

Hastings-on-Hudson Public Schools



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Dear Hastings Families and Staff,

First things first. Looking back one day, Feliz Cinco de Mayo! Looking forward to Sunday, Happy Mother's Day!

Every week I have to pick and choose what to feature about our students and staff. Thank goodness for the challenge. Read on to find out what resonates this week, knowing that I had to leave out many impressive moments and stories.

Teacher Appreciation Week

We bring to a close Teacher Appreciation Week. I want to thank PTSA/SEPTA leaders and members for stepping up to celebrate our entire staff. I heard many appreciative comments from staff. Notes of thanks also were sent to staff from individual families, the BOE and administrators. Let me share an excerpt of what I sent to all staff on Monday:

Saying thank you matters. I try to do so every week in my Friday letters. With the start of Teacher Appreciation Week, I offer more heartfelt thanks.

Individually and collectively, you bring daily dedication to what our students and families need most--for some it is an extra push, for some it is space; for some it is more rigor, for some it is more relevance; for some it is an ear, for some it is a voice; for all, it is personalized, fostering growth and well-being.

Hastings' teachers understand that all staff in the district make a difference every day for our students. They know it is **Us** making the difference. Thus, I am confident that Hastings' teachers join me in extending deep appreciation to each and every staff member.

National Merit Commended Scholars

Seven HHS juniors have been named National Merit Commended Scholars by the College Board. [The National Merit Scholarship Program is an academic competition for recognition and scholarships that began in 1955. Approximately 1.5 million high school students enter the program each year.](#) Students are recognized based on their PSAT scores. Less than five percent of test takers receive commendation from the National Merit Program. Simply put, the following seven juniors are in rarified company:

- Emilia Anderson

- Catherine Cho
- Isabella DePreist-Sullivan
- Emila Franco
- Noa Hart
- Liam Painter
- Gus Renzin

Passion Project and World Language in HOH

Last Thursday evening, more than 50 students in Level 5 Spanish and French presented their Passion Projects. As described by teachers Steven Lopez and Veronika Aleiner, “the main idea of the Passion Project is for our students to think of a skill they’d like to develop, a problem they wish to solve, and/or a larger-scale question they’d like to answer. They create an action plan to follow over six weeks, including researching educational and information resources, working with a mentor or expert in the field, and/or practicing their skill.”

The culminating activity was the evening exhibition in Cochran Gymnasium. A line of tables snaked through the gym, with each student, joined by a fellow student as translator, presenting their work, totally in either Spanish or French. Topics were complex, and in some cases drew on work students are doing in other subjects (evidencing nifty cross-discipline inquiry). Stopping by several tables, I witnessed, with the help of translators, robotics, ornithology, cultural comparisons between Spain and the US, card tricks and games, films on mythical topics and personal development, food recipes, legos, inquiries into French movies, and historical analysis of world religions. Of course, food matters at celebrations, so the serpentine tables led finally to a sharing of French and Spanish food.

Dr. Melissa Szymanski, who also attended the evening program, said, “it was truly gratifying to see students engaged in projects about which they are passionate, curious, and eager to study in depth. It was fantastic.”

Steven Lopez, in looking back on the evening, concluded, “Given the excitement of my students and the success of the evening, I plan to make this learning experience a staple of my level 5 classes.”

Student Leadership on the Climate – The Mayor’s Climate Youth Council

Mia Christie and Aynsley Zamore, 10th Graders, have joined with Mayor Armacost to launch the [Mayor’s Climate Youth Council \(CYC\)](#). Approved by the Village Trustees earlier this week, CYC will be comprised of Hastings High School students, who will work on specific climate improvement projects. Mia and Aynsley explain the impetus for CYC as follows:

Over the years, many students have expressed an interest in discovering ways to combat the current climate crisis. The challenge has continued to be that students have not identified an effective way to channel their thoughts and energy to make a real difference. Our goal, as the CYC, is to change this. We want to help students tailor plans and steps to address climate goals within the Village. This will allow students to not only voice their ideas, but also to put them directly into action through partnerships with our elected officials. We hope to encourage students to become more involved in the

community, to create actions and goals that are both achievable and effective, and to make their own contributions right here at home.

The mission of the CYC is to bring students together to fight climate change on a local level, by setting achievable goals and taking productive action. Students will work closely with CYC mentors to create the steps needed to accomplish their plans. The intention is that the CYC will make a real impact on the climate crisis starting at a local level.

Interested students are encouraged to apply to be on the CYC. The application process may be started [here](#).

I want to applaud the entrepreneurial leadership of Mia and Aynsley in reaching out to the Mayor, Lou Adipietro and me to launch CYC. It signifies so much good: talented students looking to the future, with a focus on starting local to go global. We also thank Mayor Armacost for guiding our students through what will be challenging work.

Poetry Challenge – The Poems are In

Hastings Poetry Challenge resulted in six poems from middle school students and one submission from me. We have assembled them in a digital compendium. The poems range in topic, style, message and imagery—as is poetry’s want. We have been careful to present the poems exactly as they were received. Indeed, one contributor admonished me, “please don’t edit or change my poem.” Never would; that is out-of-bounds for poetry.

We will have the Second Annual Hastings Poetry Challenge next April. Start writing now. In the meantime, enjoy this year’s [compendium](#).

Health Matters – A Necessary Reminder

Early this week I prepared a statement in response to several good questions from families in light of our increase in COVID-19 rates. I shared it with the BOE Wednesday. It is important that I share it with all staff and families.

We continue to monitor COVID-19 rates closely, given that our daily counts have moved up the past week to 10-12 per day district-wide. Calculated across a seven-day time period, we currently have about 3.5 percent of students and/or staff with a confirmed positive case. We must not forget that over 96 percent of staff and students are healthy and eligible to attend school. (The calculation is based on 10 per day average over seven days divided by the approximate total population of adults and students at 2,000.)

As I communicated on Friday (4.29.22) to all staff and families, we will maintain our current COVID-19 policies and procedures. Students, staff and families need to be vigilant with the mitigating strategies we know make a difference, most of which are also essential to limiting the spread of flu (which also has increased in Hastings):

- Stay home if not feeling well
- Wash hands and use hand sanitizer regularly
- Mask-up when in doubt, especially when in groups, in tight indoor spaces
- Get your vaccination and booster (if age-eligible)

- Avail yourself of the Antigen COVID-19 home testing kits, which are in ample supply in each school's medical office.

We coordinate with our Medical Directors, the WCDOH and regional superintendents regarding COVID-19 rates and related policies and procedures. At present, there are no plans to change policies and procedures for mitigating COVID-19. The consensus is that the mix of mitigating factors listed above are helping to minimize the spread of COVID-19. We intend to continue to follow WCDOH guidelines and not institute Hastings-specific metrics and separate policies and procedures. It is important we align with the guidance of our public health and medical authorities. Lastly, let me stress that these are not minimum standards; rather, they are considered the optimal approach to maintaining health and keeping schools in-person and the learning environment as supportive as possible.

Be well.

Bill

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