

Hastings-on-Hudson Public Schools



Office of the Superintendent

27 Farragut Avenue, Hastings-on-Hudson, New York 10706

tel: (914) 478-6205 fax: (914) 478-6209

www.hohschools.org



William S. McKersie, Ph.D.

Superintendent of Schools

mckersiew@hohschools.org

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Dear Hastings Families and Staff,

Just the facts; just the facts. Thanks to the wide-ranging excellence and creativity amongst our Hastings students and staff, the facts this week are once again a source of uplift. I do close with a discussion about health, yet even that has an overall positive outcome.

Before starting, let me provide a calendar reminder: There is no school on Tuesday, May 3, 2022, in recognition of Eid al-Fitr (Festival of Breaking Fast). Across the region, some districts and schools are recognizing Eid al-Fitr on May 2 and others on May 3.

Middle School Mathematical Excellence

In late January, our middle school Algebra students participated in an American Mathematics Competition, the AMC 8. This is a nationwide event, conducted annually by the Mathematics Association of America (MAA). Some 60 students gathered in the cafeteria after school and worked on a series of problems designed to focus on problem-solving skills.

The Director of Competitions for the MAA, Jennifer Barton, writes, "The measure of success of the competition is not the number of problems solved, but is the level of engagement with mathematics that arises from the intellectual challenge of the problem-solving process." This was clearly evident in our cafeteria as students drew diagrams, made tables, and stared intently into space, trying to manipulate the ideas within the questions into ways of thinking that made sense.

This is the first time we have been able to run this competition in several years. Our mathematics chairperson, Dr. Greg Stephens, told students that the contest is full of problems, "designed by mathematicians for young mathematicians to play with." Extending this joyful idea, we celebrate all of the students who joined Dr. Stephens and colleagues in the cafeteria to play with math, and, in particular, we recognize the six students who took first, second, and third place in total points.

- 1st place: Harley Griffin
- 2nd place: Liam Belton and Maxwell Boyd
- 3rd place: Claire Jiang, Sadie Knittel, and Jacob Charny

Artistic Talent – A Culminating AP Art Show

The AP Art Show has graced the high school foyer this week, with the opening on Wednesday evening, featuring works by AP Studio and AP Photo students. The pieces center on a theme, selected by each student early in the school year to guide their creative process. At once rigorous and personal, the themes demonstrate how art pushes thinking while delving deeply into emotions and feelings. Topics include, in the students' own words, "materialism...mental health...women's sexuality...paranoia...the sexualization and mistreatment of Asian women...three generations of family (immigrant) history...nature and plants...music as a connector of people."

Senior Liam Shanley's statement about the theme for his photography—ranging from portraits of classmates to NYC streetscapes—is exemplary: "I want to explore small moments that delve deep into a person's innermost thoughts. The idea of highlighting small moments is an attempt to show that these moments are, in fact, important and shouldn't be overlooked...I hope to be able to communicate this notion through my work because it's something that resonates with me personally."

The AP Art Show has inspired many students and staff, witness an email shared Thursday morning by FMS Art teacher Ezra Elliott: "[Congratulations] to Lorienne [Solaski] and Cory [Merchant] for a wonderful AP Art show last night. The AP Studio and AP Photo students have made us all very proud, the mastery of their craft and concept expertly guided by two amazing teachers. Being able to view the culmination of these artist's careers here in a singular show is satisfying proof of the wonderful work we do with our students."

Congratulations to Xenia Hernandez, Aya Hinawi, William Lew, Sophie Mulaire, Joan Moon, Cara Novak, Sabine Paz-Le Draoulec, Ali Quiambao, Ellie Reyna-Lalier, Mae Rooney, Paige Sanchez, Liam Shanley, Stella Stephens, and Bluebell Ward.

Cautious Enthusiasm – *US News & World Report* Rankings

Many in Hastings have heard the recent news that [Hastings High School did well in the latest rankings by US News & World Report](#). We are ranked 29th in New York State, 8th in Westchester, and 253 nationally. With a usual caveat about rankings (and these are based on 2018-2021 data), it remains admirable that HHS ranks amongst the finest high schools regionally and nationally.

I have lived with these rankings while working K-12 and in higher education. To paraphrase a wise university president, "We should appreciate the feedback, but we would be misguided to consider it more than one interpretation of our value to students and families." Rankings as a metric are problematic, as opposed to looking at groupings, bands or ranges of performance over time. For instance, our ranking could easily drop based on small shifts in AP participation and performance by individual students, but this would not indicate a change in overall school quality.

As a thought experiment, look at the rankings of the four higher education institutions (Columbia, Cornell, NYU and Rochester) listed at the end of the above *US News & World Report* link as "the best colleges in New York State." Their national rankings range from 2nd to 34th. The wise interpretation is that these ranks have limited validity and reliability as to the true comparative quality of these august institutions.

While HHS is the focus of the rankings, they are a statement on all of Hastings. To quote high school principal, Lou Adipietro, “Congratulations to the entire district, since the high school reaps the benefit of our students going through Hillside and FMS first!”

All in all, Hastings should take the compliment for what the rankings do say. Call it cautious enthusiasm.

Poetry Challenge – Final Call

National Poetry Month concludes soon. Several students have responded to the Hastings Poetry Challenge and submitted stellar poems. The deadline for poems is April 29. Please submit them directly to the Superintendent at mckersiew@hohschools.org. On May 6, we will post a digital compendium of the poems.

Health Matters

We continue to be a healthy school district, with the vast majority of staff and students in attendance. That is the fact to remember, even as we end a week that saw an increase in our daily COVID-19 counts (average has moved from 1-2 new cases per day to roughly 10-12 per day late this week). We have seen a parallel jump in the incidence of flu, which prompted the mid-week [letter](#) to staff and families from the nurses. Given that regional counts are up for COVID-19 and flu, an increase in Hastings is understandable.

To repeat important messages, we will maintain our current COVID-19 policies and procedures. We ask students, staff and families to be vigilant with the mitigating strategies we know make a difference, most of which are also essential to limiting the spread of flu:

- 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.

As always, your building administrators are available if you have any questions or concerns.

Be well.

Bill

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