



Byram Hills School District

SPECTRUM

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Coman Hill 'Makers Club' Turns Second Graders into Inventors

During a recent lunch period at Coman Hill, a second-grade girl carefully sawed a piece of wood held steady in a bench vise. Nearby, two classmates sketched plans for projects they hoped to build. Across the classroom, two boys worked with cardboard, scissors and tape to build a track for toy cars.

Welcome to Coman Hill's "Maker Club." The club, which started last year, gives second-graders a chance to learn by doing. The faculty members running the club began it hoping to foster creativity, teach students how to turn ideas into reality, and help them understand that success is often built on failures.

"This is a risk-free opportunity for the children to try to do something without worrying that there is a right or wrong way," said librarian Jane del Villar, who oversees the club with teacher Ronni Levine. "The children start to learn that nothing is going to come out absolutely right the first time." The pair often gets assistance from Leslie Goldfarb or other teachers who drop in to offer help.

Ten children, who are selected by lottery, are given the chance to participate in the club for seven weeks at a time. The club is an outgrowth of a growing "maker movement" that is bringing back the process of making useful objects in school. The maker's movement is built on the idea that once-common classes like home economics or "shop" gave students opportunities to learn practical skills under the guidance of teachers. The movement is not trying to bring back the 1950s, however. Makers clubs and classes are designed to encourage dreaming and innovation and, particularly for older students, may incorporate 3D printers and other technology.

For Coman Hill's club, Ms. del Villar and Ms. Levine wanted to focus on students exploring and manipulating their environment using science, technology, engineering, art and mathematics skills. They start each new session by teaching the children how to safely use tools such as hammers, saws and vises. Students work in a classroom equipped with a woodworking bench and supplies, including wood, textiles, circuitry and art materials, that were generously provided through a Byram Hills Education Foundation grant.



Second-grader Bianca Hutter works on her project.

■ CONTINUED ON PAGE 7

Revised Evaluation System Raises Questions in Byram Hills

The continuing controversy over teacher evaluations and student testing in New York has raised concerns among educators, school board members and parents in Byram Hills.

District leaders are concerned that the latest round of revisions to the state's evaluation process, which place even greater emphasis on high-stakes testing, will create additional costs for Byram Hills taxpayers without improving the educational program. Relatively few Byram Hills parents chose to have their children "opt-out" of statewide evaluation tests held this spring. Still, many are questioning whether the state testing is a meaningful way to help students or evaluate teachers in high-performing school districts in Westchester County.

"These 'reforms' are not good for Byram Hills. This one-size-fits-all approach will pull all schools toward mediocrity," said Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Donohue. Dr. Donohue said the district already has spent significant district resources changing a well-functioning evaluation system in order to meet state law. Now, New York school districts are facing more changes and looming deadlines.

Governor Andrew Cuomo's revisions to the state's teacher-evaluation system, passed by the Legislature in April as part of a budget deal, increases emphasis on student test scores, decreases the importance of classroom observations and reduces school districts' ability to design components of their own ratings systems. Those changes in law are now before the Board of Regents and the Education Department, which was charged with releasing

■ CONTINUED ON PAGE 3

Power of One Day Encourages Students to Give Back

If HCC students wondered whether they were old enough to make a difference, their questions disappeared after they listened to one speaker at the school's annual "Power of One Day." Hannah Alper, a 12-year-old Canadian girl, told students about her environmental blog and other ways she is trying to improve the world.

"She was so passionate," said sixth-grader Gabriella Gentile. "It made us see that we can make a difference." Agreed sixth-grader Brooke Benz, "I thought she was great; she was very inspirational."

Every year, HC Crittenden Middle School sets aside a day to show students the importance of giving back, and teach them how to take small steps to help solve big problems. This year, the whole student body heard talks by Hannah and by Prospect Park, NJ Mayor Mohamed Khairulla, who works to support schools for refugee girls in Syria. Sixth graders also attended workshops that involved sustainability, human rights and social justice issues.

"This is our ninth year of holding the Power of One, and it gets better every year," said Principal H. Evan Powderly. "The students see how important a commitment to service can be. Then they begin



to participate in service projects immediately, which is a very important part of the day."

This year's workshops involved many local charities, including Habitat for Humanity, Guiding Eyes for the Blind, and Heavenly Productions, an Armonk-based foundation that helps children in distress

Students help socialize a dog in the Guiding Eyes for the Blind program.



Sixth graders stuff teddy bears to donate to children.

through projects that include donations of teddy bears and school supplies.

At the Heavenly Production workshop, students helped stuff bears that would be donated at local hospitals and homeless shelters. Board member John Wallace, a retired Knick, was among the volunteers who helped the students finish making the bears.

"Every bear we're making is going to make a child happy," said student Lindsey Noel.

In other areas of the school, students created care packages of school supplies to send to refugee children; helped socialize guide dogs; designed and decorated pillow cases to be sent to a homeless shelter; and filmed a music video highlighting acts of kindness at HCC. Some students learned how to turn garbage into compost through a workshop run by North Castle Supervisor Mike Schiliro while others learned more about how to be a "Socially Responsible Investor."

Students could also support charities by buying lemonade and fair-trade crafts.

"It is our hope that all students will be inspired by the Power of One Day to make a positive difference in their world," said teacher Mary Staudt, one of the day's organizers.

Students Say Thanks to Staff at HC Crittenden

The students in HC Crittenden's service club recently decided there was just one thing wrong with "Teacher Appreciation Week:" it didn't include other district staff.

The VIP/Leo Club decided to use the recent week to thank not only their teachers, but also the custodians, office workers and bus drivers who help the middle school students daily.



Seventh graders Taleen Postian and Izzy Levy stuff teachers' boxes with cookies for a VIP/Leo project.

"We just thought it would be a nice thing to do something for the people who don't always get thanked," said seventh-grader Izzy Levy. Added classmate Taleen Postian, "The bus drivers get up very early to drive us, and the custodians help us every day. But we don't always think to thank them."

The students made thank-you signs, baked cookies and brought in other snacks that they set up at Crittenden and delivered to the bus garage. All the teachers found cookies in their mail box when they arrived at school.

"We wanted to show the teachers how much we love and care about them," said Izzy, "because we really do!"



High School Mock Trial Team Wins County Championship



The Byram Hills High School Mock Trial Team

The Byram Hills High School Mock Trial Team recently won first place in the Westchester County finals of the New York State Mock Trial Competition.

The team took home the trophy on April 16th after defeating Blind Brook High School in a competition held at the Westchester County Courthouse in White Plains. The win was particularly gratifying for the team's members and coaches – teachers Martin Gilbert and Lisa Pellegrino – because Byram Hills had lost to Blind Brook in the semifinals in the last two years.

“Our success in recent years is due in large part to hard work and teamwork,” said Mr. Gilbert. “The members of the mock trial team have come to understand that success is not just about luck or talent.” He also credited Ms. Pellegrino for her dedication and expertise: “She has a deep understanding of what it takes to prepare our students for trial.”

Mock Trial competition gives students a chance to experience the U.S. judicial system by participating in a fictitious case prepared by the New York State Bar Association. This year, the case involved charges of embezzlement of private money from a fundraising event. Students act as attorneys and witnesses in competitions, and are judged by attorneys. The Westchester Bar Association runs the local tournament.

To reach the county finals, the Byram Hills team won competitions against respected teams from Solomon Schechter, Rye Neck and Nyack high schools. Senior captain Elizabeth Kingsley, who has been involved in Mock Trial since her freshman year, led the Byram Hills team. The other senior on the team is Nolan Abramowitz; junior members are Dan Koster, Sarah Crucilla, Jolie Feldman, Ryan Infante, Josh Schuback, Miriam Lachs, Paul Erlanger, Greg Mekenian, Taylor Cvern and Kevin Chang.

Preparation for this year's case included two long practice trials judged by legal experts Ed Lieberman and Eliot Schuman, community residents who have acted as volunteer advisors in recent years.

“Ultimately it came down to preparation and performance,” said Elizabeth. She said the team benefitted from having members with courtroom experience “who had already gone up against the ‘big-name’ schools of the mock trial world.” Elizabeth also praised the coaches and said that Mr. Lieberman and Mr. Schuman have “great strategic minds” and had helped the team come up with unique arguments.

“This year we came into the courtroom with confidence and were able to think on our feet and improvise in unexpected situations,” she said. “That’s the extra element that won it for us.”

Although the team lost in the regional finals, Byram Hills is looking ahead to next year. Because most of the team will return next year, the coaches are expecting another strong finish in 2016.

Revised Evaluation System Raises Questions in Byram Hills

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

regulations by June 30 that districts must follow in order to receive aid.

Meanwhile, opposition to those changes has led state lawmakers to consider backtracking. The state Assembly has just passed its own education reform package that would require a review of Common Core standards; give schools more time to fully implement the new evaluation system; and delink funding from the evaluation process. The state Senate is also considering an extension for the evaluation system, and looking at other bills related to teacher evaluations, testing and implementation of the Common Core.

In Byram Hills, district leaders say the additional changes to the teacher evaluation system, known as the Annual Professional Performance Review or APPR, is an unnecessary burden. In May, the Byram Hills Board of Education adopted a resolution calling on the state Board of Regents to convene a task force to review “the reliability, transparency, developmental appropriateness, and length of the state tests” and determine whether they should be linked to teacher evaluations. It also asked the Regents to postpone a requirement for new evaluation plans until September 2016.

Finally the Byram Hills Board asked the Regents, Commissioner of Education and state legislators to fully review the evaluation proposal and reject inappropriate reforms and those that place “undue reliance on state tests.” Other districts in Westchester and Putnam have passed similar resolutions.

Statewide, parents' frustration over testing resulted in some 165,000 children sitting out state testing this year, up from 60,000 last year. Parents acted out of concern that the increased emphasis on testing was defining curriculum and consuming too many classroom hours.

Dr. Donohue said he understood the frustration driving the “opt-out” movement, noting that no other business would essentially shut down operations for six days in order to evaluate employees. Forcing districts to quickly revise evaluation plans will likely lead to the same type of problems that were faced recently by schools trying to implement Common Core standards to meet the state's schedule.

Dr. Donohue said the rushed implementation of the Common Core meant that the curriculum materials were not ready as school started: “Teachers were scrambling to get the materials they needed, and that is not the way our teachers want to plan their lessons.”

If the education plan adopted by the state stands, districts will have to modify their APPR plans by September, which the school board resolution called “another virtually impossible deadline.” Meanwhile, educators question whether the state's one-size-fits-all approach is fair to Byram Hills and other successful districts that can demonstrate their students' high performance by objective measures such as high school graduation rates, college acceptance rates and proficiency on Regents exams.

Field Day Fun

Under warm sunny skies, Wampus School held its annual Field Day on May 22. Students enjoyed a day of old-fashioned fun: They jumped rope, played with hula-hoops, dribbled soccer balls and giggled through potato sack races. Between activities, which were run by BHHS student volunteers, Wampus students laughed with their classmates and turned cartwheels on the sidelines. And student after student agreed: Every day should be Field Day!



HCC Students Try Origami During 'Exploratory' Class

After a tough test or a challenging morning of classes at HC Crittenden, origami can be just what the doctor ordered.

Learning how to fold paper into cranes, flowers or shapes somehow makes middle school students forget about their daily stresses. Students in HCC's origami "exploratory" say the class is a fun break in their week.

"It's a chance to do something different," said student Michael Caporale. "You get to relax and try something creative."

"It's kind of therapeutic," said Isabelle Ilan. "It's very calming, and it's nice that you have a chance to talk."

In grades six, seven, and eight, Crittenden students study technology, perform in music groups such as band and orchestra, and participate in the exploratory program. Students may have an exploratory class such as origami one or two days a week depending on which music classes they are taking.

In origami, students work on group projects that end up

decorating the halls of the school. The projects are often seasonal: students may fold paper into ghosts for a Halloween-themed display or make flowers for a bulletin board heralding spring. Or projects might highlight pride in the school or the Bobcats. Students have also made cranes for mobiles, and cards and boxes as decorations for the

students who visit from Children's Village in Ardsley.

Teachers Anne-Marie Pasquale and Melinda Fuller have been running the classes for almost 15 years. They have learned along with the students, slowly becoming more advanced in the ancient Asian art of paper folding. The two remember teaching the first class how to make paper frogs, which students later raced, because that was the first thing they had learned to fold. By attending a yearly convention on origami, watching videos and reading books, the teachers can now teach students how to fold countless shapes, animals and boxes.

"In the middle of the day, it really is a break for them," said Ms. Fuller. "They're talking to a friend, but their hands are doing some-



Isabelle Ilan and Skylar Healy work on a group origami project.



Wampus Fifth Graders Get a Glimpse of High School Science



Solutions that change from pink to blue to red. Pennies that turn to silver and gold. Fire that travels back and forth through a tube.

Magic? No, chemistry!

Wampus students learned that chemical reactions were behind many of the experiments they watched wide-eyed at the district's Science Night, held May 19 at Byram Hills High School. The annual evening shows about 150 fifth-graders that advanced-level science is fun.

With the help of high school volunteers, high school science teachers ran workshops with names like "Whiz Bang Boom," "Junk Yard Wars," and "We All Scream for Ice Cream" to demonstrate different scientific fields.

"The experiments are just so much fun," said Kat Orlova-Sullivan, as she took a break from making ice cream.

In one classroom, students learned about air pressure by stepping into giant plastic bags that went up to their necks and then giggling as a vacuum sucked the air out.

"Your whole body feels squished," explained fifth-grader Dylan Haber. In the "Whiz Bang Boom" room, students covered their ears as miniature rockets went off and solutions exploded. The fifth graders watched the high school students perform experiments with fire that left them asking how soon they could take chemistry.

High school science teacher Steven Borneman, the event organizer, said the night was an educational opportunity for both the fifth graders and the high school students, who plan the experiments and share a little of what they have learned.

"This year, the elementary students had the opportunity to experiment with sound, forensics, the power of air, alchemy, engineering design, and acids and bases," said Mr. Borneman. "This event is an outstanding learning experience and definitely inspires students to be interested in science."

High school sophomore Hannah Malter said she volunteered because she recalls what a fun night it was: "I remember doing it when I was in fifth grade, and I just loved it!"



Origami projects adorn an HCC hallway.

thing. By the end of a project, they have a real sense of accomplishment." Ms. Pasquale said the class even reinforces some of what they learn in math class; she hears students discussing how they are creating trapezoids or certain kinds of triangles.

Although many Byram Hills students

have been exposed to art and museums from an early age, they often do not know much about origami.

"They start to appreciate origami as an art form," she said. Moreover, origami can be a creative outlet for students at a time in their schooling when they may start to judge their artistic efforts against their classmates'. A middle-school student may say 'I'm not a good artist,' "but no one comes into this class and says 'I'm not a good folder,'" said Ms. Pasquale. During a recent class, students paid close attention as their teachers demonstrated how to create a cube, often bringing over their work to make sure they were doing it right.

"Even at this age, they love to see their work when it goes up on the board," said Ms. Fuller.

Byram Hills Community Comes Out to Support Theater Program

It was a night to celebrate the Byram Hills Stage theater program's past, look ahead to its future and honor an educator who has long been its champion.

A benefit performance of the Tony Award-winning show "Next to Normal" was recently presented at Byram Hills High School with a cast that included Byram Hills alumni and faculty under the direction of Fine Arts Director Joy Varley, who will retire in June. The show's composer Tom Kitt, a 1992 BHHS graduate, called Ms. Varley an important influence and said his involvement in a Stage production of "Into the Woods" taught him the power that musical theater can wield.

"Anything that Joy Varley asks me to do, I do," said Mr. Kitt during a reception. He isn't the only one.

Ms. Varley wanted to end her Byram Hills career with a benefit that would provide a nest egg for the program she ran from 1988 to 1999. She said she turned to some of the "amazing" talent that the program has produced. Alumni agreed to star in the show, provide musical direction, play in the orchestra and handle lighting. Teachers took on roles or offered their musical talents. Community residents packed the audience for the April 13 show, helping to raise about \$25,000 for a program that Ms. Varley said, "will be in my heart forever and forever."

"We live in a community that has come together tonight to celebrate our legacy and endow the future of the Byram Hills Stage theater program," Ms. Varley told an audience that responded with a standing ovation. Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Donohue thanked Mr. Kitt, the performers, the Board of Education and the community for its support of the arts.

"In 25 years at Byram Hills, I have never had a night when I was more proud to be a leader of this school district," he said "This is amazing."

Mr. Kitt, who won a Pulitzer Prize for "Next to Normal," spoke before the curtain went up about how a show that deals frankly with mental illness reached Broadway. He also paid tribute to Ms. Varley and Stage, calling it a "wonderful program, a program that really changed my life."



Superintendent of Schools William Donohue and Principal Chris Borsari unveil a playbill renaming the Stage theater group "The Varley Players" in honor of Director of Fine Arts Joy Varley.

Then, with Ms. Varley back in the director's chair one last time, alumni shined on the stage where careers in theater and music had started for them.

Alumna Lauryn Ciardullo, who played Diana, later said Ms. Varley had helped motivate her to pursue a career in theater. The actress, who is currently in the cast of Broadway's "Aladdin," said Ms. Varley's high standards had long set the bar for students.

"Rehearsals were on a professional level," she said. "They truly prepared us for what it's like in the real world."

At the show's conclusion, High School Principal Chris Borsari and Dr. Donohue honored Ms. Varley with a special surprise. Dr. Donohue announced that the Stage group would be renamed "The Varley Players" and that future playbills would describe her contributions to the district.

Along with Ms. Ciardullo, the show's cast included alumni Katerina Papacostas playing Natalie and Jared Weiss playing Gabe. Faculty members in the cast included John Anthony Lopez, the current Stage director, playing Dan; and music teacher Jonah Piali as Doctor Madden. Actor Johnny Stellard rounded out the cast as Henry. The show's music director was alumnus Jason Loffredo. Musicians included alumna J.J. Clark, on drums; Byram Hills parent Lori Horowitz on violin; and teachers Alan Lounsbury on bass and Kathy Shelhart on cello. Alumnus Michael Cummings handled lighting design; district theater staffer Jamie LaJoie was responsible for sound design; and science teacher Jim Gulick was the production assistant.

Ms. Varley has had a 28-year career in Byram Hills. She taught choir and theater before becoming director of fine arts. Ms. Varley said donations made to the program will go toward future productions, helping keep ticket prices stable and enabling the program to make the best artistic and educational decisions about what shows to produce.

Contributions may still be made to the fund by emailing jvarley@byramhills.org.



Joy Varley, center, with alumni Lauryn Ciardullo, who played Diana, and Tom Kitt, composer of "Next to Normal."

Byram Hills Sophomore Takes Bronze at World Fencing Championships

Byram Hills student Sylvie Binder recently won a bronze medal in her first appearance at the Junior and Cadet World Fencing Championships in Uzbekistan.

Sylvie, a 15-year-old sophomore, was one of just three cadet foil fencers chosen to represent the United States at the worlds. She was the only American in her division (under 17) to win a medal for the USA team at the April competition.

"It was so amazing," said Sylvie recently, "I didn't expect to win a medal." During the competition, Sylvie competed against fencers from Brazil, England, Hungary, Russia, Italy, and Japan. In one match, she defeated the reigning world champion, Marta Martyanova from Russia, after a back-and-forth battle that ended with her winning 15-14 in overtime. Sylvie said that bout really made her appreciate her American teammates, whom she became friendly with during the competition.

"It was so nice to hear this small group of Americans chanting your name when a whole stadium is chanting 'Russia!'" she recalled. Sylvie said qualifying for the world championships was the result of years of training and preparation and steady wins this year: "For the entire year, I've been building up to worlds."

Sylvie started fencing when she was 7 after taking a sample lesson at the Fencing Academy of Westchester in Hawthorne. "The coach saw that I was left-handed and wouldn't let me leave," she said with a laugh, noting that being a leftie can be an advantage in the sport. Sylvie was the Youth-12 national champion, and last year was the USA's top-ranked 14-year-old. This year, Sylvie attended monthly tournaments in the



US and overseas, which involved travelling to Germany, Italy, Hungary, Croatia and Romania. Teachers and classmates have been very supportive of her fencing, helping her stay up to date on assignments and arranging for extra help when needed. She said that the long plane rides gave her plenty of time to stay current on homework.

Although Sylvie said that she had occasionally wished over the

years that she could play a sport like soccer so she could be on school teams, she said she knows that she really is better suited to a sport where she's in control of her own matches. She also said that her friends and classmates are now more aware of what she does than when she was in middle school.

"People start to understand that there is a world beyond Byram Hills," she said. Fencing has also become a family thing: her brother Zachary and her sister Abigail, who both attend Crittenden, also fence. Sylvie said she knows that it will be a little harder next year to balance fencing with the demands of junior year. She is ready, however, to face that challenge. The new season, and the road to the 2016 World Championships, begins in July at the 2015 summer Nationals in California. Sylvie will be there.



Sylvie Binder (second from right) at the awards ceremony.

Coman Hill 'Makers Club' Turns Second Graders into Inventors

■ CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

As each meeting starts, Ms. del Villar and Ms. Levine describe a challenge and one way to meet it. The students may learn how to make something that balances, spins, moves, or makes a noise. To create something that balances, students recently learned how to make a dragonfly that would teeter on their finger. After the brief instructional time, the students are free to create whatever they would like. Most students at a recent meeting chose to turn to their own projects.

Bianca Hutter sawed wood to make a bed for her teddy bear, explaining that "it is really fun" to use the woodworking table. As they worked on their track, Aidan Padley and Kyle Zhang said they loved the club and building things that they imagined. Aidan Lebowitz and Ike Simonds used a circuitry set to make a tiny tickle machine that they later tried out on giggling classmates.

"I love science, and I love making stuff," explained Ike, "so I really love this club." Added Aidan, "You get to make really cool stuff."

Along with starting to learn how to use tools, students in the club develop mental habits that are useful both in and out of school, according to Ms. Levine and Ms. del Villar. Ms. Levine said learning how to break big ideas into smaller components helps children understand how to tackle large projects. One student had recently told her he wanted to make a huge ball that could drop on the next New Year's Eve. With the adults' guidance, he eventually figured out how to scale back his idea to one that he could tackle.

"The students are learning perseverance – and how to change their ideas to make them work," said Ms. Levine. Ms. del Villar said the students are also learning how to collaborate on a project and explain it. As each meeting wraps up, several students will talk about what they're making while classmates often offer suggestions.

For students, however, the best part of the club is the satisfaction they get from making something on their own. Ms. del Villar noted that children do not have as much time for putting around or using tools as they once did. With a little free time and some tools, however, they quickly develop a do-it-yourself mindset:

"The kids really seem to love it, and they constantly amaze us."



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In an environment of mutual respect, the Byram Hills School District and its community will provide students with the means, the knowledge, and the opportunity to excel in order to become productive and responsible citizens of the twenty-first century.

“A great place to learn.”

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School Board Honors Seniors in the Science Research Program



Seniors describe their authentic science research projects to the Byram Hills Board of Education before being recognized for their accomplishments.

The Byram Hills Board of Education has honored senior participants in the high school’s science research program, praising them for tackling challenges in areas ranging from muscular dystrophy to Tommy John surgery to bipolar disorders.

Board President Ira Schulman congratulated the 27 students during a May 5 meeting for their hard work and success in the Dr. Robert Pavlica Authentic Science Research Program, which he called “one of the jewels” of the Byram Hills High educational program.

“Students excelling academically is really what makes this district great,” Mr. Schulman said.

Superintendent of Schools Dr. William Donohue told the students that the district was proud of their accomplishments, which include winning recognition in the Intel Science Talent Search and other academic competitions. He said, however, that he agreed with the program’s founder that awards were not as important as what students in the program learn about science and their own abilities.

“Science isn’t about getting a grade, and science isn’t about doing some canned experiment... science is about participating in a community of other scientists who are all trying to learn more

about what is true,” said Dr. Donohue. He said that Dr. Pavlica, a longtime science teacher who died in 2007, had once told him that the most exciting part of the program was when students had an “aha moment” that wasn’t about science but was about themselves.

Dr. Donohue said he was sure many of the students being honored had experienced that “aha moment” when they realized they could achieve so much more than they thought they could when they entered the program as sophomores.

“Thank you for taking the challenge,” he told students.

Program Director David Keith thanked the board and district parents for supporting science research. Looking around the room, he said the students had entered the program as children.

“I’m struck by how I’m no longer looking at children,” he said, adding that the students had turned into “27 fabulous adults.”

While in the program, students learn study, research and presentation skills. In the second year of the program, they conduct independent work under the guidance of Mr. Keith and teachers Stephanie Greenwald and James Gulick. The students also work with mentors who are professionals in the field they are studying.