaureate Organization has approved Somers High School's Middle Years Programme in freshman and sophomore grades, accepting the program into the globally recognized community of rigorous, student-centered schools.



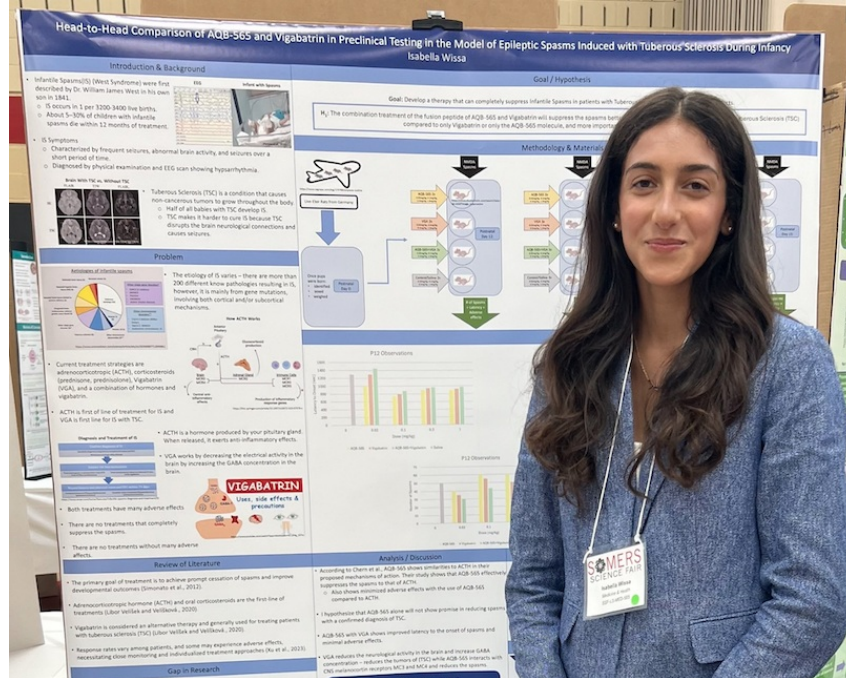
The approval affirms a continuous experience in the approach to learning beginning at Somers Middle School in grade 6 and continuing through grade 10, after which, the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme is one of various robust pathways juniors and seniors may pursue.

"With the International Baccalaureate Organization's affirmation, we are part of a widely recognized, international professional learning community," said Interim Superintendent Harry LeFevre. "That is only going to help us get stronger and build upon what has been created by the dedicated team at Somers High School, supported by the Board of Education."

The organization informed Somers High School earlier this month that the school had met the requirements for authorization.

[Read more about Middle Years Programme here.](#)

Isabella Wissa Named National STEM Champ



Somers High School junior Isabella Wissa has been named one of 106 champions in the National STEM competition for her research into infantile spasms (IS) and their debilitating effects.

Wissa and the other winners will be invited to an expenses-paid National STEM Festival in Washington D.C. in March, where they will present their projects to corporate executives, government officials, and the media.

She was thrilled to learn she had been recognized for the project she's been working on for almost a year and that she cares deeply about.

"I am excited for the potential it has to help infants, especially in the developing world," she said. When she learned she had won, she added, "It felt like all the hard work and late nights were worth it. I couldn't stop smiling—it was such a surreal and joyful moment."

[Read more about STEM champ Isabella Wissa here.](#)

Middle School Students Create Mechanized Amusement Park Rides



Technology and Engineering classes reached new heights as students designed and built amusement park rides.

Somers Middle School eighth graders employed the coding, laser cutting, and engineering skills they developed over the past three years to create original amusement park rides that spin, rotate, or move up and down. Working in small groups, students decided on a type of ride to build, then sketched various options and chose the one they liked the best or thought they would enjoy building the most.

"We made multiple designs and sketches," said Drin H. "We tried some of the other designs and realized they would be too complicated, so we went with something more basic like the dropper style."

Rides could be any design or type as long as they met certain requirements, such as using an Arduino programmable motor to move some part of their structure. Students worked with Arduino motors previously to learn the variety of ways they could use them in their ride designs.

"This is actual coding that they have to write," said teacher Matt Lugo. "They have to write it, edit it, and get it to move their ride the way they want."

The rides also needed seats for LEGO mini-figures, incorporated pieces that were laser-cut using Vcarve software, and used classroom materials such as cardboard, string, felt, wood, and paper. Students also had access to drills, saws, hot glue, and many other tools to help bring their designs to life.

"The 3D printed piece will be a ride operator stand," said Olivia V. "It has a seat and a board that you can write on and an umbrella."

Creating an original amusement park ride allowed the students to be creative communicators, problem-solvers, risk-takers, and open-minded, all learner attributes of the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Program at SMS.

\$63.9M Construction Bond Proposed for Upgrades Across District

The Somers Central School District is preparing a \$63.9 million capital bond package of improvements and repairs, from repaving asphalt surfaces to repairing the schools' roofs, to restore the buildings to top condition, provide state-of-the-art facilities, and prevent costly deterioration.

The plans call for work in all four schools – the oldest of which is the original 1936 section of Somers Middle School – plus the transportation facility. The items to be addressed were identified in the 2024-2025 Comprehensive Plan that was presented at the Jan. 21 [Board of Education meeting](#).

“Repairing, restoring and replacing these items now will avoid greater costs down the line,” said Assistant Superintendent for Business and Operations Christopher Plantania, who presented the plan. (While the plan presented called for \$64.1 million in projects, the scope has been slightly reduced.)

The work would include new walkways, curbs, asphalt pavement, doors, windows, roof and façade repairs, improved drainage and upgraded flooring, bathrooms, classrooms, and playgrounds.

The district would borrow the funds by selling bonds, to be repaid over 15 years. By timing the repayments to replace the final payments being made on a previous \$56 million bond passed in 2009, the district will keep spending relatively flat, or tax neutral. Keeping the local share consistent helps to avoid substantial swings in the tax levy limit that is calculated annually.

The project would be funded in part by \$1.8 million in the capital reserve fund, meaning that the actual amount to be borrowed would be about \$62 million. The public will vote on the borrowing plan May 20, while also voting on the 2025-2026 school budget and electing board of education members.

Watch for ongoing information about the plan from the Board of Education and administration, including three public presentations in April and early May.

Construction is projected to begin in June 2026 and would be substantially complete by September 2027.

“With buildings as large and as important as schools, it is vital to maintain everything in excellent condition to prevent more urgent issues and larger problems down the line,” said Interim Superintendent Harry LeFevre. “As with any other buildings, things come to the end of their useful life, and they need to be replaced.”

[Find the Jan. 21 presentation here.](#)

Whitebull, of Nez Perce Tribe, Visits Intermediate School



Whitebull, a member of the Nez Perce Tribe, regaled Somers Intermediate School fifth graders with stories, songs and music from his Native American tradition.

Also known as J.R. Spencer, the visitor from the Pacific Northwest Native American tribe spoke to the students while dressed in traditional clothing, including a split buffalo horn hat.

One tale he related told of how Coyote, a central figure in the tribe's lore, defeated an enormous monster and, in the end, created humans. The Native American tale also explained why a rattlesnake's head is flat, a grizzly's nose is short, and a muskrat's tail has no hair.

"In these stories," he said. "You learn about the different animals, why they're shaped the way they are, why they behave the way they do, what plants you could use, what time of the year they're ready to be harvested, and how much of that plant you could use at one time."

Whitebull's visit was funded by a grant from the PTA. His trip was arranged by fifth-grade teachers Felicia Salamone and Patty Sisca to enrich English Language Arts lessons in which students learned about Native Americans, the Nez Perce, and the U.S. government.

"I learned about different cultures," Ethan Baksh after the presentation.

Spencer, a storyteller, educator and performing artist, also sang and played on a wooden flute and an elk hide hand drum.

"The best part was his singing," said Victoria Ramos.

The students had learned some of his songs from his videos, and they surprised

their guest by joining in when he began singing.

"This is the first time I actually had kids sing along with me," he said.

Kindergartners Celebrate Winter Solstice With Snow-Themed Activities



Kindergartners in Kailin Michelitch's class at Primrose Elementary School celebrated the recent winter solstice by engaging in crafts and stories with a cold and snowy theme.

Three parents volunteered to visit the class, bringing winter crafts. For one, students pursued their artistic talents by making snowflakes with cotton swabs, white glue, and cardboard disks.

"A few parents came into the classroom, and each planned a craft activity with a winter theme," said Ms. Michelitch. "It's just one of many opportunities for parents to get involved throughout the year."

At another craft station, students were given a blank template in the shape of a snowman and put their matching skills to the test. Students had to locate and place the correct sticker on the template to complete the snowman, including hats, buttons, arms, and facial features. By the time they were done, they had a snowman worthy of being Frosty's friend.

"We're making snowmen," said Olivia. "You match the shapes, like a present and a present."

At the final activity station, students discussed the books they love to read while creating beautiful bookmarks for themselves, family, and friends. Students were

given foam bookmarks, a selection of winter-themed stickers, and pipe cleaners to decorate them with. Pipe cleaners could also be used instead of ribbons to make bows as a finishing touch.

"My favorite book is 'The Cat in the Hat'," said one student while working on a bookmark.

Another student added, "I love 'Pete the Cat' books."

Not only are activities like these a nice way for parents to come into the classroom to volunteer hands-on, but they also are great learning opportunities for students to practice important kindergarten skills, including listening, matching, and following directions, all while exploring their creativity.

Budget Presentation Looks at Non-Instructional Costs

On Tuesday, Jan. 21, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Operations Christopher Platania, presented cost projections on the non-instructional portions of the 2025-2026 budget. They include legal costs, technology, buildings and grounds, benefits and transportation.



**2025-2026 Budget Discussion
Board of Education Meeting
January 21, 2025**

Spending in those areas would total \$46,288,909, an increase of \$1,161,161 over the current year. The largest section, and the largest increase, would be in benefits, which would increase \$910,913 to \$28,657,655. Much of the increase is due to health insurance costs, where the rates are set by the New York State Health Insurance Program and the Putnam Northern Westchester Health Benefits Consortium.

The costs do not include the spending plan for instructional costs, which comprise the larger portion of district spending. That plan will be presented Feb. 11. After that, the schedule is:

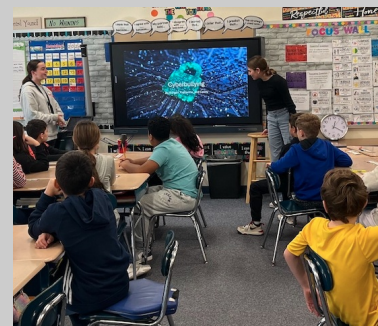
- March 25: Budget planning session.
- April 22: Budget summary and adoption.
- May 6: Budget hearing.
- May 20: Budget vote.

[Find the Jan. 21 presentation here.](#)

Seen Around Somers



Seventh graders created works inspired by the



Somers High School students hosted the annual Veteran's Lunch in December, honoring the community's veterans. On the menu: pancakes, French toast and more, prepared by the students.

boldly colored works of Dutch artist Piet Mondrian, a pioneer of 20th century abstract art, in the class of Somers Middle School art teacher Gary Wanderlingh.

Eighth-grade Family and Consumer Science students taught fifth-graders about internet safety recently, covering topics including cyberbullying, digital ethics, digital literacy, inappropriate content, and online privacy.

Donations Pouring in For Tusker Shop



It's a great problem to have: the Tusker Shop, offering clothes, necessities, toys and more to those in need – at no charge – has been collecting so many donations that organizer Raisha Hernandez is short of space to store them all.

Contributions have been streaming in from thoughtful community members to bolster the stock of the shop, which opens the first Saturday of each month, 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., at Somers Middle School, 250 Route 202. It is open to all Somers community members, not only school district families. The next one will be Feb. 1.

Don't worry about the stock room overflowing. As more donations arrive, Hernandez is happy to find space for them.

"I want to thank all those who have donated and who continue to donate," said Hernandez, who is the Somers Central School District's Family Liaison. "It's great to see how much support there is in the community."

The stock room is crammed with clothes for all ages, household items, toys, games

and more. The merchandise includes Funko pops of the whole Harry Potter crew, Grogu toys from *The Mandalorian* in their packaging, large-piece puzzles, decorative jars of brined olives and brightly colored peppers, and at least one bicycle.

Hernandez was inspired to establish the shop by a similar boutique at a Katonah community center where she volunteers. She started the Tusker Shop last November and has been surprised by the flood of donations.

"There's a willingness to help others in this community that warms my heart," she said.

Donations can be brought to the shop starting 8 a.m. on the days that the shop is in operation. For other ways to donate, and for more information, contact Hernandez at rhernandez@somersschools.org or 845-260-8502.

Tusker Tots Program Open for Children Ages 3-5

The Tusker Tots 'n' Teens program has openings for the remainder of this school year for Somers district children ages 3-5. Parents and guardians can enroll children for this year, next year and beyond.



The program is part of Somers High School's Early Childhood Education classes. In it, high school students learn how to create dynamic and engaging lessons to perform with the children. High school students interact with the tots throughout three class periods as they play games, complete crafts and lessons, and enjoy a snack brought from home.

The program is free and open to Somers district children age 3-5 (Children must be 3 years old by Sept. 1 of enrolled school year, and fully potty trained.)

The program runs Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, and Friday, 11:20 a.m. to 1:50 p.m., from mid-September through early June.

Enrollment is ongoing on a first come, first served basis.

For more information, contact Melanie Ivey at mivey@somersschools.org



- Ninety people attended **SEPTA's** Movie Extravaganza screening of *Mufasa* on January 20th. Families enjoyed socializing over pizza and snacks after the show.
- **Primrose PTA** hosted first grade and kindergarten Author's Days in December. Students met and learned from Susanna Leonard Hill and Katie Petruzzello, respectively, through read-alouds and engaging interactive discussions.
- **SIS PTA** recently approved three grants to teachers. As a

result, students will be exploring hands-on learning through puzzles and building kits, and fifth graders enjoyed a presentation from Whitebull and the Nez Perce Native Americans in December.

- **SMS PTA** is busy planning fun experiences for all students; 6th graders will have their spring social in May, and 7th and 8th graders will have dances in June.
 - **High School PTSA** hosted a successful teachers' luncheon last month, and the Hang Up and Drive presentation for sophomores and juniors will be on March 3.
- Congratulations to SMS, SIS, Primrose, and SEPTA for winning the Trailblazer Award (75% membership goal) last month. Thank you to all our PTA members!

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