
SOMERSET HILLS SCHOOL DISTRICT

Pathways to Success



Nov/Dec 2025

Superintendent's Corner by Dr. Brian Brotschul

Using a slow cooker, not a microwave, to produce our outputs requires a deliberate, patient approach. One that consistently arrives at a better end product. This month, I'll share news about our study of our relationship with Bedminster Township, the process by which we collaboratively make decisions in SHSD, and an examination of school and District culture.



Regionalization Study: The District and Bedminster Township have approved a Regionalization Study to better understand the two districts. This [study](#) allows both Boards of Education to formally chart our direction and examine the District through a broader lens, given that the last time we engaged in this work was in 2003. This work includes an Advisory Team of 21 community partners across our districts and a Steering Committee of nine community partners who are charged with establishing priorities that both Districts are passionate about to guide the study moving forward. The groups are meeting in January and February while the *Sweeney Center for Public Policy* conducts its work. We expect to have a report ready next November, followed by public meetings in December to review its contents and the resulting recommendations. This study is grounded in community participation to drive priorities in the Somerset Hills and will significantly inform our future.

Collaborative Leadership: To refine decision-making processes, SHSD works closely with the *Rutgers University School of Labor and Management Relations Public School Collaborative* to ensure our schools have defined Leadership Teams that represent a partnership between the District administration and the local association of educators. Collaborative Leadership focuses on making decisions on the front lines, supporting student achievement, and examining each of our schools through a critical lens to ensure that *All Means All*. Each School Leadership Team, comprising school administrators and our front-line educators, is examining our outcomes, developing priorities, establishing professional development, and informing our work to support students. This work, and our educators' participation, will significantly inform our future.

Culture of our Schools: Culture, not strategy, sustains success. Recently, you received a communication from me regarding a project that examines school and District culture to understand and improve the experiences of students, staff, and parents. The New Jersey Department of Education recently informed us that Somerset Hills will receive individualized support and services for improving school climate and culture from consultants at the *School Climate Transformation Project (SCTP)* at the *Graduate School of Applied and Professional Psychology at Rutgers University* to build a favorable school climate and culture that is inclusive of all students. This work, and your participation, will significantly inform our future.

As we say goodbye to 2025 and hello to 2026, I am optimistic about the future and appreciate the flexibility to conduct this critical work. Happy Holidays and Happy New Year. Bring on 2026.

Governor's Educator of the Year Program

by Dr. Scott Neigel, Ms. Lisa Garofalo, and Mr. Scott Wolfe

Mrs. Heather Hunkele has been a cornerstone of Bernards High School for 18 years, known for her innovative teaching, unwavering support of students, and her ability to make every learner feel seen, challenged, and empowered. Families frequently share how their children enter her classes with curiosity and leave with confidence—often discovering passions they didn't know they had. Mrs. Hunkele's commitment to helping students find their voice and take ownership of their learning has made her one of the most impactful educators in our community.



Nowhere is Mrs. Hunkele's influence more evident than in our journalism program, which she has transformed into one of the school's signature strengths. Under her leadership, The Crimson has become an award-winning digital publication recognized statewide and nationally, including SNO Distinguished Sites honors. She inspires her student journalists to explore meaningful topics, engage with the community, and tell stories that reflect the full spirit of Bernards High School. Her commitment extends beyond the newsroom as well—when students expressed interest in expanding their work, Mrs. Hunkele guided them through the creation of a school podcast studio, helping them research equipment, plan the space, and bring the idea to life. The studio now produces student-created, award-winning content and provides an invaluable real-world learning experience.

Mrs. Hunkele also brings that same dedication to her 11th grade English classes, where her thoughtful instruction and student-centered approach foster strong readers, thinkers, and writers. Within the English department, she is a trusted leader who shares effective practices—such as her classroom book-club model—and supports colleagues with generosity and expertise. In addition to her journalism work, she serves as advisor to both The Crimson and our award-winning yearbook, The Bernardian, guiding students through the enormous responsibility of documenting the school year with accuracy, creativity, and pride.

Students, staff, and families alike describe Mrs. Hunkele as a life-changing educator—someone who not only teaches, but opens doors. Many of her students have pursued journalism and communications in college and beyond, crediting her for helping them discover a passion they might never have explored otherwise.



Ms. Jaclyn Pasquarelli, our building’s mental health counselor, is an asset to the emotional and social well-being of students at Bernardsville Middle School. A graduate of both Rutgers University and New York University, Ms. Pasquarelli hones her skills as a certified clinical social worker at our shared campus. She is a support for students and their families. Ms. Pasquarelli is dedicated, committed, kind, and caring. A recent presenter at New Jersey School Board Association’s fall workshop, Ms. Pasquarelli believes in the value of building relationships and empowering student voices. Parents say, “Ms. Pasquarelli embodies the very best of what an educator should be—someone who sees and nurtures the whole child, beyond academics.”

Mrs. Kristene Tresslar has been a teacher at Bernardsville Middle School since 2006 and shares her passion for learning with her 7th grade students. She is the embodiment of a master teacher. She responds to student needs, approaches her instruction with creativity, and reflects on the effectiveness of her instruction. Mrs. Tresslar fosters an engaging and inviting classroom atmosphere, balancing lighthearted humor with rigorous, in-depth exploration of the subject matter. Her teaching focuses on individual students and by the end of school year, her students leave her classroom as stronger readers and writers because of her individualized attention. A student describes being treated by Mrs. Tresslar, “as if I was one of her own.”

Mrs. Tresslar’s commitment extends beyond the classroom walls as she actively seeks out professional development opportunities. She is always reflecting on best pedagogical practices, keeping current and informed on curricular updates and middle school resources. She is a natural mentor, generously sharing her insights and guidance with new and veteran teachers. Colleagues and supervisors alike echo Mrs. Tresslar’s exceptional talents as an educator, as well as being a respected and collaborative leader.

Mrs. Jess Collins received multiple nominations this year, which speaks volumes to the impact that she has had on Bedwell School. These nominations came from a variety of people including a colleague, parent, and student. Mrs. Collins has created a classroom environment that is inclusive of all



learners, and one that is based on safety and cooperation. Bedwell School recognizes the positive impact that Mrs. Collins has had on all of the students that have gone through her classroom door.

Mrs. Collins is a dedicated advocate of her students. Unwavering in her commitment to student needs, Mrs. Collins makes sure that she gets them what they need, require, and deserve. As one person shared, "Her teaching emphasizes student growth, creating an environment where every child feels valued, capable, and empowered to succeed, and she makes meaningful contributions to school initiatives, consistently setting a standard of excellence."



Mrs. Lauren Smith has consistently demonstrated exceptional skill, compassion, and dedication to both her students and her colleagues. Through her use of data-driven instruction, small group interventions, and personalized learning plans, she has helped a plethora of students make remarkable growth in both comprehension and confidence. She is an educator that not only advances literacy initiatives but also strengthens the entire school community. Mrs. Smith "embodies the qualities of an exceptional educator: patience, insight, innovation, and heart."

With more than 40 years of combined teaching experience, Mrs. Collins and Mrs. Smith, are two examples of all that is great about Bedwell School.

Tomorrow's Teachers Make School Visits by Lindsay Barna

Tomorrow's Teachers, an elective course added to the Bernards High School Program of Studies last school year, offers an exciting opportunity for high school students interested in the field of education. Taught by English teacher Lauren Volosin, the course aims to provide students the opportunity to experience the teaching profession.

In addition to coursework on historical and current issues in education, child development, and effective instruction, students are also required to observe in classrooms and eventually complete a long-term internship. During the past two months, enrolled students have had the opportunity to visit both Bedwell Elementary School and Bernardsville Middle School. Teaching staff volunteer at each location sign up to "host" our Tomorrow's Teachers, who get a first-hand view of what teaching is all about!

Supporting Positive Behavior
at Home & School
by Jamie Koransky

During our December SEPAG meeting, we discussed how children often communicate their needs through their behavior, especially when they do not yet have the words or skills to express themselves. Every behavior has a purpose, whether it is seeking attention, avoiding a task, wanting something tangible, or meeting a sensory need. By paying attention to what happens before and after a behavior, parents and educators can better understand what a child may be trying to tell us. Most importantly, families are encouraged to remember that challenging behaviors are not personal. Giving children a fresh start each day builds trust and strengthens the parent-child relationship.

Simple, proactive strategies that make a big difference in preventing challenging behavior were also discussed. Keeping routines predictable, setting clear expectations, offering small choices, and using specific positive praise help children feel more in control and successful. Visual supports, calm modeling, and meeting a child's sensory needs before frustration builds can also support smoother days at home and school. With consistency and understanding, we can help children stay regulated, confident, and ready to learn.

Thank you Maintenance Department!
by Frank Riccio

Our maintenance team has been busy keeping the property safe and prepared for the season. Recent efforts include clearing fallen leaves, salting the parking lots ahead of predicted icy conditions, and promptly addressing heating issues throughout the facilities. The team has also completed winterization of the snack shed and lawn sprinkler system to protect equipment and ensure that everything is ready for use when warmer weather returns. We are grateful they are keeping our students, staff, and facilities safe, along with our dedicated custodial staff.

Thank you SHEA

On December 11th, the Somerset Hills Education Association teamed up with The Pretty Pink Rooster in downtown Bernardsville to raise funds for the SHEA scholarship fund. Each year, SHEA awards two scholarships to deserving BHS seniors heading off to continue their education. It was a fun night of shopping with a great cause!



Business Office Attacks Audit

From September 17th through October 1st, Suplee, Clooney & Company conducted the initial phase of their audit process at the Olcott Administrative Office. During that time, members of the Business Office provided information and supporting documentation, with assistance from the Data Administrator, the District Registrar, and the Operations, Curriculum, and Technology departments.



Following that, the auditors continued to review the District's financials and provided the Business Administrator with a final report in December. Suplee, Clooney & Company will present their findings at a public SHSD Board of Education Meeting early in the new year. Special thanks to Richard D. Liguori, Business Administrator/Board Secretary; Jodi Smith, Business Office Assistant; Amy Cicenica, Accounts Payable; and Julianne Galuppo, Payroll and Benefits.

Bernardsville Students Come Full Circle by Jeremy Schwarz

The IT Department is proud to introduce two newer members of the team who are also proud SHSD alums.

Spotlight on Sebastian Pross

He began his journey in Bedwell Elementary School. After spending a few years away, he returned in 5th grade and remained through his graduation with the Class of 2020. He went on to attend Ramapo College, earning his degree in 2024 in Computer Science. During the 2024-2025 academic year, he continued his studies by beginning a Master's program, while also completing his NCAA eligibility as a hammer thrower on Ramapo's Division III Track & Field team.

Spotlight on Angelo Saez

He spent his entire childhood in the district, beginning at Bedwell in 2007 and graduating from Bernards High School with the Class of 2020. He went on to earn his Bachelor's degree in Computer Science from Stevens Institute of Technology, graduating this past spring. Angelo enjoys building and maintaining his computer and working on software engineering projects involving iOS, databases, and web development. He also has a passion for game development, especially creating art and collaborative projects with friends.

Join us in welcoming them as they have already proven themselves to be valuable assets to the team and the Somerset Hills School District.

Untold Histories Come Alive Through Author's Visit by Marcos Vargas

In Ms. Pietroluongo's Untold Histories class, the past opened itself with uncommon clarity as author Kristen Martin joined our students in late November. Ms. Martin-whose work graces the pages of The New York Review of Books, The New York Times Magazine, the Washington Post, and other leading publications-shared insights from her groundbreaking first book, *The Sun Won't Come Out Tomorrow*. Her exploration of the often-hidden histories of American orphanhood, shaped by classism, racism, religious indoctrination, and state-sanctioned family separation, resonated deeply with a course designed precisely to illuminate stories that traditional narratives overlook. In listening to Ms. Martin, students were not merely receiving information; they were actively engaging with a fuller, more honest account of our shared past.



What made the visit even more powerful was the thoughtful attentiveness of our students. Having read the book in advance, they brought forward questions that showed both empathy and intellectual courage—questions that carried the promise of future scholars, advocates, and leaders determined to understand the complexities of the world they will soon shape. Their dialogue with Ms. Martin felt like a glimpse of what education can be when curiosity meets truth-telling.

Special thanks to Ms. Pietroluongo for shaping a learning environment where such conversations can take root, and to Mr. Catelli, Director of Academic Support, Enrichment, and Multilingual Education, for arranging this meaningful visit.

Sports Spotlight: Coach Lister
by Michael Hoppe

It is winter season, and the Bernards Athletic Department would like to recognize ski coach KC Lister. For the past seven years Coach Lister was the Treasurer of the New Jersey Interscholastic Ski Racing Association and a member of the Executive Council, setting policies and rules for high school ski racing. During her time as Treasurer she enjoyed getting to know the coaches and Athletic Directors at North Jersey schools that have ski teams.

Coach Lister has been coaching the boys and girls ski teams at Bernards for the past ten years. Her coaching philosophy is to teach the technical aspects of ski racing so that each racer improves their performance, while teaching each racer to be a good teammate. She shared, “Many Bernards racers have no racing experience prior to joining the team, so I’m a big believer in keeping it simple. Rather than overwhelm the racers with too much coaching advice at once, I focus on a specific technique at each practice and tailor my advice based on the abilities of each racer. I like a collaborative approach where I will ask my racers what technique they think is appropriate in a particular part of the race course. I tell all my racers that the team score is more important than any individual performance. There will be times where I have to tell a racer to make sure they finish a race rather than going all out to get a better time and risk blowing out of the course. Everyone on the team has a role to play regardless of their ability. It makes me proud when I see the more experienced racers give advice to the less experienced racers, and when the entire team waits at the finish line to cheer on their teammates rather than go into a warm lodge.”



While she has many special memories, one of her favorites took place last season when they were training at the Mountain Creek Ski Resort. She shared “As each racer came down the course that day, their technique was significantly better than the week prior. It was like the entire team made a big jump in their ability at the same time. I was amazed and stunned. At the end of the practice I turned to a bunch of the racers and joked ‘who are you and what did you do with the Bernards team?’ I was hoping the racers made the connection to the movie Invasion of the Body Snatchers, but instead my reference failed miserably as the kids had no idea what I was talking about; they must have been too young to have seen that movie!”

Coach Lister is looking forward to this season and is excited to see what the racers will do on the mountain!

Read all about it!

In our newly developed website there is a hot spot for district news spanning all three campuses. You can access the District News section from the main page, from any school tab, or simply [click here](#) to catch up on the greatness of our students, staff, events, and more!



SHEF Awards Classroom Mini-Grants

by Olga Christie, SHEF Chair

The Somerset Hills Education Foundation (SHEF) is honored to announce the recipients of the 2025 Classroom Mini-Grants, totaling \$15,646 in funding for innovative educational projects across the Somerset Hills School District. This year's awards support five inspiring teacher-led initiatives:

Newstein Chang, BHS, 9th Grade Biology

Biotechnology in Conservation Biology: \$3,337

Holly Jablonski & Debbie Rokosky, BES, 1st Grade

Step Into Learning: An Outdoor Sensory Path for
Whole-Child Development: \$5,000

Jade Pietroluongo, BHS, Social Studies/Performing Arts

Performing Arts Workshop: \$2,000

Tyler Nadolny, BHS, Health & PE

Disc Golf Baskets & Equipment: \$1,710

Judge Ellis, BHS, Woodworking (Grades 9–12)

Portable CNC Tool (Shaper Origin) for
Advanced Design & Fabrication: \$3,599

We extend heartfelt congratulations to this year's awardees. It is our pleasure and privilege to support educators whose creativity and dedication enrich the learning experience for all SHSD students. We look forward to seeing these projects come to life and to hearing about their positive impact across our schools. Our mission is to promote and provide innovative educational opportunities that elevate teaching and learning in the Somerset Hills School District. These five projects embody that commitment, and we are proud to champion them.

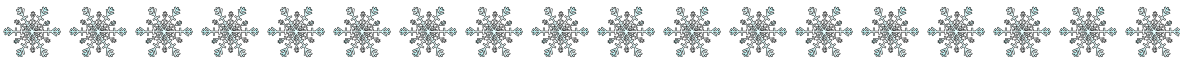
Kindergarten Registration
for September 2026

Registration for Kindergarten for the 2026-2027 school year will open on **December 23, 2025**. All parents/guardians of children who will be entering Kindergarten in September 2026 can go online to www.SHSD.org and pre-register.

Students must be five years of age by October 1, 2026 in order to enroll in Kindergarten for the 2026-2027 school year.

Kindergarten

Registration will take place by appointment, January 12, 2026 through January 30, 2026 from 8:00am to 12:30pm and from 2:00pm to 3:00pm at the Somerset Hills District Office (25 Olcott Ave). Please note that the final step in the online application process will be to select an appointment time slot from the choices above. For questions about registration, please email Pari Melkote at pmelkote@shsd or call at 908-204-1930 (ext.1113).



***A Note from
Sam Frenda,
SHSD Board President***

Each year as the holiday season approaches and we close out another year I look to reflect on what the students, staff, families, community members and partners have accomplished together. Our classroom, support, and administrative staff work tirelessly to provide not only the best academic content for our students, but to provide as much opportunity and growth as possible. Our students are incredibly tenacious and drink up what they are afforded and stun us with their accomplishments. At the December BOE meeting Ms. Hunkele, the BHS Crimson Advisor, spoke about the outstanding accomplishments of the Crimson staff and the numerous SNO recognitions they have received to date - only one of seven schools out of 452 internationally to have received the Distinguished Sites award at this point in the school year. The editorial staff set laudable goals for themselves, created plans to achieve them, and did so within a timeline that left us speechless. Our BHS student representatives reported out, as they do monthly, on the academic, athletic, co-curricular and service accomplishments of our student population. They tackled everything from food drives to blood drives, created holiday albums, and delivered beautiful stage performances. Our

student athletes gave it their all on the courts and fields and our seniors have been busy pursuing their post secondary opportunities and are beginning to report out on what their post-BHS experience will look like. We would like to extend our congratulations to our student representatives who announced their plans; Sophia Fazel-Sarjui will attend Boston University and Nolan Baker is headed to the University of Notre Dame. We are so grateful for their contributions to the SHSD community and look forward to all they have to share in the second semester of this school year.

Our BMS reporters also shared what has been happening at the middle school and about how their individual opportunities and experiences have shaped them throughout the first semester. Specifically, Joseph Gomez spoke of his experience on the wrestling team and Titus Knaus did the same as an 8th grader and first-time member of the basketball team. What stood out was that they both spoke of the impact their coaches had on them and how meaningful it was to be a part of a team. There is nothing more important than to hear about our student experiences directly from them, not only to highlight all that is going well but where they see room for improvement and to share feedback from their peers as to how they would like to see the student experience evolve. We are so grateful for their time and willingness to share with us and their community.

As we move into 2026 the Board and District are focusing on the upcoming Referendum vote on March 10th and launching the work for this year's regionalization study with Bedminster Township School District to ensure that we are doing all we can to deliver the best outcomes for those we serve. We hope you will consider attending one of the public information sessions this winter to learn more about the Referendum efforts. Information can be found on the [District Referendum tab](#). We will continue to evaluate our curricular offerings, the culture and climate of our buildings, building capacity and empowerment amongst our staff and making sure we are providing all of the appropriate supports necessary for those we serve. A lot has been accomplished, but there is still much work to be done and we strive to accomplish that work in partnership with the greater community. We encourage you all to reach out to us to share your feedback and thoughts. Board members can be contacted individually via the website, or you can share correspondence with Mr. Richard Liguori, our Board Secretary, at rliquori@shsd.org so he can disseminate it to the full Board. Of course we always hope you will join us at our [monthly Board meetings](#) and are looking forward to our annual reorganization meeting on January 5th at 6pm where Allicen Librera, Kelly Hunt, and Pat Wry will be sworn in for their new three year terms. At our December meeting we said goodbye to our departing Board members, Silvia Gils and Bob Baker and hope you join us in thanking them for their service and wishing them well in their future endeavors.

On behalf of the Somerset Hills School District Board of Education, I extend the warmest holiday wishes to all of you and your families, and hope your new year will be filled with peace, joy and wonderful new experiences!