

Hastings-on-Hudson Public Schools



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April 8, 2022

Dear Hastings Families and Staff,

Breathe in, breathe out. Made it. Spring Recess, yes!

Heading into our break, I raise up the Academic Challenge Team, make a COVID-19 request, and close with a reminder about the Poetry Challenge.

Academic Challenge Team – Live Again!

Nine months in, I am still finding golden nuggets in Hastings. Last night, the Academic Challenge Team held its Annual Fundraiser, the Community Quiz Bowl. For the first time since 2019, the event was live, in-person and at the High School. Coach/Advisor Michael Willson shared the following testimonial on the Team and event.

“Academic Challenge is a national organization that has Jeopardy-like competitions, with a lot more science and math. This is my fifth year as the coach/advisor and it has been a privilege to work with such smart and enthusiastic students. We are having a great year, both in terms of our win/lost record, but also in terms of our participation. On average, more than 25 students attend our weekly practices and we are sending 20 students to most of our competitions this year. Our meets have been virtual for the past two school years, but I’m pleased to announce that our final Westchester Competition will be in person on April 23, and we are hosting it here at Hastings High School. In June, we will compete virtually at the Nationals, defending our title as the two-time (2020, 2021) Small School National Champion.”

Getting back to last night’s event, the Community Quiz Bowl follows the format of our competitions, but with the roles reversed. The students moderate and the parents compete. Many parents still compete every year, long after their children graduate. This year we had 10 teams, with fun names like “Hastings Hellions” and “I lost on Jeopardy.” We also welcomed back, as an “adult” participant, Atri Ray (Class of 2021 and former team captain), who came up from Columbia, where he is a Freshman.

Special thanks to Team President Charlie Linder and Vice President Sasha Gordon for their excellent work planning every aspect of last evening’s event. Now seniors, Charlie and Sasha have been with the Club since ninth grade and are the remaining members of the 2020 and 2021 championship teams.”

COVID-19 Request

We continue to monitor COVID-19 within our schools. The daily counts, which are being shared at the close of each school day, are an important indicator of our status. To be clear, the daily counts capture the new confirmed positive cases within the previous 24

hours (unless otherwise noted in the daily memo). The daily counts are not cumulative; we are tracking daily changes given they are most informative to our evolving status.

For all those words, please focus on the fact that we continue to have daily counts at or close to zero. In the midst of regional increases in COVID-19 cases, we should be cautiously pleased that we are a counter-story. To keep our healthy record going, please be vigilant with the mitigating strategies we know make a difference: stay home if not feeling well, keep washing hands and using hand sanitizer, when in doubt mask up, and get your vaccination and booster (if age-eligible). Within the schools, if we see any patterns in COVID-19 cases, the Facilities Department is notified and additional cleaning is provided for specific classrooms/areas.

I want to reiterate my support for optional mask use. We have done well in supporting the individual decisions of students and staff regarding masks. Ultimately, having masks optional provides families and staff flexibility and control.

Each school has been distributing sample sets of Antigen COVID-19 home testing kits. We also have supplies available in each medical office, which we provide to families whenever we have any questions about possible COVID-19 infection. While the use of these tests is optional, we suggest that staff and families consider testing before returning to school after Spring Recess.

Lastly, please use the following link for reporting positive COVID-19 cases during the Spring Recess. This link will alert health office staff who, in turn, can then provide instructions to families. [Spring Break COVID-19 Reporting Form](#)

Please be in touch with your building administrators if you have any questions or concerns.

A Poetry Challenge – A Reminder

In last [Friday's community letter](#), in honor of [National Poetry Month](#), I announced a poetry challenge for Hastings: Please send by Friday, April 22 short poems written by students or staff, and I will share them in a digital format on Friday, April 29.

To set the tone for the challenge, I turned to Emily Dickinson, featuring her poem, “*Hope*” is the Thing with Feathers. Today, I prime your poetry muse (intentional mixed metaphor) with my own free verse. By dropping way below the lofty standard of Dickinson, I hope to encourage more Hastings poetry—take the risk to write and share, it is easy. My free verse conveys what I heard and experienced in several Hillside classrooms this week while guest reading.

Ever Curious – Our Joy

A mystery reader – at the classroom door
Appreciative smiles from teachers
Quizzical looks from students
Oh, right, we see you at drop-off
A Superintendent and a doctor?
Manage buildings?
Fix my leg?

A book beckons
Eyes on the cover I shield
I want the surprise.

We start
The book is shown
Arms shoot up in recognition – real or not
Title and cover drawing studied
A first “turn & talk” – What will happen?
Loud chatter, ideas flying
We return and share.

The reading begins
Eyes focused as one
Funny voices attempted
Smiles appear (thankfully)
Energy of many is joined
On the words
On the pictures.

At the cusp of a plot change
A second “turn & talk” – What happens next?
Pairs form fast
More loud chatter, more ideas flying
We return and share.

The book ends
A final “turn & talk” – What two pages would you add?
We return and share
Ideas boundless
Creativity soars
Tidbits expand
Big themes reappear
No wrong answers.

Walking out, I carry
Their Creativity
Their Smiles
Their Laughter
Their Insights
Their Curiosity
Our Joy.

Have a great Spring Recess.

Be well.

Bill

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