



CUFSD NEWSLETTER

APRIL 2026

HOME OF THE HAMBLETONIANS

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FROM THE
SUPERINTENDENT

CATHERINE
O'HARA

May is an exciting time across our schools, as we celebrate student accomplishments and the continued growth happening throughout our district. It is also a time to stay connected as a school community, recognizing that the decisions ahead help shape future opportunities for our students.

The final budget presentation will be held on May 6, with the budget vote to follow on May 19. Be on the lookout for our Hambletonian News, which will be mailed on May 7, in advance of the budget vote. Families may also visit our website to review previous presentations and materials.

May 4 through May 8 is Teacher Appreciation Week. We extend our appreciation to our teachers and staff for the dedication, care, and commitment they bring to our students each day. Their work continues to support student-centered, future-focused, and team-driven learning experiences across our schools.

This work is strengthened through partnerships across our CUFSD community, including our Parent Advisory Panel, Chester Academy Parent Athletics Panel, families engaged in our Family Instructional Academy, and our community and business partners supporting the Workplace Learning Internship Program. These connections expand student opportunities and drive continuous improvement across the district.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership.

Universal pre-K comes to every Chester family

For the first time, pending voter approval of the 2026-2027 budget, all eligible Chester Union Free School District students who want a Universal Pre-K spot have one.

The 2026-27 school year marks a milestone for Chester Elementary: the UPK program has doubled in size, growing from one classroom to two, each serving 18 students for a total of 36 on-site seats. But the expansion doesn't stop there.

Thanks to a new partnership with On My Way, a pre-K program located at 12 Riverside Drive in Middletown, every student who didn't land one of those 36 spots was still guaranteed a quality placement. The waitlist – a frustrating reality for Chester families in years past – is effectively gone.

Superintendent of Schools Catherine O'Hara said, "Now, we offer UPK to every eligible student for the first time in our history. The state funding and district investment make this possible."

That investment is real. The expansion is funded through a combination of increased state UPK funding – approximately \$10,000 per student – and direct district support through the proposed 2026-27 budget.

[Read the entire story here!](#)



UPCOMING 26-27 BUDGET PRESENTATION SCHEDULE

There is only one more presentation before the 2026-2027 Budget Vote that takes place on May 19, 2026.

The "Legal Budget Hearing" will take place during the Board of Education meeting on Wednesday, May 6, 2026. The budget vote is Tuesday, May 19, 2026 and will take place at Chester Academy.

[You can review all previous budget presentations here!](#)

Tuesday, May 19, 2026



**Vote for One
Board of
Education Seat**

IMPORTANT DATES

May 6
BOE Meeting

May 11
HS Spring Concert

May 15
Half Day for Students

May 22 & 25
Schools Closed

May 27
MS Academic Awards

May 11
MS Spring Concert

May 14
Jr/Sr Prom

May 19
District Budget Vote

May 26
Family Instructional Academy

May 28
HS Academic Awards



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CHESTER ACADEMY



FROM THE
CA PRINCIPAL

JOHN
FLANAGAN

As we move into the month of May, there are many important events and opportunities ahead for our Chester Academy community. Middle School state testing began with ELA on April 28 and 29. Math assessments will take place on May 6 and 7, followed by Science on May 13. We encourage all students to be well-rested and prepared to do their best.

Our Junior/Senior Prom will be held on May 14 from 6:00-10:00 PM at the West Hills Country Club in Middletown. Tickets are on sale through May 1, and we look forward to a memorable evening for our students.

Concert season is quickly approaching, showcasing the talents of our student musicians. The Middle School concert will be held on May 11, and the High School concert will take place on May 12. We hope you will join us in supporting these outstanding performances.

Chester Academy will also host our annual Art and STEM displays on May 19, the day of the Budget Vote, in the main lobby. Please be sure to stop by after voting to view the impressive work of our creative students.

Have a wonderful month of May!

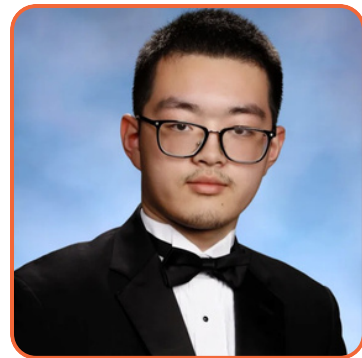
Chester Academy announces class of 2026 valedictorian and salutatorian

Chester Academy is proud to announce the class of 2026 valedictorian and salutatorian. Please join us in congratulating valedictorian Brooke Battiato and salutatorian Ocean Chen.

Brooke Battiato, president of the Class of 2026, is an accomplished student committed to both her studies and extracurriculars. Brooke has served as vice president of Key Club and a member of the Multicultural Club, Yearbook Club, and Varsity Club. She also co-founded the Medical Club with her friend Zia, motivated by their shared passion for the medical field.

Ocean Chen is an outstanding student who has actively explored his interests throughout his high school career. He dedicated significant time to the Mock Trial Club while also participating in the Cooking Club. His passion for both art and technology is reflected in his involvement in numerous electives in both areas, including Drawing & Painting, Computer Coding, Civil Engineering & Architecture, Ceramics & Sculpture, and College Engineering & Graphics.

[Read more about the 2026 valedictorian and salutatorian here!](#)



Words in Motion: Chester Academy students bring poetry to life through dance

What happens when a public speaking class and a dance class decide to work together? At Chester Academy, students are finding out firsthand.

Chester Academy teachers Jen Daly and Christopher De Lao have teamed up on a cross-disciplinary project that pairs student poetry and interpretive dance. The idea is straightforward: students in Mr. De Lao's public speaking class write or select poems that mean something to them, and students in Ms. Daly's dance class choreograph and perform movement to bring those poems to life.

[Read all about the cross-disciplinary poetry and dance project here!](#)



Work-Based Learning Program wraps with student and community recognition breakfast

Chester Academy's cafeteria was filled with energy and gratitude this morning as students, business mentors, educators, and supporters gathered for the annual Work-Based Learning Program wrap-up and recognition breakfast. This event, hosted by guidance counselor and work-based learning coordinator Jennifer Burretto, celebrated a year of growth, partnership, and achievement in Chester Academy's Work-Based Learning (WBL) Program—a model initiative that reflects the Chester Union Free School District's commitment to preparing students for the many pathways they may choose for their futures.

[Read the whole story and see a gallery from the event here!](#)



CHESTER ELEMENTARY



FROM THE
CES PRINCIPAL

MARY KATE
BOESCH

April has been a busy month here at Chester Elementary School.

We were proud to host our CES Around the World Art Show and Multicultural Family Night, an evening filled with learning, connection, and celebration of the many cultures within our community. If you attended, please take a moment to complete the family survey that was shared. Your feedback is important as we plan ahead.

We are excited to share that next year, our Multicultural Family Night will be combined with our STEAM Night in the fall, and we would love to see even more families participate.

We are pleased to share that our Pre-K lottery was held, and all 43 students who entered will have a placement, pending budget approval. Thirty-six students will attend CES, and seven will attend through our valued partnership with On My Way Early Learning Center.

A special thank you to our PTA for hosting a wonderful Family BINGO Night, an exciting event that brought our community together and raised funds to support our students.

Congratulations to Milan Ibocko and Solilah Perry for representing CES at the All-County Music Festival.

We closed out April with Grades 3-5 NYS ELA testing and look forward to a strong finish to the school year.

Chester Elementary brings families together for multicultural art event

On the evening of April 9th, Chester Elementary School came alive with the sights, sounds, and flavors of cultures from every part of the globe. The school's first-ever Around the World Art Show & Multicultural Family Night brought together two events under one roof, drawing more than 100 Chester community members through the doors for an unforgettable evening of cultural celebration.

From the moment guests arrived, the experience was immersive. Families received their very own "passports" and traveled through the CES art show, where artwork from every student in Pre-K through 5th grade was proudly on display.

The art show, organized by Chester Elementary School art teacher Emily Daunicht, was built around the theme Art Around the World. Students spent weeks creating pieces inspired by each of the seven continents, with each student showcasing three to four works.

[Read and see more from the evening here!](#)



Fifth graders give pollinator garden a big green thumbs up

Our 5th grade students have been putting their green thumbs to work in the Pollinator Garden!

With care, curiosity, and a whole lot of teamwork, students are learning how to nurture plants that support bees, butterflies, and other essential pollinators. From planting to tending, they're not just growing a garden, they're growing a deeper understanding of environmental stewardship and the important role they play in protecting our ecosystem.

[See a gallery of their gardening here!](#)



Authors apply fact and fiction in their latest writing projects

CES students aren't just learning to write, they're becoming authors!

Publishing Parties in Mr. Hallock, Ms. Puchalski, and Ms. Quackenbush's classes have been celebrating students' progress as wordsmiths. They have been working on particular narrative styles, including persuasive writing, memoir, and fantasy fiction!

These moments are more than celebrations, they are milestones in building confident, capable writers. At CES, we don't just teach writing... we inspire authors!

[See a gallery of the writers taking their seat in the Author's Chair!](#)

