

Good evening. An underlying theme of our budget presentations is the attention Rye Neck pays to individualization. Of course, we collectively identify as Panthers and we have all the staples of a school system, like classrooms built for a few dozen students, a bell system for mass movement, and yearbooks that make you a part of the “class of...”. However, while we present a responsible, collective, districtwide budget to our community, most of what we do is aimed at serving the needs of individuals.

In terms of reading, writing, and arithmetic, Rye Neck provides academic intervention services based on student need from K to 12, ENL afterschool help, Integrated Co-Taught courses for students with IEPs, advanced coursework beginning at the Middle School and culminating in 24 AP course offerings at the High School. Most of our academic work provides opportunity for student choice in everyday core instruction, in addition to our DW Wonder Studio, Bellows Idea Lab, 19 MS specials and 75 HS electives. Our students' creativity is on display on our budget slides, on our walls and on the latest video edition of the High School's Rye Neck News.

Rye Neck believes in extracurricular opportunities attractive to student interest. We have Math Olympiads and Science Expos; our 6th grade has intramurals while 70% of students in grades 7-12 compete at the modified, JV, and varsity level of interscholastic athletics. Beyond General Music class we offer band and string lessons in grades 4 through 8 with performance groups in both the MS and HS. There are over 40 clubs at the MS HS level, supported by PTSA at Bellows.

By the time our students graduate, they have had the chance to taste the real world through capstone projects and internships, and take dual enrollment courses with local colleges and universities. Our counseling department helps with the monumental transition into adulthood: the graduating class of 2024 last year, only 73% the size of this year's class, got 577 acceptances to 212 different schools.

Our students come through a nurturing environment that starts and ends with an involved and caring teaching staff, and in between, an array of social-emotional assistance: Second Step, Kelso, RULER, No Place for Hate, Character Ed, DBT, and ESS. Not satisfied with that, we're working on creating an even more empathic and self-driven district for them through our Strategic Plan.

Which brings me to my concluding point. When federal and state governments argue over vocabulary like diversity, equity, and inclusion, they forget that schools are where our children make their own friends, that schools are one of the places they learn right from wrong through standards they hold in their hearts; and that schools teach how to think for themselves and solve problems. We have a welcoming and affirming environment here at Rye Neck because we understand our students are all different and all individuals, but our process is to work together and everyone offers their unique contributions to the group. Creating a welcoming and affirming environment is a goal that transcends politics: it speaks to our obligation to put each of our students in the best position to excel as part of an organization. It's also a principle that led to a diverse group of Rye Neck High School students capping off their production of *Grease* with an extraordinary and inclusive, sensory-friendly show on March 9th. That's a wonderful example of how our community has forged a district that values opportunity.

