

SPECTRUM

A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE

HOMECOMING

CELEBRATIONS AT BYRAM HILLS

MEET KAREN ELDON

INTERIM PRINCIPAL AT COMAN HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

CHARACTER STRONG

AT WAMPUS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

VOICE AND CHOICE

AT H.C. CRITTENDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL

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WHAT'S NEW

AT BYRAM HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



Byram Hills was overflowing with excitement and Bobcat pride as the community came together to celebrate Homecoming Week.

Spanning September 27 to October 3, the week featured thrilling sports action under the lights with cheering fans from throughout the District, enthusiastic and fun-filled pep rallies and school hallways filled with the red and blue of Byram Hills.

"We had a terrific week with an abundance of school pride and community support," said Rob Castagna, the Byram Hills Director of Health, Physical Education and Athletics.

Homecoming Week kicked off with the traveling pep rally, with team captains and cheerleaders from Byram Hills High School lining the entryways at H.C. Crittenden Middle School, Wampus Elementary School and Coman Hill Elementary School. They greeted the younger students as they arrived at school with cheers of "Go Byram" and "Let's go Byram."

It was also Spirit Week at Byram Hills High School, with students dressing up for theme days. There was a day to wear pajamas, Hawaiian clothing, neon, and Friday was Bobcat Pride Day. Students in the lower schools donned blue and red on Friday as well.

The athletic program had a busy week, with varsity home games under the lights each night from Tuesday through Saturday and



home games for the non-field sports as well. This year featured more games during homecoming, especially for junior varsity teams.

The high school pep rally, a beloved annual tradition, took place on the turf field. Students screamed and cheered as they competed by grade against faculty members in spirited games of balloon pop, pass the hula hoop and the toilet paper mummy wrap. The concert choir sang a beautiful rendition of "The Star-Spangled Banner," the cheerleaders performed and the fall athletic teams were introduced. The Byram Band added to the atmosphere with favorites like "Sweet Caroline."

Hours after the pep rally came Friday Night Lights, as the varsity football team played in front of a cheering crowd.

Homecoming Week concluded with the Byram Hills Education Foundation's outdoor family movie night on Sunday on the high school's turf field. More than 200 families attended along with dozens of high school athletes who played games with younger students from all of the schools before the movie. The showing of the sports comedy "The Sandlot" was a fitting end to the festivities.

"It was the best week ever," said Irene Byrnes, a senior who was an emcee at the high school pep rally and crowned homecoming queen. "I saw the community come together for homecoming and it made my heart full."



NEW COMAN HILL LEADER IS COMMITTED TO HELPING EARLY LEARNERS REACH THEIR POTENTIAL



Karen Eldon's lifelong passion for education began when she was just a toddler, playing teacher to the stuffed animals in her bedroom. She followed her dream of becoming a teacher, enjoyed a fulfilling career as an elementary school teacher and principal, and retired in 2017.

But the veteran educator found that her love of teaching and learning remained stronger than ever and that she still had so much to give to young learners.

Mrs. Eldon, who became interim principal at Coman Hill Elementary School on July 1, felt a special connection to the Coman Hill community. As interim principal, she is committed to continuing the great work at Coman Hill and taking the school to the next level.

"I've always felt that if kids get a really good start in those formative years, it sets them up for success in the rest of their academic career," Mrs. Eldon said.

Her mission is to help students feel safe and be socially, emotionally and academically grounded so they can feel confident and successful. "Everyone succeeds at different rates and times, but everybody has the potential to feel success," she says.

Every occurrence at school, like a playground squabble or working toward the next reading level, is a chance for students to grow. "All of those things are opportunities for us to guide students toward achievement," Mrs. Eldon says.

She has been supporting the teachers and helping them implement the new ELA curriculum, Wonders, and the Investigations math program. She wants teachers to know how valued they are, and to make their year as fulfilling as the students'.



Mrs. Eldon earned a bachelor's degree in elementary education from Wagner College. After working as a teaching assistant for a year, she joined her family's printing business, a temporary stint that ended up lasting nearly two decades.

She gave her parents two years' notice and earned a master's degree in K-12 reading from The College of New Rochelle and later a master's in administration from Fordham University.

"I always knew I'd get back to teaching," she said. "I missed it so much."

Mrs. Eldon spent some 17 years in Brewster as an elementary school teacher and assistant principal. She then served as an elementary school principal in Bedford for 11 years until her retirement. Even then, she couldn't stay away, serving as an interim principal for a year in Scarsdale.

In Byram Hills, she found a commitment to excellence and a great sense of caring for students, along with many opportunities for students to learn in different ways. "I see the expectations are very high, and I like that because it encourages every child to reach their potential, wherever that is," Mrs. Eldon says.

Byram Hills is thrilled to have her at the helm.

"Karen Eldon is a veteran administrator with the right skill set to support our faculty and staff to meet student needs every day," Superintendent Jen Lamia said. "She is loved and respected by all, and we are grateful for her leadership."

Mrs. Eldon, who is married with two adult children and two grandchildren she loves reading to over Zoom, enjoyed her retirement. But coming to Coman Hill was the right move, she says, adding: "I'm so happy to be here."

WAMPUS THIRD GRADERS ENJOY LEARNING TO BE 'CHARACTER STRONG' THROUGH NEW CURRICULUM

Who knows what empathy is?

The question was posed to a class of third graders at Wampus Elementary School by Annie Schmitt, the school's new counselor.

Empathy is to "feel what someone else is feeling," Mackenzie Gold answered.

Students shared their ideas about how to express empathy and know that someone cares about how they are feeling. Wearing heart-shaped "empathy glasses," they considered several tricky situations through the lens of empathy and brainstormed ways they could use empathy to help.

"You can say, 'I'm sorry this happened to you, it happened to me too. I know how it feels,'" Lia Bienstock said about a hypothetical student whose knees were shaking at school due to nervousness.

The early October lesson was part of the new social and emotional learning curriculum called Character Strong that is being piloted this year.

Ms. Schmitt is spending 26 days in each third grade classroom, teaching daily, 45-minute lessons that cover 10 character



Students colored in a picture of a shoe and wrote about themselves so students could know what it is like to walk in their shoes.

traits and skills: courage, perseverance, honesty, respect, gratitude, kindness, responsibility, cooperation, creativity and empathy.

Working on the traits one-by-one, she defines them, asks students what they know, they discuss how a skill may play out in various situations, and the topic is reinforced through craft projects and group challenges.

"It gives students a practical and hands-on way of learning about social and emotional skills that is beneficial in the classroom and translates outside as well," Ms. Schmitt said.

During their empathy study, students colored a picture of a shoe and wrote about their lives so fellow students could learn what it is like to walk in their shoes. Working together, students made a giant paper chain while learning about cooperation.

The lessons help students build important skills, become good social and emotional

learners and see people in new ways. They show students how to use the skills and serve as reminders for how to apply them in their daily lives.

"We hope they gain not only relationship-building skills with their friends and peers, but also a better understanding of themselves and other people, and how they interact with everyone around them," Ms. Schmitt said.

"Students who are more aware of their emotions and know how to interact with others are more successful in the classroom," she added. "It's huge for them to have this skill set."

The curriculum was chosen because it gives students many opportunities to practice learning about and applying each character trait, Wampus Assistant Principal David Mack said.

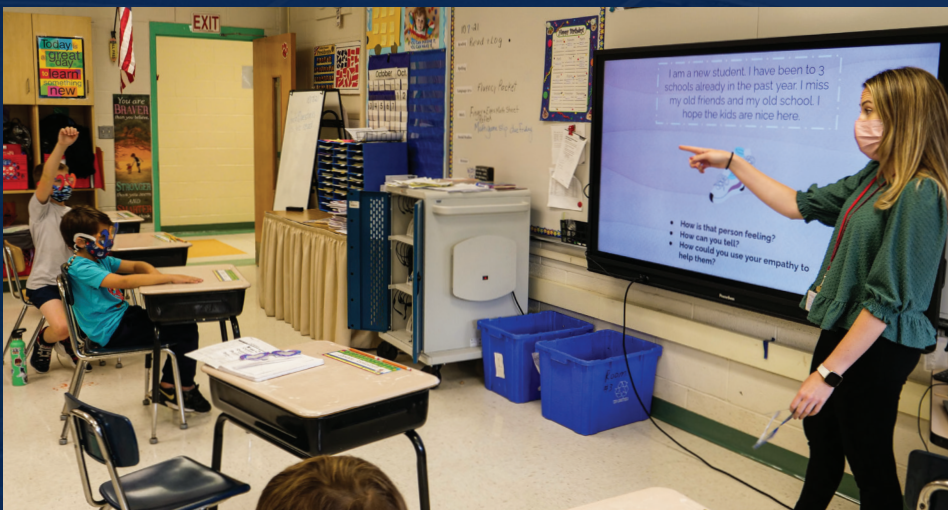
"It gives solid, concrete examples to upper elementary students of how to practice these skills in a safe way," he said. "We know these skills are so important for young learners as they transition to having more independence."

Caroline Rubinstein said she likes the lessons "because they're fun and I like doing activities."

"I'm learning how to be more mindful and more grateful, more kind, less bossy," she said.

Tyler Adamson said he is learning about kindness and respect. That's important, he says, because "if you are kind to someone, they'll be kind back."

As Ms. Schmitt's work with this class was nearing the end, she was gratified to hear the students using what they learned on Day 1. "I've already seen so much growth," she said. "It really shows me they're picking up on what it's all about."



School counselor Annie Schmitt calls on a student during a discussion about empathy.

HCC HONORS STUDENT 'VOICE AND CHOICE' IN DAILY ENRICHMENT CLASS

There is an exciting new part of the school day for students at H.C. Crittenden Middle School that offers academic and social and emotional enrichment combined with the power of choice.

It is called Student Directed Learning, or SDL for short, and it's a 30-minute block that comes after lunch for seventh and eighth graders. Each morning, students go online to choose their SDL class for the day.

"It captures our strong belief in student voice and choice," H.C. Crittenden Principal Kim Lapple said. "It also provides students with independence and an opportunity to pursue their passions while still having the structures necessary in middle school to guide our students."

In the early fall, SDL classes included Creative Writing, Math in Action, Origami Pumpkin Patch, Tech Exploration/3D Printing, silent reading, makerspace and Shark Tank. Students can play intramural sports, get academic support, study independently or participate in a book club.

"We will always have enrichment of some sort and there's always going to be extra help, every day, in every subject," Ms. Lapple said, adding that SDL offerings will change throughout the year.

SDL was created to meet student needs identified through the District's work with Challenge Success, the Stanford University-affiliated nonprofit organization that provides schools with strategies to promote students' well-being and engaged learning.

The middle school found that some students felt stress and anxiety or struggled to find time to meet with teachers, do their homework or even to play. While seventh and eighth graders gained SDL, sixth graders now have a daily block for a wellness break or intramurals.

"We reconfigured our schedule to incorporate the concerns we were hearing," Ms. Lapple said. "All of their needs are different."

SDL classes are part of the school's mission to help make students become more engaged and be active learners, risk takers and decision makers. "It's allowing them to make good choices based on their own needs," Assistant Principal Angelo Ancona said.

On a fall day, seventh graders were working on Shark Tank presentations and projects in Tech Exploration/3D printing. Students liked the freedom to pick a class they felt passionate about.



A student shows off her origami creations.

Zabelle Shil was immersed in Shark Tank, a competition class to conceive a new program or object for the school. "I like SDL because I get to interact with other students and specifically in this one, I get to create something cool that everyone will enjoy," she said.

Annie Calvao chose pumpkin origami. "When I'm making stuff, it's quiet and calmer and not really stressful and not too loud," she said. "It's a lot more relaxing than doing work."

Tommy Vataj, who picked Shark Tank because he watches the TV show of the same name, likes SDL because there are offerings from every subject and students can sign up for what they like.

"It's giving you a brain break from other academics, but at the same time you're still learning new things," he said. "What's great about that is when you like something, learning is really fun and it just makes your whole day enjoyable. I'm excited to come back tomorrow and continue on this project."

Phillip Steinvurzel says some of his friends are on another academic team but SDL allows them to work together. He was enjoying his SDL class. "3D printing is one of my dreams that I've never been able to do but now SDL allows me to," he said.

Teachers created SDL workshops and classes that stem from their passions. "They take what they love and through their class, they're able to connect with the kids more," Ms. Lapple said.

Students were digging into their SDL activities. "It's going great," Ms. Lapple said. "This is who we are."



Another student works on a project in Tech Exploration/3D Printing.



Students enjoyed a beautiful day outside during the universal lunch period.

NEW BHHS SCHEDULE SEEKS TO STRENGTHEN STUDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Before students head to their first period of the day at Byram Hills High School, they can meet with any teacher for extra help. When classes begin, they spend more time in each subject and have fewer classes a day. And at lunch, the entire school community pauses to eat and recharge together.

These are the key elements of the school's new master schedule that took effect in September. It was created after three years of study and with input from teachers, administrators and students as a way to increase academic engagement and bring a greater depth of learning.

The idea is that longer classes allow for deeper engagement, fewer classes a day lead to a more manageable workload and that time built into the school day for homework makes it easier for students to participate in extracurricular activities or even to get more sleep.

"There's a lot of optimism and positivity around the implementation of the schedule," Principal Christopher Walsh said.

"The new schedule better reflects what we value as a learning community," he added. "We want to prioritize critical thinking skills, social and emotional learning and wellness, and we want our students to embrace the characteristics of lifelong learning."

A closer look at the updated schedule:

- Office hours, brand new at the high school, are held every morning for 25 minutes. All teachers are available every day and students can get extra help, finish a project, do homework or work on a group project.

- Class periods: There are five periods a day that last 64 minutes. Under the previous 1990s-era schedule, there were seven or eight classes a day that lasted 44 or 49 minutes.
- Lunch: The midday break was increased to 43 minutes, from 26, and everyone eats together, rather than split into the two lunch periods of the past.

"The longer class periods are really beneficial for in-depth learning, and the instruction will become much more student-centered and it will allow teachers and students to delve much more deeply into the curriculum," Mr. Walsh said. "And the rigor that everybody is looking for is still there."

"The office hours are helpful for students who need to touch base with teachers," he added. "The kids absolutely love being able to eat with all of their friends during our universal community lunch. This is also the first time when teachers and staff all eat at the same time and that promotes a culture of collegiality."

To prepare for the revised schedule, faculty members participated in professional development over the summer to learn the best practices for teaching longer classes. This training will continue during the school year on Superintendent's Conference Days and at faculty meetings.

Social studies teacher Kim Gewitz appreciates the new schedule for giving students "the gift of time" that allows them to absorb and process the material better. Instead of a 1-minute discussion at the end of a unit on the French Revolution, her students have the time needed to develop more complete conclusions.

"It allows for deeper learning of content," she said. "We have more time to debrief and dig deeper into a topic and make connections with other areas we've been discussing. It is beneficial to all learners."

Byram Hills senior Jack Blackmar likes the longer classes, saying they allow teachers to go deeper and students to focus on fewer subjects in a day, "which lets us learn better."

"It feels like lessons can be more continuous," he said. "They don't feel rushed toward the end."

Katerina Schmidt, another senior, enjoys eating lunch with all of her friends and appreciates having fewer classes each day. "You don't have to learn a lot of new material in one day and then go home and try to review a lot of different subjects," she said.

Matt Marinozzi, a senior and member of the Student Advisory Committee, which gave input on the new schedule, said he believes it is helping lower students' stress levels. "Having less classes in a day means there's a lower chance of having multiple exams in a day, therefore lowering stress," he said.

Senior Sydney Levy, another member of the Student Advisory Committee, also likes the longer classes.

"It is nice having more time with each teacher and being able to dive deeper into topics and learn more each period," she said, adding that the schedule is helping the school community because there is "less stress and anxiety."

She also really likes the universal lunch, saying: "It is great to see our community together."

NATIONAL MERIT SEMIFINALISTS



From left to right:
Olivia Addeo,
Ryan Bernstein,
John Ndocaj,
and Jane Zeltner.

Congratulations to the four Byram Hills High School students selected as semifinalists in the 2022 National Merit Scholarship Program.

Seniors Olivia Addeo, Ryan Bernstein, John Ndocaj and Jane Zeltner can compete for 7,500 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$30 million that will be awarded in the spring.

"Our distinguished students should be

commended for their pursuit of academic success," said Kristina Wilson, the Byram Hills Guidance Chairperson.

The students entered the scholarship competition by taking the Preliminary SAT last year.

They are among approximately 16,000 semifinalists in the 67th annual National Merit Scholarship Program. The semifinalists from around the nation

represent less than 1% of high school seniors in the United States, and include the highest-scoring entrants from each state.

About 95% of semifinalists are expected to become finalists, and about half of the finalists will win a scholarship and the Merit Scholar title, according to the National Merit Scholarship Corporation.

BHHS STUDENTS RECOGNIZED AT HONOR SOCIETY INDUCTION CEREMONIES

Dozens of Byram Hills High School seniors were recognized for their academic excellence in October.

Twenty-one students were inducted into the Cum Laude Society, an honor for the students who make up the top 10% of their class based on weighted GPAs.

On October 21, Principal Christopher Walsh welcomed the inductees, their loved ones, faculty members and administrators to the ceremony, held for the first time in the high school theater. He noted that "the road to Cum Laude induction is strenuous in the best of years."

But for these students, members of the only class now at the high school to have had a school year uninterrupted by the coronavirus pandemic, the path has been extraordinary, as the "academic playing field changed overnight" in 2020, their sophomore year.

"They had to improvise, adapt and overcome in a way that no other class that I can remember had to do," Mr. Walsh said. "The overwhelming majority of their high school experience was in flux. They managed to do it at the highest levels.

Your academic achievement, it really is incredible given the uniqueness of your experience."

The Cum Laude address was delivered by social studies teacher Thomas Andriello.

"Congratulations on this amazing accomplishment," he said. "It's something you should be proud of, something you have earned, something that should be remembered. Now go out there and find yourself."

To great applause, this year's faculty inductee was announced as English teacher Jessica Shaw.

On October 7, 87 seniors were inducted into the World Language Honor Society, an achievement that reflects their hard work and dedication to the study of French, Italian or Spanish.

In a virtual ceremony, World Languages Chairperson Melissa Stahl congratulated the students and encouraged them to continue their language studies. To become a member of the honor society, students must have an A or A+ final average for three consecutive years.

Brandon Lutz, a 2010 Byram Hills graduate, delivered the keynote address, lauding the value of learning world languages. Mr. Lutz took AP Spanish at Byram Hills and became fluent in French, Dutch and German at The University of Texas at Austin.

"Pursuing foreign language is immensely challenging and reaching this level shows not just grit, but highlights you all as ambassadors of a more globally minded world," he said, adding: "As seniors, you're on the cusp of an incredibly exciting time in your lives and I want to advocate that you continue to make foreign languages a part of yours in the future."



**SCAN ME
TO VIEW THE
WORLD
LANGUAGES
INDUCTION
CEREMONY**



**SCAN ME
TO VIEW THE
CUM LAUDE
INDUCTION
CEREMONY**



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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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BACK TO SCHOOL: WHAT'S NEW AT BYRAM HILLS

The school doors swung open on September 1 for another terrific year, with students and staff members excited to be back to school.

"The start of the school year is always the most spectacular time for students and staff, full of positive energy and of a wonderful sense of community," Superintendent Jen Lamia said. "We are fortunate to have so many great additions in the District this year to enhance students' learning and engagement."

Back-to-school highlights include:

- A new entry awning at Wampus Elementary School provided by the PTSA. The awning offers shelter during arrival and dismissal time, and benches will be installed underneath it to create an outdoor learning space.
- Crittenden Commons, an amazing new outdoor space provided by the BHEF at H.C. Crittenden Middle School, features an amphitheater-style seating area and athletics court. The combined athletics and learning space allows for many opportunities for student experiences and exploration.
- Character Strong is a new social and emotional learning curriculum being piloted in the third grade at Wampus Elementary School.



HCC students having fun at the Crittenden Commons.



The new entry awning at Wampus Elementary School.

- Many teachers engaged in professional development over the summer. K-5 teachers continued to study the literacy curriculum and spent time mapping the standards to units of study, while many middle school and high school teachers engaged in a workshop to "rethink time," given the longer class periods in those schools this year. Cyber Camp provided training on all the technology tools, and teachers collaborated on lesson planning and design using these tech tools to engage students deeply with the content and in an engaging and interactive way.
- There are more than a dozen new teachers who are being mentored by veteran faculty members, and more than a dozen new support staff members who play important roles in the District.
- Students in grades K-5 are engaged in the music and art rooms for their specials classes, and they are singing and taking instrumental lessons. Students are participating in after-school activities as well, with the activity buses running.
- The BHEF hosted kindergarten and first grade parents at an outdoor event to help them get acquainted and build their community in support of our schools.

The work of the District continues throughout the school year, as we continue to build our curriculum and instruction for students.