MARCH 2026

SUPERINTENDENT NEWSLETTER

"ENGAGE, EQUIP, ELEVATE TOWARD EXCELLENCE."

A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

If I can say one thing, March was truly a month of celebration and hard work!

Our administrative team has been busy developing the budget for the 2026–27 school year, always keeping one goal in mind: continuing to support and strengthen our district while staying committed to excellence. I've proposed a $48,098,741 budget—a 1.73% increase that remains well below the New York State tax levy cap. I'm excited that this budget builds on the momentum we've created, supporting everything from curriculum and facilities to professional development and expanded opportunities for our students.

In this issue of the *Superintendent Newsletter*, you'll find highlights of the proposed budget, and we'll continue to share updates on our website.

I also want to take a moment to recognize the incredible work of our students and staff in the arts. We enjoyed not one, but two fantastic drama performances! The Grady Drama Club brought "The Lion King, Jr." to life in front of a packed house, and the AHHS Drama Club followed with a wonderful production of "The Little Mermaid, Jr." It's always inspiring to see the talent, creativity, and teamwork that go into these shows. Congratulations to everyone involved!

Earlier in the month, two of our students had the opportunity to shine on stage as well. Grady's Gideon Geevarghese and Tahjarie Bedward were selected for this year's Elementary All-County Festival. Gideon performed at White Plains High School, and Tahjarie also earned a place in this special experience, putting in a great deal of effort to prepare. We are so proud of both of them!

There was also plenty to celebrate in athletics. Our Girls Varsity Basketball Team had an outstanding season, advancing to the Section 1, Class B Finals and earning a number one ranking along the way. Their hard work and determination were evident all season long. Congratulations to the team and their coaches—we can't wait to see what next year brings!

In our classrooms, the great work continues every day. At Dixson, students have really embraced our goal of ensuring all first graders move on to Grady with strong reading skills. This year, both kindergarten and first-grade students made impressive, double-digit gains in reading. That kind of progress is a testament to the dedication of our teachers and support staff, as well as the strength of the programs being implemented.

There's even more happening across the district—from our ongoing commitment to professional development, including a recent AI workshop, to celebrating two staff members who were selected for the Mercy University STEM Ambassador Program.

Looking ahead, I have a feeling the next few months will be just as busy—and just as exciting. I look forward to continuing to share the many accomplishments of our students and staff.

Sincerely,

Susan Yom

Superintendent of Schools

SPRING RECESS

As a reminder to all our families, our schools will be closed March 30 - April 3 for Spring Recess!

We hope you enjoy a restful week!



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Superintendent Presents Proposed 2026–27 Budget

Superintendent of Schools Susan Yom shared her proposed 2026–27 budget at the March 11 Board of Education meeting, outlining a plan that continues to support students while remaining fiscally responsible.

The proposed budget totals $48,098,741, reflecting a 1.73 percent increase from last year, or $818,299. The tax levy increase is proposed at 1.98 percent, which stays within the New York State tax cap.

"At the heart of this budget is our commitment to providing every child with what they need, every day," Ms. Yom said.

She explained that the district's work continues to center around key priorities: strong academic achievement, safe and supportive learning environments, investing in staff, and maintaining efficient, high-quality operations.

The proposed budget supports those goals by continuing funding for academic programs, extracurricular opportunities, and safety measures across all school buildings.

Ms. Yom also took time to reflect on what the district has accomplished over the past year.

"Our AHHS graduation rate increased to 95 percent, which is an incredible achievement for our students," she shared. "We offer 20 AP courses, 41 electives, and 43 athletic and extracurricular opportunities. Our students are being accepted into top colleges and universities, and we're so proud of their success."

She also highlighted some of the moments and improvements that made the year special—from the Girls Varsity Basketball team reaching the Section 1, Class B Finals, to a new art teacher and kiln at the high school, to summer learning opportunities and important facility upgrades like new roofs at Grady and Dixson.

The district also expanded safety efforts with an additional School Resource Officer (SRO), increased student participation in music programs like NYSSMA, added more books, and continued to offer enriching field trip experiences. Looking ahead, Ms. Yom emphasized building on that momentum.

"We're heading into the new school year focused on continuing the great work already happening across the district," she said.

Academically, the district saw a 15 percentage point increase in ELA scores from 2023–24 to 2024–25.

"That kind of growth is really exciting," Ms. Yom said. "It shows that our focus on literacy is making a difference."

A key goal moving forward is ensuring all students at Dixson are reading on grade level by the time they enter second grade. The district will also continue strengthening math instruction, which has already shown improvement.

The superintendent also emphasized the importance of supporting staff. "This plan allows us to stay within the tax cap while maintaining favorable class sizes, supporting all of our programs, continuing safety staffing, and meeting our commitments to our employees," she said.

The budget also includes plans to add a special education class at Dixson, update technology, expand professional development, and continue facilities improvements—including air conditioning installation at Grady this summer.

2026-2027 Proposed Budget

2026-27 Proposed Budget	$48,098,741
Budget $ Increase	$818,229
Budget % Increase	1.73%
2025-2026 Budget	$47,280,512
Proposed Tax Levy	$36,411,500
Tax Levy Increase	$708,673
Tax Levy	1.98%

Even with a projected decline in enrollment, the district plans to maintain staffing and support.

Class sizes in grades K–4 are expected to remain under 18-20 students, helping to ensure strong learning environments.

Deputy Superintendent James Yap shared that the district will continue to take a closer look at curriculum—especially in literacy and math—while also expanding enrichment opportunities. At Grady, for example, Recess Clubs, along with more field trips and assemblies.

At the high school, 22 courses have recently been added, with more on the way next year, including Graphic Design 2, Photography 2, Ceramics 2, and a new Senior Internship Program.
As New York State begins shifting away from Regents exams, the district will also begin developing its own "Portrait of a Graduate" to define what success looks like for its students.

Leah Zilich, Director of Special Education and Pupil Personnel Services, shared that 19 percent of students in the district receive special education services. A new 8:1:2 program at Dixson is being proposed to better serve students within the district, along with expanded supports like speech services, social skills programs, and parent training.

Director of Facilities James Frees reviewed recent and upcoming building improvements, including

Budget, continues on page 3

Budget, continued from page 2

completed roof work at Grady and Dixson and sidewalk repairs at the high school.

This summer, work will continue with air conditioning installation at Grady and other maintenance projects.

Ms. Yom closed by thanking the Board and inviting continued feedback.

"We're proud of what we've accomplished together and remain committed to doing what's best for our students while being mindful of our community," she said.

Board of Education President David Hecht echoed that sentiment.

"It's really impressive to see this kind of growth in student performance," he said. "That doesn't happen without a dedicated team. We're fortunate to have such an outstanding staff, and I'm confident we'll continue moving in the right direction."

For more information on the proposed 2026–27 budget, please visit the district *website.*

Budget Components

	2025-2026 Budget	2026-2027 Proposed Budget	B to B $
Administrative	$5,191,283	$4,975,051	-$216,232
Program	$38,465,618	$39,390,998	$925,380
Capital	$3,623,611	$3,732,692	$109,081
TOTAL	**$47,280,512**	**$48,098,741**	**$818,229**

- Administrative Component: administrative salaries/benefits, related office staffing, Board of Education expenses, legal, auditing, insurance, BOCES admin/capital expenses and data processing costs
- Program Component: instructional salaries/benefits/materials/supplies, guidance, health services, BOCES programs, interscholastic sports, extracurricular programs, and transportation
- Capital Component: facility maintenance/operations, transfer to capital, and debt service payments

Proposed Revenues By Category

Based on: NYS Governor's Budget Proposal

NYS Foundation Aid	$8,850,000
Tax Levy	$36,411,500
Non-property Tax	$825,000
Health Services	$85,000
Interest and Earnings	$1,500,000
Miscellaneous	$0
Medicaid Assistance	$10,000
Appropriated Fund Balance	$417,241

2026-2027 Budget Schedule

April 8, 2026
Board of Education Adopts Final Budget for the Vote

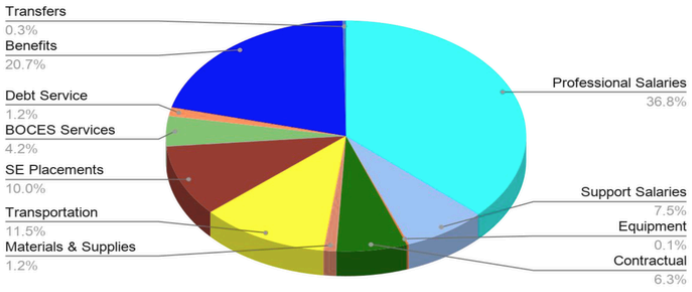
April 28, 2026
Proposed budget available to the public

May 6, 2026
Public Hearing on the Budget

May 19
Board Elections and Budget Vote

Proposed Expenditures

% Of Budget



Expense Categories by State Object	
Professional Salaries	$17,718,766
Support Salaries	3,614,712
Benefits	9,944,679
Transportation	5,548,370
Special Education BOCES and nonBOCES Placements	4,819,000
Contractual	3,053,958
BOCES Services	2,041,175
Materials & Supplies	555,868
Debt Service	587,213
Transfers	145,000
Equipment	70,000
TOTAL	**$48,098,741**

Dixson students love to read

What has Dixson students so excited? Reading.

Principal Deborah Earle has noticed that the kindergarten and first-grade students at her school are "definitely excited and engaged" when it comes to reading, which is just one way for students to reach their reading goals.

"The goal is for all first graders to leave Dixson able to read," Ms. Earle said.

Developing strong literacy skills is a priority for all students. Research on the Science of Reading, states that phonemic awareness (the ability to hear and manipulate sounds) and phonics (the relationship between sounds and letters) are most effective when they are tightly integrated rather than taught as entirely separate entities. The District has adopted Fundations (Phonics) that focuses on the alphabetic principle. Studies show that Fundations is highly effective at improving decoding, spelling, and fluency. Teachers also teach with Heggerty (Phonemic Awareness) to focus on the auditory and oral side of reading. The District also uses ARC Core, which is a comprehensive, K–12 literacy curriculum that integrates English Language Arts (ELA) instruction with science and social studies content.

New research from Johns Hopkins University CRRE shows that prioritizing 1st-grade reading intervention yields lasting results. All students, the principal explained, are given Tier 1 instruction. For those who may struggle, they receive Tier 2 or Tier 3 support and may also work one-on-one with a reading specialist or in small-group instruction. The school uses the DIBELS system, or Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills, an assessment tool that helps teachers monitor early literacy development.

"This helps us see where kids are with their letter names, sounds, decoding, and reading," Ms. Earle explained. "The assessment informs the instruction."

"The programs we are using are data-based, and they are phenomenal," she said, adding that Fundations is also used in the district's UPK program, which provides consistent instruction and assessment when students arrive at Dixson for kindergarten.

For families wondering how they can support their students, the principal assures them that it's simple.

"Read, read, read," she suggested. "The more you read to your kids and with your kids, the more their vocabulary expands. As long as they are reading and being exposed to language, they learn so much."

Ultimately, how well a student develops literacy skills may depend on their level of maturity; however, encouraging and celebrating reading goes a long way.

Students are also supported when parents allow them to discover what kinds of stories and genres, they enjoy most and indulge those preferences.

Graphic novels, Ms. Earle said, are great, too—they include words, sentence structures, and rich vocabulary, just like more traditional books.

Learning basic literacy skills at this age, the principal said, provides a solid foundation that students will use throughout their academic, personal, and professional lives.

"They first understand the process of reading and build from that," she said. "Early literacy is the key."

"I am so proud of them," Ms. Earle said of the Dixson students. "And so proud of the teachers."

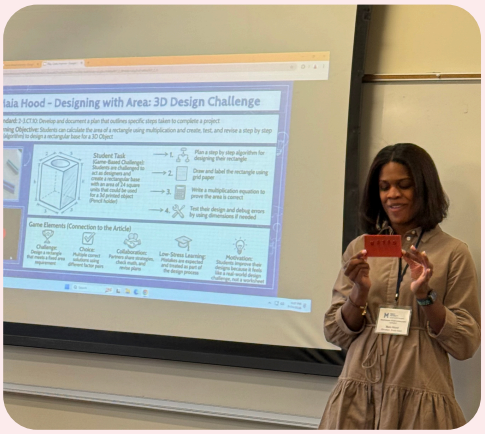




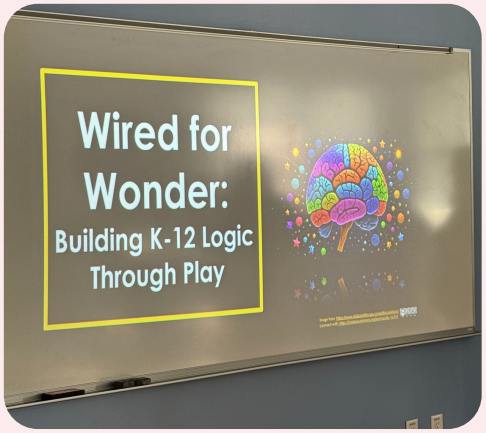


Teachers complete Mercy University STEM Ambassador Program











When opportunities for professional development become available, the district is committed to enabling its staff to take advantage. In some instances, programs are held in the district, and with others, staff have an opportunity to spend time learning away from their classrooms.

Most recently third-grade STEM Teacher Maia Hood and AHHS Band Director Jaymie Giordano participated in the Mercy University Center for STEM Education Westchester STEM Ambassadors program for the entire year.

“I was excited to be selected because I wanted to bring more experiences and hands-on learning opportunities for my students that they typically wouldn't get,” Ms. Hood said. “I was really interested in the focus on combining computer science, engineering, and educational technology in a meaningful way.”

Having always been personally interested in technology, Ms. Hood said she appreciated that the program provided both professional development and actual materials, like robotics and STEAM supplies, that could be used directly in the classroom.

“The opportunity to collaborate with other educators and develop lessons to share more broadly was another big factor that drew me in,” she said.
The program consists of 40 hours of professional development over the course of the school year, including in-person and virtual sessions.

“Throughout the program, we collaborated with other educators to design and refine STEM lessons aligned to NYS standards,” explained Ms. Hood. “As part of the experience, we worked in groups to research a topic and present our findings. My group focused on game-based learning in elementary math and we connected computer science standards, specifically algorithms and programming under the CT.10.

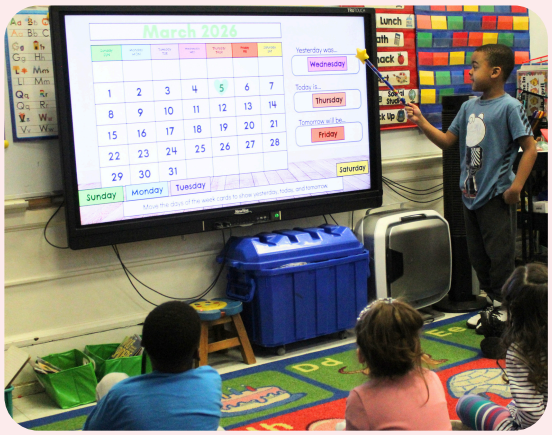
We explored how game-based approaches can improve both student engagement and achievement, and we shared strategies for applying those ideas in the classroom.”

She worked with educators from throughout the county, something she found valuable as they each could share different perspectives, collaborate and learn from each other’s teaching experience, all thing she could bring back to her classroom.
“One of the biggest takeaways was a stronger understanding of how to intentionally integrate computer science and computational thinking into everyday instruction,” Ms. Hood said. “I also gained confidence in using tools like 3D Printing to support content areas like math. For example, I created a lesson aligned to standard 2-3.CT.10 where students applied their understanding of area by designing objects for 3D Printing. It was a great way to make learning more interactive and meaningful.”
“Overall, the program was an incredibly rewarding professional experience,” said Ms. Hood. “It not only expanded my instructional practices but also connected me with a network of educators who are passionate about STEM. I've been able to bring back both resources and ideas that have had a positive impact on my students, and I'm excited to continue building on what I've learned.”

Dixson “Whacky Dress Day”

One recent morning, while celebrating "Whacky Dress Day," Kindergarten students settled into their routine in Ms. Herrera's class, beginning the day with the Pledge of Allegiance, reviewing the date and weather and moving on to combining different sounds in words!









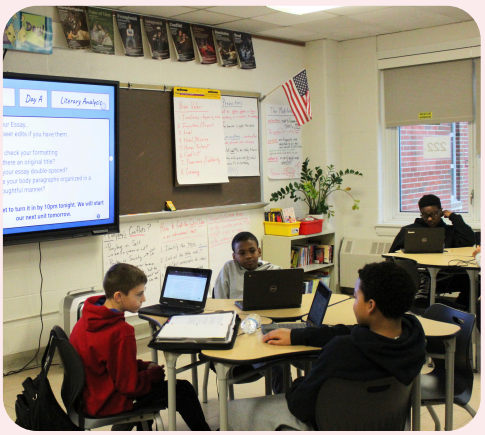
Strike up the band!

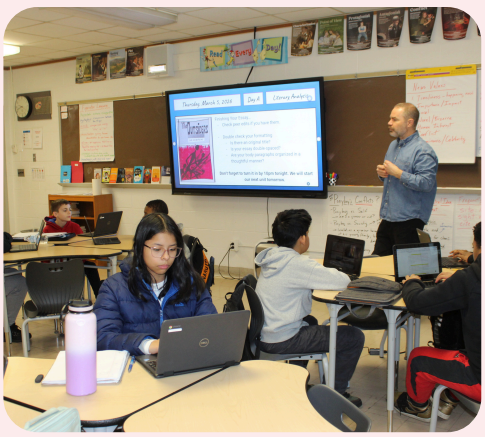
Grady Band Director Michael Webb hosts a lesson with some of the band's brass instrument players during a recent session at school!













Book Reviews

Seventh grade ELA students spent some time recently discussing and working on their essays following the class reading of "The Outsiders" by S.E. Hinton. Teacher Douglas Elliott looked over the essays the students had started, encouraging them to add details and examples from the story.

The Little Mermaid, Jr.

Congratulations to the cast and crew on an amazing performance from the AHHS Drama production of "The Little Mermaid, Jr.!" Thank you also to our amazing show director teachers, Sabrina Doolittle, Dawn Zampbell, and Jaymie Giordano!









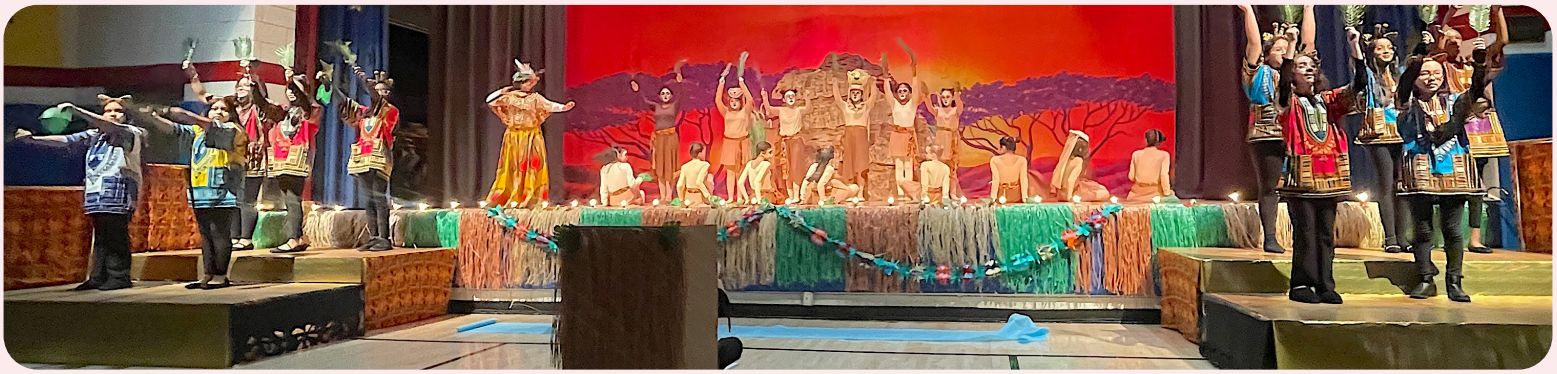
Lion King, Jr.

BRAVO to the Grady Drama Club for their wonderful performance of "The Lion King, Jr.!" They performed to a standing room only crowd and delighted the audience with their talents! Thank you also to our amazing show directors teachers Kimberly Breen, Mary Potenza and Christine Budzynski!









Annual Review Season Is Coming Up!

Annual review season is approaching, and our Special Education team is preparing to partner with families to review student progress and plan for the upcoming year. During your child's annual review meeting, the Committee on Special Education (CSE) will discuss current performance levels, review goals, and determine appropriate supports and services. Parents will receive a meeting notice in advance with details on the date, time, and a virtual link. The District encourages families to come prepared with questions, insights, and any updates you'd like to share; active participation is an essential part of the process.

Director Office Hours

The District will continue to offer monthly office hours (the first Monday of each month), with the Director of Special Education, Leah Zilich, beginning at 5:00 p.m. This is an opportunity for parents and guardians to ask questions, share concerns, or seek guidance in a supportive and informal setting. Office hours are open to all families and are designed to strengthen communication and collaboration between home and school.

Google Meet Link: https://meet.google.com/wwu-qchn-adg

Family Resource Corner: Westchester County Supports

Looking for additional support or information? Our Family Resource Corner includes a curated list of organizations, services, and agencies throughout Westchester County that support children with diverse learning needs and their families. This resource includes contact information, phone numbers, and links to services such as advocacy groups, counseling services, recreational programs, and transition supports. Whether you're seeking guidance, community connections, or specialized services, this is a great place to start. You can access the resource through the link above!

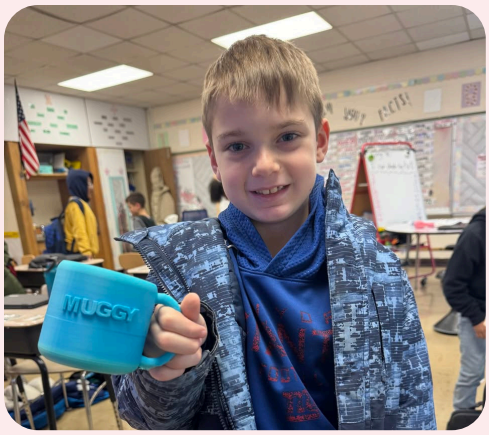
Grady Lunchtime Enrichment Clubs

Grady has been piloting a Lunchtime Enrichment Clubs program, offering students an opportunity to engage in an area of interest during their recess time!

Recently students in the 3D Printing Club made key chains, luggage tags and coffee mugs! In the weeks ahead the program is looking to offer Ukulele, Arts and Crafts, Yoga, Board Games, Lego Club, Bracelet Beading and Device Deconstruction.









THANK YOU for an amazing season!

Congratulations to our Girls Varsity Basketball Team on an amazing season! They were ranked No. 1, and played in the Section 1, Class B Finals, falling to YMA 55-39. It was a season filled with dedication, teamwork, and heart. We are incredibly proud of their hard work and perseverance throughout the season!
(Thank you to Jean Carlos Hernandez, M.S.Ed., for the photos!)













Pep Rally

Our Girls Varsity Basketball Raiders were sent off to the Sectional FINALS with an afternoon pep rally! Teams consisting of students in all grades got into the spirit and engaged in a match on the hardwood, with the Red Team winning over the White Team, 21-20!









UPCOMING EVENTS

APRIL 8, Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., AHHS Auditorium

APRIL 24, Dixson Fitness Friday

April 29, 8th Grade Road to Success Night, AHHS Library, 6:30 p.m.

On Parade

The Alexander Hamilton High School Band participated in the Tarrytown/Sleepy Hollow St. Patrick's Day Parade!



