



FIRST IN NEWSDAY

Cinema Arts Centre Leader Fired

■ Board cites what it
'believed' to be 'serious
misconduct' by
longtime co-director

■ He calls allegation
'unfounded'

A7



12 Top Spots For BBQ To Take Home

EXPLORE LI

BACK TO SCHOOL



NEWSDAY / HOWARD SCHNAPP

A student gives flowers to first grade teacher Tara Ardizzone at Steele Elementary School in Baldwin.

LI districts returning to class amid new initiatives, debates on technology and growing AI concerns

A2-3 | VIDEO AT NEWSDAY.TV

ONLY IN NEWSDAY

HOW MUSLIMS' LIVES HAVE CHANGED ON LI SINCE 9/11

A4-6

Rochell Bishop Sleets
Editor, Chief Content Officer
631-843-3702
rochell.sleets@newsday.com

Baird Helgeson
Managing Editor
631-843-3118
baird.helgeson@newsday.com

Doug Dutton
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-4650
doug.dutton@newsday.com

Robert Shields
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-4795
robert.shields@newsday.com

Shawna VanNess
Associate Managing Editor
631-843-3264
shawna.vanness@newsday.com

Ben Weller
Senior Assistant Managing Editor
Long Island News
631-843-2715
benjamin.weller@newsday.com

Tracy M. Brown
Assistant Managing Editor
Special Sections
631-843-2312
tracy.brown@newsday.com

Ade Emmanuel
Assistant Managing Editor
Business
631-843-3161
ade.emmanuel@newsday.com

Keith Herbert
Assistant Managing Editor
Investigations
631-843-3478
keith.herbert@newsday.com

Thomas Kupper
Assistant Managing Editor
Government and Politics
631-843-3935
thomas.kupper@newsday.com

Robert Levin
Assistant Managing Editor
Breaking News
631-843-3108
robert.levin@newsday.com

Monica Quintanilla
Assistant Managing Editor
Public Safety, Crime, Courts
631-843-2917
monica.quintanilla@newsday.com

Hank Winnicki
Assistant Managing Editor
Sports
631-843-4832
hank.winnicki@newsday.com

MULTIMEDIA

Robert Cassidy
Executive Director Multimedia
631-843-3027
bobby.cassidy@newsday.com

John Keating
Director Multimedia Newsgathering
631-843-5482
john.keating@newsday.com

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The following pertains to mailed subscriptions as required by the USPS:

Newsday (USPS# 388-760)ISSN 0278-5587 (print) ISSN 2643-9417 (online) is published daily except Sunday and Christmas Day by Newsday LLC, 6 Corporate Center Drive, Melville, N.Y. 11747. Periodicals postage paid at Huntington Station, N.Y. Postmaster: Send address changes to 6 Corporate Center Drive, Melville, N.Y. 11747.

TOP STORIES

MANY LI STUDENTS

Evolving tech, class offerings greet learners

This article was reported by **Lorena Mongelli, Maureen Mullarkey and Darwin Yanes**. It was written by Yanes.

At Steele Elementary School in Baldwin, Principal LaTrace Finney said Wednesday her goal for this academic year was simple.

“When students walk into this building they feel loved, they feel valued,” she said. “I really want to ensure that they have an amazing foundational experience when it comes to elementary school, because if we provide them with all the tools that they need to be successful, when they go off to middle school and high school, the sky’s the limit.”

The Baldwin district was one of 49 on Long Island that welcomed students back to school on Wednesday. Students in about three dozen districts started school on Monday and Tuesday; the remaining 37 districts will open their doors either Thursday or next week.

Students are resuming school at a time when the debate over technology use and screen time in the classroom has intensified. On Wednesday, New York City waded into the controversy by issuing a one-year moratorium on use of “student-facing” artificial intelligence for the elementary and middle school grades, and imposing screen time limits for students. Amid the growing concern over technology in schools, especially for young learners, Gov. Kathy Hochul has said she plans to study the issue.

Locally, the cancellation of some varsity football teams is already having reverberations, with worries about this year’s season and the impact on traditions like homecoming.

There are bright spots as well: New state funding has expanded pre-K opportunities for about two-thirds of the Island’s districts, part of a push to make early education universally available in the state. And amid

WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- **Students in more than one-third** of Long Island’s public school districts returned to school on Wednesday.
- **About three dozen districts started classes** on Monday and Tuesday; the remainder will open their doors Thursday or next week.
- **Students are resuming school amid an intensifying debate** over technology use and screen time in the classroom.

a growing interest in the trades, some schools on the Island are rolling out new career and technical education classes.

But at Steele Elementary on Wednesday morning, Denise Perez’s children had a more pressing concern on their mind — the end of vacation.

Perez, 37, is mom to a third grader and first grader. She said her children were not quite ready to say goodbye to their summer.

“They’re excited to be back with their friends, and you know they’re really comfortable here, but also they didn’t want summer to end,” she said.

Tech debate

Questions about how much technology is appropriate in the classroom have been brewing for some time.

Earlier this year, the American Federation of Teachers, the second-largest teachers union in the nation, and the New York State United Teachers union called for bans on screens and “student-facing AI” for young learners.

The federal Education Department, in contrast, issued guidance in August that advised educators to consider the instructional value of any technology implemented in the classroom.

“The public policy debate should not be framed as a choice between technology and no technology, nor should every screen be viewed as serving the same purpose,” Kirsten Baesler, the department’s assistant secretary of office of elementary and sec-

ondary education, wrote in a letter at the time.

The state Education Department has said it is developing its guidance for technology in schools.

On Wednesday, Hochul commended New York City’s new policy, calling it a “bold move.”

The governor pointed to the state’s ban on cellphones in schools, which went into effect for the 2025-26 school year, as well as a policy requiring social media companies to restrict algorithmically personalized feeds and nighttime notifications for minors.

With regard to technology in schools, she said, “We’re prepared to look at some options, and we can talk about this, especially when it comes to young kids, overall for our youngest children.”

Baldwin’s director of curriculum, Anne Marie Squicciarini, said Wednesday that children from kindergarten through second grade use Chromebooks that are kept in the classroom, while students in third to fifth grade have devices they take home.

“We’re really mindful to make sure that the technology apps that we’re using are for learning purposes only, and not just as filler time wasters,” she said. “I think as long as we’re managing our technology use in a constructive way, where students are using it as a learning piece and a learning tool, then it’s really beneficial and effective.”

Some parents agreed that technology should continue to be used in the classroom, with limits.

Perez said her son in third grade was eager to receive a Chromebook this year and added she was pleased with the school’s technology policy.

“I think in moderation it’s OK,” she said. “It’s always the fact of having too much when it becomes the problem.”

Kevin Slavin, principal of Miller Place High School, echoed those sentiments.

“It’s a balance. . . . There are some great, great things that are out there that can enhance the instruction. It doesn’t replace the instruction,” he said. “So to me, we’ve done a nice job of being able to blend that model, use it where appropri-

ENJOY RETURN TO SCHOOL, FRIENDS



Students and staff of Steele Elementary School in Baldwin prepare to enter the building for the first day of school. ■ Video: [newsday.tv](https://www.newsday.tv)

ate, but don't use it as the end-all, be-all. It's never going to replace that person standing in front of the room."

Football concerns

Another issue facing schools on Long Island is the loss of some varsity football teams.

Two districts — Amityville and Port Jefferson — have announced they had to cancel their varsity seasons because of a lack of players.

The news was disappointing to Miller Place High senior Van Johnson, who is a linebacker and tight end for his school's varsity football team.

Johnson, 17, said two home games were canceled after the Port Jefferson and Amityville squads withdrew from playing.

Slavin said the school's homecoming game was to be played against Port Jefferson but it will be rescheduled.

"We're going to try and make the most of our home games and homecoming," Johnson said. "Just have a great football season and hopefully make it in the playoffs."

New pre-K center

In the South Huntington district, schools opened on Tuesday. But the back-to-school cele-



Miller Place High School holds its first day of school Wednesday.

brations continued on Wednesday, when a ceremonial ribbon-cutting was held for the district's new Silas Wood Pre-K Center, a dedicated space for about 270 students.

Hochul, who has championed universal pre-K, was in attendance.

A total of \$560 million was allocated in this year's state budget for the program, Hochul said. More than 400 districts in the state have expanded their pre-K offerings this year, includ-

ing 84 on the Island, she noted.

"What you can do for our kids, when they're that young, will make a profound difference in their success later on," she said as she addressed a room of local leaders on Wednesday.

South Huntington pre-K classrooms were previously spread out among several district buildings.

The center's principal, Renee Schumm, said having all pre-K classes in one location allows

for better collaboration and builds a sense of belonging.

"So, getting them in the door, and having them develop language skills and socialization, and taking turns and learning what a school building really is, and what a school day looks like is huge," Schumm said.

In Samantha Leonick's Pre-K classroom, students on Wednesday took turns playing with magnetic building tiles, puzzles and coloring on sheets of paper. Leonick said was excited for a new year and new building.

"A lot of times this is the first time leaving their families, so this is like the first stepping-stone into their educational journey," she said.

Cindy Abate, who walked her grandson Alejandro to the front door Wednesday, hailed the school for being organized during the first days of the school.

"They did a wonderful job putting this all together," she said. "I, myself, attended Silas Wood, K through sixth, so it was nice coming home."

Getting career ready

In East Meadow, the district on Wednesday launched new medical assisting training programs at the two high schools.

The programs will include classrooms with hospital beds and medical lab equipment.

Christine Quinn, a medical assisting training teacher at W.T. Clarke High School, said students will get hands-on experience, including learning about vital signs, EKGs, phlebotomy and body systems. Students will receive college credit during their second year of the program and can obtain service industry credentials, such as a medical assisting certification, Quinn said.

Junior Khloe Louis-Jean, 15, was among the students expected to start the program.

"I was really excited for this period of the day," said Louis-Jean, who hopes to become a nurse.

The East Meadow district high schools offer seven approved career and technical education pathways. These pathways are part of the state's shifting graduation requirements, known as Portrait of a Graduate.

Beginning in fall 2027, students will no longer need to pass the Regents exams to graduate. Instead, students in New York State will have multiple ways to earn a diploma, including through career and technical education and work-based learning experiences.

At W.T. Clarke High School, its carpentry classroom has also been overhauled for this academic year. Last year, the class constructed huts that were used at Jones Beach, according to Toni McIntosh, the district's business and technology chairperson who also runs the career and technical education programs.

"We're getting them career ready. They're getting all those skills that Portrait of a Graduate requires," McIntosh said.

Seamus O'Brien, a 17-year-old senior, is in his second year of studying carpentry. While he said he probably won't pursue it as a career, he hasn't entirely ruled out the idea, either.

For now, he said he's focused on what lies ahead after graduating high school.

"There's obviously been ups and downs, but it is a bit bitter-sweet," he said. "But I'm excited to move forward with my life as well."

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