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## SOMERSET HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT

# Pathways to Success



March/April 2025

### ***Superintendent's Corner by Dr. Brian Brotschul***

In 1905 the Olcott Family deeded the property that Bernards High School sits on to the District in addition to their family home at 25 Olcott Avenue. The mission was clear: use our home and our land to ensure that every child in Bernardsville receives a thorough and efficient education. Every child. Every single one. Not most of the children, or some of the children, but every single child.



The Olcott Family, through their generosity, has continued to serve as a beacon of philosophy in the District one hundred and twenty-five years later. Their vision of ensuring every child in our school district receives an education that prepares them for their next level of education or work serves as our absolute non-negotiable, and nothing is able to move us as a District off of that mission and of that charge from the Olcott Family.

As the Olcotts so passionately pointed out, education is a local responsibility; one that the United States Constitution delegated to each state in our country. In New Jersey we rely on local control and the Somerset Hills Board of Education takes its responsibility seriously and with great care.

In recent weeks there have been several proposed changes related to public education at the federal level that may have contributed to a sense of uncertainty and concern among families in our communities. I want to acknowledge these challenges and understand the potential questions they raise about the future of our educational environment.

I want to be unequivocally clear that changes at the federal level do not deter the District from our dedication to providing an exceptional education for all of our students. The District remains committed to providing a learning environment where students are educated but also valued as integral members of our school community.

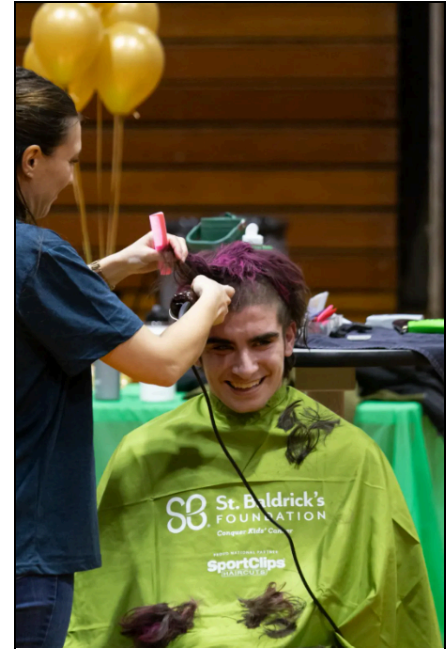
The District remains focused on collaborative efforts with our educators, families, and community partners to continue to foster an environment of trust, respect, and excellence. We are dedicated to addressing challenges head-on, supporting our students, staff, and communities through any uncertainty, and ensuring that our schools remain just as the Olcott Family envisioned: places of opportunity and aspirations for all.

In Somerset Hills, all does indeed mean all, and it will continue to serve as our moral, academic, and social compass.

***St. Baldrick's Event***  
***by Dr. Scott Neigel***

On March 12th, BHS hosted its second annual St. Baldrick's Head Shaving Fundraiser to benefit pediatric cancer research. The event was organized and facilitated by seniors Lola Parente and Ari Rosen, along with Janice O'Brien, BHS English teacher. Nineteen students, staff and community members volunteered to shave their heads in advance of the night, in addition to ten other participants spontaneously volunteering at the event.

The "cause" was contagious; the excitement and the electricity were palpable. A total of \$25,155 was raised... and the donations are still coming in a month later!



***Congratulations***  
***by Dr. Olga Edgerton***



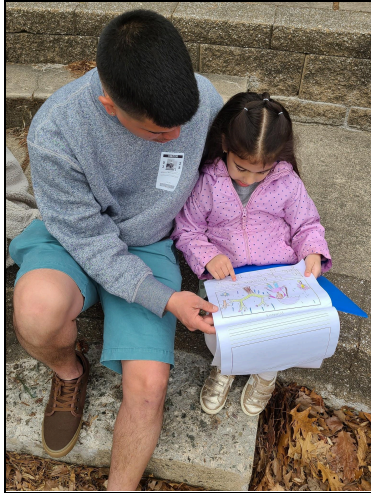
Fifty BHS seniors recently participated in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which focused on Mathematics and English Language Arts. NAEP is a nationwide assessment that provides valuable data on student achievement and helps inform improvements in education at the state and national levels. We commend our students for representing our district, and we appreciate their role in being part of this important assessment.

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***Facilities by Frank Riccio***

The project to freshen up the infields on our baseball and softball fields has been completed.





***Celebrating Literacy, en Español***  
***by Jasmine Akauola***

On Friday, March 28th, Sarah Roth's Bilingual Kindergarten class hosted a literacy event for their parents, staff, and district administrators. During the event, students read aloud personal narratives and shared the matching illustrations to their work. Our bilingual classroom began in the fall of 2024, and students have made amazing progress in both English and Spanish! This literacy event highlighted the wonderful work of our students and the magic of bilingual education.

After presenting their work, students and families enjoyed an afternoon snack together. Thank you to our families, staff, and community for attending! Students were so proud of their work and were eager to share.



***BMS French***  
***by Lisa Garofalo***



The American Association of Teachers of French has conferred its award of Exemplary on Bernardsville Middle School in March of 2025. This prestigious award recognizes the outstanding quality of the middle school's French program. Bernardsville Middle School is one of only nine in the nation to receive this award. Thanks to this outstanding program headed by Patricia Kupper, Bernardsville Middle School has increased its enrollment in French over the past three years. Mademoiselle Kupper has arranged guest speakers both in-person and virtually to expose students to the world of French outside the classroom walls. French students in eighth grade participated in French Day at Montclair State University last month. They participated in workshops to both demonstrate and expand their knowledge of French culture, specifically Senegal and the Ivory Coast. Eighth grade students won second place at this state-wide event for their poetry reenactment. The school also recently participated in the Annual AATF National French Contest, and we are now eagerly awaiting national results. Past years have seen BMS French students win awards in the AATF's national creative writing competitions. The American Association of Teachers of French, founded in 1927, is the largest association of French teachers in the world, with close to 8,000 members.

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### ***VFW Honors Mr. Michael Catelli***

The VFW highly supports the education of America's youth. VFW Citizenship Education programs stimulate interest in America's history, traditions, Americanism, civic responsibility, and patriotism. VFW Memorial Post 7858 nominated Mr. Michael Catelli, who oversees social studies programs in the district, for the Educator of the Year Award because he exemplifies these qualities and has always been a strong supporter of Post 7858 through the youth essays contests, youth speech contests, and creating chances for our local veterans to connect with students.



### ***SHSD Counseling Corner: SEL DAY! by Dr. Jaime Walker***

Schools across the country—including the Somerset Hills School District—participated in the annual “SEL DAY” event last month. Although social-emotional learning practices can be infused throughout the curriculum every day, the event allows schools to coordinate activities that contribute to educating the whole child on this special occasion. SEL practices have been demonstrated to improve behavior and academic performance while easing anxiety. At BHS this year, SEL Day became SEL Week to promote a healthy lifestyle and overall wellness. Counselors prepared meet-ups to bring students together to talk about important teen issues. Daily topics varied from self-awareness/management, relationship skills, social awareness, and responsible decision making. A display of specifically curated wellness-themed books was prepared in the BHS Media Center and inspirational messages and healthy tips were outlined on the hallway chalkboard. At BMS, families were able to complete an activity together about the importance of reframing negative thoughts and the ability to have and accept a different perspective from others around us. Bedwell students celebrated Read Across America Week simultaneously and important social-emotional learning concepts were infused in the stories.

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***PopsNight!*** On April 10th, the Bernards Choirs presented their annual PopsNight! This year's student-chosen theme was "Best of Broadway!" and the night was a big hit with solos, duets, trios,



quartets, full ensemble pieces, and special appearances by the BMS 8th Grade Chorus. If you missed it this year... it is something you don't want to miss in 2026!



## *School Nurses Day- May 7th*

Thank you to our team of  
School Nurses  
who provide excellent care  
for all on our district campuses,  
each and every school day!



### Our Nurses

- Conduct exams
- Administer first aid
- Make referrals
- Lead trainings
- Assist staff
- Promote a healthy and safe environment
- Encourage nutrition and fitness
- Maintain accurate records
- Confer with students, staff and parents
- Nurture a positive school climate
- ... AND SO MUCH MORE!



### *And the winner is...*

Congratulations to Bernardsville Middle School student Samuel Emery for receiving the Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Award in the Arts!

This prestigious honor recognizes students who not only demonstrate outstanding talent, but also embody the values that Paul Robeson stood for - human and civil rights, equality, freedom, and the importance of unity among all people.

Samuel's creativity, dedication, and passion for the arts inspire those around him, and his commitment to using his voice and talent to make a difference is a reflection of the legacy of Paul Robeson.

Samuel was recognized at a wonderful ceremony held on April 3rd at Raritan Valley Community College. Special thanks to School Counselor Michele Adkins who nominated Samuel for this award and to BMS Literacy Teacher Pat McMillan for her support!

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## ***Stay Alert***

***by Jeremy Schwarz***

### **Top Phishing Attacks in 2025**

Phishing remains a leading cause of data breaches, accounting for over 90% of incidents (Cisco, 2021). Despite advanced security measures, user awareness is crucial for protection.

### **What is Phishing?**

Phishing is a cyber-attack that exploits social engineering to steal sensitive information. Attackers trick users into clicking malicious links or downloading harmful files by posing as trusted entities.

### **Common Phishing Tactics:**

- **Email Spoofing** – Attackers forge email domains to impersonate legitimate sources. They manipulate email headers to appear trustworthy, hoping recipients overlook the sender's actual address.
- **SMS Phishing ("Smishing")** – Scammers send deceptive text messages containing malicious links. People often trust SMS more than email, making this an effective tactic.

### **Warning Signs of Phishing:**

- Requests for sensitive information (login credentials, payment details)
- Urgent or threatening language
- Poor grammar and spelling errors
- Suspicious URLs and unexpected attachments
- Too-good-to-be-true offers



### **How to Spot Phishing Attempts:**

- **Check domain addresses** – Scammers use similar-looking but incorrect domains.
- **Beware of shared drive links** – If you should already have access, it's likely a trap.
- **Unsolicited emails** – Verify the sender before opening attachments or clicking links.
- **Urgent messages** – Instead of clicking, visit the official website directly.
- **Spelling & grammar mistakes** – Many phishing emails contain errors.
- **Unknown attachments** – Never open files from unverified sources.

Staying vigilant and verifying sources can help protect against phishing threats.

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***INSIGHT 2025***  
***by Lindsay Barna***

Somerset Hills School District administrators, Lindsay Barna and Michael Catelli, shared their expertise with out-of-district colleagues at a recent professional development event. INSIGHT 2025, held on March 7th at Manville High School, was a day-long event, offered free of charge to educators from around the state. Ms. Barna and Mr. Catelli both presented to an audience of district and building-level administrators on how to assist staff in adopting more equitable grading practices. They shared insights from their own personal research and readings, as well as work done in and around the district.



***Incoming Kindergarteners!***  
***by Keith Koellhoffer***

On April 8th, Bedwell hosted information sessions for incoming Kindergarten families. The presentations, led by Kindergarten teacher Phyllis De Stefano, aimed to equip families with essential information for the upcoming school year. We look forward to welcoming all of our new families to the Bedwell community! Thank you to School Nurse Jackie Pistilli-Urena, Director of Operations Frank Riccio, Maschio's representative Krystian Kalinowski, and the entire Kindergarten team for their contributions to make this event such a great success!



All essential paperwork was emailed home to families who could not attend in person; if it was not received, please reach out to Bedwell leaders Keith Koellhoffer or Jasmine Akauola.

### ***Music & Talent***



Crimson Café is a showcase of the Jazz Ensembles from Bernardsville Middle School, Bedminster Township School, and Bernards High School. Since each middle school ensemble feeds up to Bernards High School, this event allows the young musicians to perform together, and establish connections and camaraderie through music. Each band sounded absolutely stellar on April 12th! “It was an incredible concert!” shared Stephen Taesler. “I am so proud of every student involved and they should be proud too!”



### ***Go Green Team!***

On April 3rd, the Bernards High School Green Team had a service and educational field trip to Raritan Headwaters Fairview Farm Wildlife Preserve. The team removed invasive species from an area to make room to plant native species in the future! The Green Team has been leading the way in helping BHS become a River-Friendly Certified School.



### ***ANTICIPATED Positions 2025-2026 School Year***

Social Studies - High School  
Language Arts Literacy - Middle School

Board Certified Behavior Analyst  
School Psychologist/Social Worker

Apply at: [WWW.SHSD.ORG](http://WWW.SHSD.ORG)



### ***Professional Development by Dr. Coleen Butler***

During a recent professional development day for staff members, SHSD was happy to welcome back Philip Seyfried as a speaker and workshop facilitator. Mr. Seyfried is an educator and a curriculum developer with Advancing Literacy, Columbia University. He has been investigating the intersection of artificial intelligence (AI) with literacy practices and shared his work with our staff. His forthcoming book on Digital Literacy and Artificial Intelligence examines how classrooms can thoughtfully integrate digital tools to support learning while holding tightly to our humanity. The SHSD staff was able to glean important new information from Mr. Seyfried and it was an experience enjoyed by many!

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***Sports Spotlight: Coach Bisconti***  
***by Michael Hoppe***



Bernards High’s Girls Basketball Coach, Brett Bisconti is being honored as the Bernards girl’s team finished the season as Mountain Division Champions with a record of 23-6! The 23 wins surpasses the 1996-97 Championship season (22 wins) by Coached by Dr. Roger Nettune. In 1996-97 Bernards High was in the Colonial Hills Conference.

Coach Bisconti is a History Teacher at Livingston High School and has been working there for the past nine years. He currently teaches AP US History and Honors US History. He started coaching basketball at Bernards in 2019. His coaching philosophy is to “prioritize hard work, discipline, and teamwork in order to develop student athletes who excel on the court and in their community. The goal of our program is to inspire a passion for basketball and competition and use it as a vehicle to build champions on and off the court.”

When talking about this year’s team he said, “This was my favorite team that I have coached. We went from 14-14 a year ago to 23-6 this season. The kids worked hard and I am so proud of them.” When asked to share one memory, he did not hesitate. “I’ll always remember beating Voorhees this past season to advance to the Sectional Semi-Final in front of a packed house in the lower gym. We beat them for the first time since I’ve been at BHS, and by winning that game, we set the record for the most wins in a season.”

Coach Bisconti credits his father for influencing him as an athlete. He said, “My father definitely had the biggest impact on me as an athlete and has continued to be supportive throughout my coaching career as well. While teaching me the game of basketball, he was teaching me



even more about life along the way. I do everything I can to use the success and the adversity my players go through as lessons to grow as an athlete and, more importantly, as a person.”

***SHEF Spotlight by Jennifer Adams, SHEF Marketing & PR Chair***

The Board of Trustees of the Somerset Hills Education Foundation (SHEF) recently welcomed two new members to its leadership: Kristen deGrandpré, a dedicated community member and experienced healthcare professional, and Coach Jon Simoneau, a respected teacher and head football coach at Bernards High School.



Kristen deGrandpré, of Bernardsville, brings over 25 years of experience in healthcare as a nurse and an educator. Her professional background includes leadership, research, and community engagement, which she now applies to her work with SHEF. Kristen and her husband are active supporters of their three teenagers' sports and extracurricular activities. She has served as a Cub Scout leader, a Board of Education member, a little league coach, and is currently a Girl Scout leader for her daughter's Cadette troop. Her dedication to service and education has had a positive impact across many corners of the community.

Coach Jon Simoneau joins SHEF as the new Bernards High School faculty representative. Simoneau teaches Video Production and Video Editing, where he emphasizes creativity, technical skill, and storytelling, offering students hands-on media experience. He is also the head coach of the Mountaineers football program, having led the team to over 100 career victories and multiple playoff appearances. In 2023, the New York Jets named him their Week 2 High School Coach of the Week, celebrating his 100th win and awarding a \$1,000 donation to the football program. A graduate of The College of New Jersey, where he played football and rugby, Simoneau brings enthusiasm and expertise to his roles both in the classroom and on the field. His appointment to the SHEF board further strengthens the connection between faculty and foundation. His leadership, mentorship, and focus on teamwork embody the values SHEF seeks to support throughout the district.



SHEF is committed to fostering a thriving educational environment for all students in the Somerset Hills School District. With the addition of new leadership on the Board of Trustees, the Foundation is energized to broaden its reach and deepen its impact. For more information and to make a donation to support local education, please visit: <https://www.shefnj.org/donate-to-shef>





*A Note from  
Sam Frenda,  
SHSD Board President*

On April 1st, I was fortunate enough to attend the BMS HSA annual Book Club meeting which discussed the book *Anxious Generation* by Jonathan Haidt. The book itself was extraordinarily relevant and timely given the discussion, not only regarding cell phone use at the district and board level, but at the state level as well. BMS Principal Lisa Garafalo, and K-8 Mental Health Counselor Jackie Pasquarelli led a dialogue centered around some of the most significant topics and questions raised in the book, and focused on many of the shared concerns of parents and community members as they pertain to student cell phone use.

Prior to the start of the discussion Ms. Garafalo led the group in an exercise central to the Capturing Kids' Hearts program which all BMS students have participated in this year. We collaboratively engaged in the construction of a social contract to frame the expectations for behavior and participation in the larger discussion. The social contract bound all participants to honor fundamental ideas of trusting and respecting one another. This initial exercise allowed us to participate in an environment that was non-judgmental and fostered a space where we could be truly honest and vulnerable. Participants shared intimate and personal concerns, practices, fears and a desire for assistance and community support in addressing a complex issue. It was a revealing and outstanding dialogue based solely on improving the wellbeing of our children and ensuring that we all are partners and equally invested in removing barriers for student success.

This event was a powerful reminder of how important a sense of community is not only for our students but our parents/caregivers and educators as well. What happens within the walls of our schools is so much more effective and meaningful when we work in partnership with one another and, most importantly, respect the value of different perspectives and areas of expertise that everyone brings to the table. There is always work to do and we are simply strongest in achieving our goals and making improvements when we truly listen to, and work with, one another.

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***Reminders***

Upcoming Board Meetings: April 30th, May 13th, and June 16th

Check out our [District News](#) and [Superintendent Reports](#)!



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**Somerset Hills School District Board of Education**

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