

# SPECTRUM

A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS COMMITTED TO EXCELLENCE

## STRENGTHENING LEADERSHIP

WITH VETERAN AND NEW ADMINISTRATORS

## A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

AT COMAN HILL ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

## GROWING COMMUNITY AND INDEPENDENCE

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SPIRIT IN OUR DISTRICT





*From left to right: Coman Hill Principal Peggy McInerney, Wampus Principal David Mack, and Wampus Assistant Principal Leisa Palmer.*

## DISTRICT STRENGTHENS LEADERSHIP TEAM WITH MIX OF VETERAN AND NEW ADMINISTRATORS

Byram Hills has strengthened its leadership team with six new administrators who bring a wealth of experience to their positions: Four have well-established careers in the District and two new additions are the perfect complement.

"The combination of veteran expertise in the District and broad outside experience from our newcomers rounds out the administrative team," Superintendent of Schools Dr. Jen Lamia said. "I'm confident they will serve our students and school community very well."

Meet our new administrators:

**Peggy McInerney, Coman Hill Elementary School Principal:** Mrs. McInerney began her teaching career in New York City and arrived in Byram Hills in the late 1990s as a third grade teacher. She has held various leadership posts, including in the District office and as principal of Wampus Elementary School and Coman Hill.

"It's my job to make parents feel welcome and to make our children feel really happy coming into the school building," Mrs. McInerney said. "I value the partnership that I have with our parents and our children."

**Leisa Palmer, Wampus Elementary School Assistant Principal:**

Mrs. Palmer has been a K-5 teacher in Byram Hills for the last 20 years. She has always worked to build classroom communities and is excited to play an integral role in building a school community.

"I take a lot of pride in making sure that when students walk through the doors, they feel at home," she said. "I'm excited to continue to deepen students' love of learning."

*From left to right: Byram Hills High School Assistant Principal Lauren Albert, Byram Hills High School Assistant Principal Benjamin August, and Special Services Assistant Director 6-12 Colleen O'Connor.*



**David Mack, Wampus Elementary**

**School Principal:** Mr. Mack arrived in Byram Hills as a school counselor at H.C. Crittenden Middle School in 2007, and held several coaching positions. He became the assistant principal at Wampus in 2018.

"One of the things I'm looking forward to the most is my continued work with students, the faculty, the staff, the parents and collaborating with those groups to make decisions that are best for students," he said.

**Lauren Albert, Byram Hills High School Assistant Principal:** Before starting her Byram Hills career this year, Ms. Albert taught history and economics at Mamaroneck High School and was the social studies supervisor in the Baldwin Union Free School District.

"I am really excited to be in this district because I was impressed by the collaborative approach to education I found here," she said. "I'm very glad to be part of that collaborative process."

**Benjamin August, Byram Hills High School Assistant Principal:**

Before arriving in Byram Hills this year, Mr. August worked in New York City, where he taught theater and English, helped rewrite state arts standards and served as an academic policy supervisor.

"I'm a person who gets a lot of joy from being connected with people," Mr. August said. "As an assistant principal, I get to connect with students to figure out what goals they have and do deep thinking with teachers and staff about how the school can be part of their journey."

**Colleen O'Connor, Special Services Assistant Director 6-12:** Mrs.

O'Connor was a special education teacher and assistant principal at a New York City high school before coming to Byram Hills, where she served as an assistant principal at the high school for three years.

"I'm very excited to be in the classrooms, to be watching instruction, to be working and collaborating with teachers and to get to know the students," she said. "I'm also very excited to be working across the buildings and see the progression of students and their skills."





*Principal Peggy McInerney leads the first schoolwide community meeting and reads "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?"*

## STUDENTS AT COMAN HILL ARE COMING TOGETHER AS A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

Coman Hill Elementary School is celebrating the importance of building a community.

Students are creating communities small and large by gathering in their classrooms for daily meetings with their teacher and at new schoolwide assemblies that highlight important social and emotional learning themes.

Through these gatherings, students gain important listening and observational skills, learn and practice character traits that will serve them well throughout their life, and review behavior expectations for school, all of which help with their academics.

"This school year, our children have many opportunities to come together," Principal Peggy McInerney said. "Being part of a community helps them learn how to see themselves as individuals, and how they can make positive contributions and fit into the world around them. When children feel comfortable, confident and safe, they're ready to learn."

Mrs. McInerney launched community meetings this year as a way for the entire school to build a Coman Hill community. She kicked off the year with a meeting the first week of school, with all of the students seated on the gym floor.

The students were reminded how to be respectful, responsible and safe during arrival and dismissal time, and heard Mrs. McInerney emphasize the idea of goodness in the world as she read "Have You Filled a Bucket Today?" The book is about everyone's invisible bucket that holds their good thoughts and feelings

about themselves and explains how you can fill someone's bucket by being kind or giving someone a smile.

The community meetings continue last year's increased focus on social and emotional learning at Coman Hill that emphasized character traits like respect, kindness, gratitude and empathy. After the schoolwide meetings, teachers can follow up with classroom lessons and activities that reinforce the theme.

On a September afternoon, Suzanne Milano's second graders sat in a circle for a class meeting to discuss how they could all be a bucket-filling classroom. Ms. Milano asked students to give examples of how they have filled someone's bucket or how someone had filled theirs.

"I held the door for strangers at my swim school," Ryan Arnold said.

"Yesterday, I took my sister to her classroom," said Leo Sabatini.

"Our classroom sounds like a bucket-filling classroom," Ms. Milano said, and asked how that will help their classroom community. "We're all nice to each other and kind and filling people's buckets," Alex Goldman answered.

The year is off to a great start. Since the first community meeting in September, Mrs. McInerney said she heard many conversations about bucket filling throughout Coman Hill.

"The feelings that come out of a community meeting are often very positive and when you feel positive about yourself, you're more accessible to learning," she said.

"Children are rising to our high expectations and putting forth positive behaviors that promote learning," Mrs. McInerney added. "If you put that in motion early in the school year, children often surpass their academic expectations."



*As a follow-up to the first community meeting, second grade teacher Suzanne Milano meets with her students for a discussion on being a bucket-filling classroom.*



## WAMPUS CAFETERIA: POINT OF PRIDE, COMMUNITY, AND GROWING STUDENT INDEPENDENCE

Wampus Elementary School students are enjoying the renovated cafeteria, which has a fresh coat of paint, updated lighting and loads of blue and red Bobcat spirit!

“Our year is off to a great start,” Principal David Mack said. “The students are engaged, the building looks terrific and the pride of being a Wampus student is palpable.”

The cafeteria, with tables featuring the word “Wampus” and the Bobcat’s pawprint, is not only a point of Wampus pride but also the setting for strengthening the school community and increasing student independence.

The students gather in the cafeteria for monthly gradewide and schoolwide community meetings that cover topics like expectations for behavior and goal-setting.

By October, the fifth graders gained the privilege of choosing where to sit at lunch, rather than having to sit only with the students from their class. Students can now sit at longer rectangular tables or smaller round tables and they have plenty of room to spread out.

This opportunity came from following the Wampus motto to “Be all 3: Safe, Respectful, and Responsible,” and by leading by example.

Wampus also launched Bobcat cards this year. While all classrooms have a system of reinforcing positive behavior, administrators hand out the cards to



students in all grades for following school rules or showing leadership. In a weekly drawing, a whole class can win an extra recess period!

Both initiatives are providing students with daily opportunities to practice the important concepts they are learning from Character Strong, the schoolwide social and emotional learning curriculum that focuses on traits including respect, empathy, responsibility, perseverance and cooperation.

“When students are demonstrating these different traits and holding themselves and each other accountable, we believe it

builds their independence and their confidence,” Mr. Mack said. “These are cornerstones of upper elementary school that help prepare students for middle school. Additionally, when students are feeling comfortable and confident, they are well prepared to learn.”

School counselor Annie Schmitt, who teaches the Character Strong program, said the goal is for students to apply the character traits in their everyday lives, in and out of the classroom. “These are skills they can use with their friends and family that will help them problem-solve, be good citizens and lifelong learners.”

Fifth graders like being able to sit with their friends at lunch and feel proud that their good behavior was recognized.

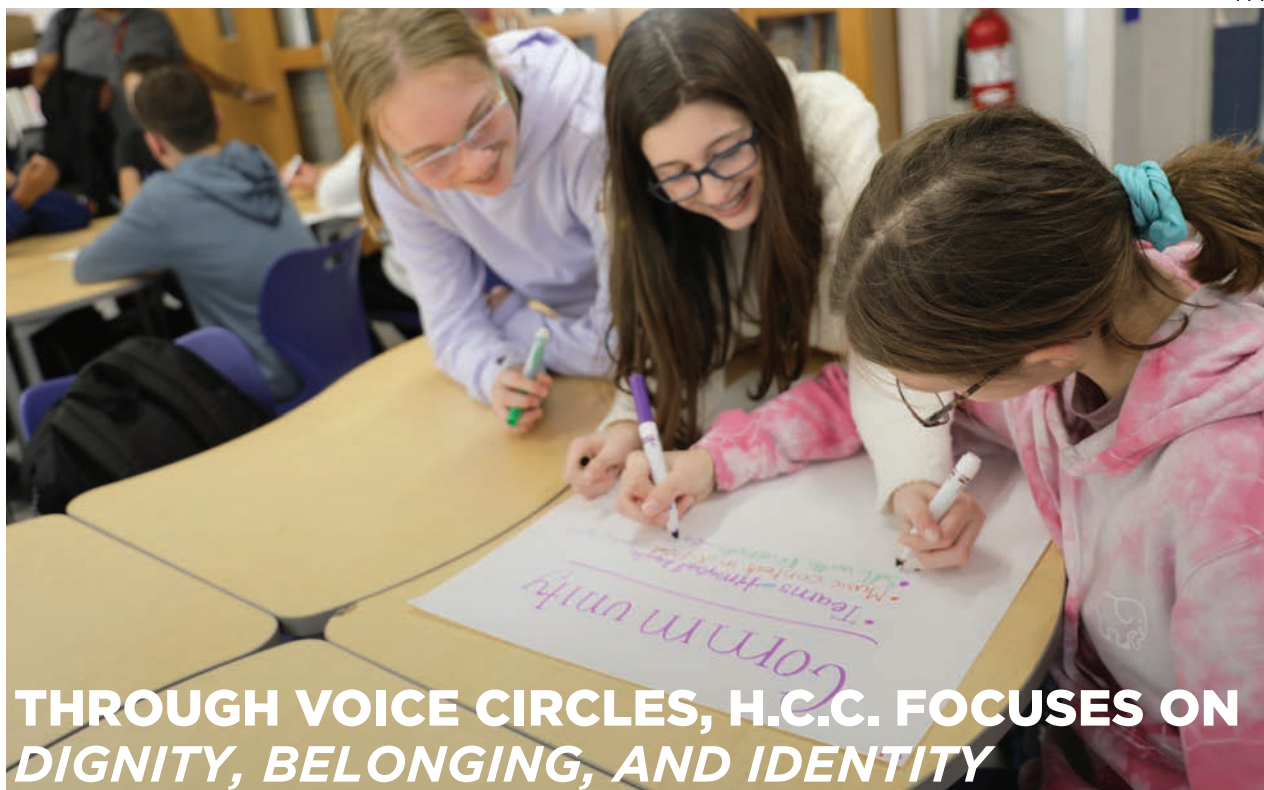
“You get to experience sitting with other people in different classes so you can sit with your friends and not just the same people every day from your class,” Mila Hart said. “It’s fun to sit with your friends because you don’t get to see them that much.”

“I like it because you get to sit with friends from different classes,” Arber Gecaj said. “Maybe you have really good friends from last year and now you might not be in the same class as them.”

Brody Maltz said it feels good to be able to sit where he wants and he likes “talking to friends from other classrooms, because normally you can’t.”

While the cafeteria upgrade began two years ago, this is the first year that students are able to take full advantage of the revamped space.





*Seventh graders brainstorm Voice Circle topics they will discuss with their peers.*

## THROUGH VOICE CIRCLES, H.C.C. FOCUSES ON DIGNITY, BELONGING, AND IDENTITY

When did you feel that your dignity was most honored at school? What gives you a sense of belonging at H.C. Crittenden Middle School? Who makes you feel like you matter?

These were among the questions that middle schoolers discussed during the week of October 17 when they gathered for Voice Circles. Led by educational consultant Trent Hall, the students were seated with their X-Pod classmates in circles in the gym and participated in uplifting Voice Circles workshops, which included small and large group sharing exercises.

"Today was a day for exploring identity, belonging, and dignity in a way that allows us to move forward as a group," Mr. Hall said after meeting with the first half of the eighth grade. "The way that we explore belonging is by being intentional about providing spaces to connect and explore pieces of our identity together. The purpose is to make sure that no matter what your identity is, that you feel like you truly belong here in our school community."

Principal Kim Lapple said the Voice Circles work was important because helping all students feel honored and understood will strengthen the school community and every part of students' middle school experience.

"We're hoping this week of Voice Circles will help continue to foster connections and strengthen the H.C.C. community," Ms. Lapple said. "This work allows us to give students the skills and tools to

grow and have healthy relationships with one another. The more a child feels comfortable, a sense of belonging and that their dignity is being honored, the more they are present and ready to learn."

During one workshop with eighth graders, students partnered up to talk about how they were really feeling (not just "good" or "tired") and also shared stories of their best meal, best day and best gift ever. The conversations were a way for students to get to know each other better, and they high-fived and fist-bumped each other to show gratitude for sharing.

Another exercise focused on "building a belonging classroom," and students discussed actions they've experienced that help create a classroom where everyone belongs.

"Our main takeaway is just being kind and friendly and if you see someone alone, always try to help them out and include them," a student said into the microphone, sharing his X-Pod's responses and drawing applause. "Don't judge anyone. Always try to make more friends and add them to the community."

Mr. Hall responded: "Beautifully said, beautifully said."

The conversation shifted to dignity, which Mr. Hall said is "inherent human worth." He asked students to define dignity and think of times when their dignity was honored.

"We said that the best way to show dignity is to honor people for the good that they do and give them respect for their worth,"

one girl said, drawing applause.

Then it was time for a tangible takeaway. Students in each X-Pod wrote a list of things at school they would like to see start, stop and continue to help increase connections and belonging, feedback that administrators will analyze.

Mr. Hall urged students to remember the feelings they had in the gym during that day and to continue practicing what they learned to help everyone feel like they belong.

Students enjoyed Voice Circles and felt the experience would help the school.

"I felt like we expressed ourselves and really got to know each other more and some people that I didn't know before, I really became closer with them," eighth grader Ben Solow said. "The more people are closer, the happier everyone is."

Classmate Tiffany Marescot said she thinks the day will help make people feel more included and said: "Everyone really felt free and open to speak and no one really felt pressured."

As the time with Mr. Hall began to wrap up, he spent time with a group of students to help continue this climate of care and respect. Twenty seventh graders were trained to lead future H.C.C. Voice Circles with their peers. The work to strengthen the school community will continue through student conversations and connections.



# BYRAM HILLS STUDENTS DIVE INTO THE SCIENCE BEHIND PRESSING ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

On a fall day, students tossed small objects onto paper “islands” to simulate the migration and extinction patterns of birds if a storm forced them off the mainland. On another, they dissected regurgitated owl pellets to estimate how much energy from the food pyramid is preserved.

During another activity, students used chopsticks to “fish” for M&Ms, competing for the candies with the highest economic value to represent the exploitation of natural resources.

Welcome to AP Environmental Science, a new course at Byram Hills High School. The class, which focuses on topical environmental problems including climate change, was offered in response to a growing interest among students at the high school as well as on college campuses.

“We listened to our students and are thrilled to offer this course to help them move into these areas of study in college and their careers,” Principal Christopher Walsh said.

The course, for juniors and seniors, combines the rigor of a college level course with topics related to the Earth, including biodiversity, land and water use and pollution.

This year, nearly 70 students are enrolled in the class, taught by William Twardy and Alexandra Spacavento. The classes are very hands-on, with a lab or activity nearly every period to help students visualize the concepts through interactive learning.

The course comes to the high school at a time of deep concern for the environment among young people.

“We have a lot of students who are very passionate about the environment and this class is a great outlet for them to learn about issues they care about,” Mr. Twardy said.

“They’re naturally excited about learning about environmental issues and the science behind them. The students are invested and energized.”

The class adds versatility and breadth to the Byram Hills science curriculum by allowing students to dig deeper into geoscience, or Earth-related, topics that affect everyday lives and study them at an advanced level, Science Chairperson Debra Cayea said.

“This class provides students with access to learning about things they’re hearing about in the world and are passionate about,” she said. “We have extremely bright and engaged students who will be world changemakers. I’m confident this generation of students is going to lead our world in positive ways.”

Students are enjoying the study of environmental issues, especially through the labs.

“I try and be a very sustainable person and I like to see all the different effects that us humans cause to the

environment,” senior Ethan Schwartz said. “It talks about how a lot of things we do, the normal things that we do on a daily basis, contribute to the negative impact to the environment as a whole, and I want to find ways to further prevent that in the future.”

Sydney Black, a senior and vice president of the Byram Hills Sustainability Initiative, is happy the high school offers the course and called it “super educational,” especially with the activities and labs that represent real-world environmental issues and phenomena.

“I think knowing more about the environment is a really important thing given climate change and given how many environmental issues we face,” she said.

Senior Sydni Shamus took the class because she is interested in helping solve real-world problems. “I wanted to learn the solutions and ways to alleviate overfishing, polluting the air, and how our environment will benefit from this.”



New this year, AP Environmental Science is a very hands-on class, filled with labs and activities.



# BHHS STUDENTS RECOGNIZED AT HONOR SOCIETY INDUCTION CEREMONIES

## NATIONAL MERIT SEMIFINALISTS

Congratulations to the eight seniors at Byram Hills High School who are semifinalists in the 2023 National Merit Scholarship Program.

The students, Ethan Cherry, Alaska Fairbanks, Alex Kahn, Mihir Kumar, Remi Matza, Samantha Milewicz, Kelsey Vaquero and Clara Weil, can compete for 7,250 scholarships worth nearly \$28 million.

They entered the scholarship competition by taking the Preliminary SAT last year as juniors. The students were in their first year of high school when the coronavirus pandemic began and disrupted the educational process.

"Even though they had such a unique high school experience, these dedicated and hard-working students have demonstrated great achievement and this recognition makes the entire Byram Hills community extremely proud," Principal Christopher Walsh said.

Guidance Chairperson Kristina Wilson added: "This is a remarkable accomplishment for the semifinalists, who showed tenacity and commitment to their academics during extremely challenging high school years."

The more than 16,000 semifinalists in the 68th annual scholarship competition represent less than 1% of high school seniors in the United States, including the highest-scoring students in each state.

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



*The National Merit Scholarship semifinalists are, from left: Alaska Fairbanks, Clara Weil, Ethan Cherry, Mihir Kumar, Alex Kahn, Remi Matza, Samantha Milewicz and Kelsey Vaquero.*

## CUM LAUDE SOCIETY

The 17 seniors whose weighted GPA put them in the top 10% of the Class of 2023 were inducted into the Cum Laude Society, an honor society for academic achievement.

The students are Chloe Bernstein, Sydney Black, Milena Chan, Allison Cooper, Abby Eickelbeck, Alaska Fairbanks, Lily Feldman, Aliza Hammond, Callie Higgins, Casey Maryyanek, Remi Matza, Samantha Milewicz, Lindsay Miller, Caleb Palappillil, Isabelle Sampere, Max Teitelbaum and Kelsey Vaquero.

Principal Christopher Walsh noted that the inductees were able to find academic success even as so many changes were thrown their way during the coronavirus pandemic.

"They have had to improvise, adapt and overcome for the overwhelming majority of their high school experience," Mr. Walsh said. "Not only that, these 17 students managed to do it all at the highest levels. Their academic achievement really is incredible given the uniqueness of their experience."

Delivering the Cum Laude address, English teacher Jessica Shaw commended the students for their drive and discussed the importance of failure.

"Before, during and after you make that indelible mark on the path you set out on, you have to, well, mess up," Ms. Shaw said. "Failure, mistakes: They're the greatest indicators that you have taken risks, and none of us can live a rich life without those chances that we take."

English teacher Catherine Eshoo was announced as the new faculty inductee.

## WORLD LANGUAGES HONOR SOCIETY

Seventy seniors were inducted into the World Languages Honor Society, reflecting their dedication to the study of French, Italian or Spanish. Four students were inducted for excelling in both French and Spanish.

In a virtual induction ceremony, World Languages Chairperson Melissa Stahl thanked the world language faculty members for their continued excellence and congratulated the students and their families.

"We would like to thank you, the parents, for sharing your appreciation for foreign cultures and languages, and for teaching your children to explore and take risks and for showing your children the power and importance of language," she said.

Ms. Stahl asked the four dual language inductees to discuss how speaking more than one foreign language has changed their perspective of the world, and why it's still important, despite advances in online translators, to speak another language.

"Listen to how they embrace the value of communication and the differences among us," Ms. Stahl said. "Let's see our world and our future through the lens of other languages."



*The Cum Laude Society inductees are, from the left, in the front row: Lily Feldman, Caleb Palappillil, Max Teitelbaum, Isabelle Sampere. Second row: Abby Eickelbeck, Kelsey Vaquero, Alaska Fairbanks, Milena Chan. Third row: Callie Higgins, Allison Cooper, Chloe Bernstein, Lindsay Miller, Aliza Hammond. Back row: Casey Maryyanek, Samantha Milewicz, Sydney Black, Remi Matza.*





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## **Our Mission**

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 and leaders of the twenty-first century.

*"A great place to learn."*

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**Published by the Byram Hills Media and Communication Center**

## **BACK TO SCHOOL:**

### *WHAT'S NEW AT BYRAM HILLS?*

Students filled our schools with big smiles, enthusiasm and positive energy on the first day of school and embarked on a new year of learning and engagement.

"The students were so incredibly excited and appreciative to be at school," Superintendent Dr. Jen Lamia said.

Highlights include:

- Six new or returning administrators have strengthened the administrative team. There are 31 new teachers across the four schools who are being mentored by veteran faculty members.
- Teachers participated in professional development over the summer, including at Cyber Camp where they learned to integrate innovative technology into their curriculum. K-5 teachers studied the ELA curriculum and middle school and high school teachers attended workshops on problem-based learning and authentic-learning experiences.
- The Crittenden Courtyard opened at H.C.C., thanks to a generous grant from the Byram Hills Education Foundation. The renovated space is an area for structured recreation, including games like Cross Net, ping pong, foosball and chess.
- An electronic welcome sign greets drivers entering Byram Hills High School. The sign, a gift from the PTSA, displays school updates. Recently, it featured our Girls Varsity Tennis state champions!
- At Coman Hill, the BHEF provided a grant for an extensive patio that is being used as a learning and social space for multiple classes at a time.



## **HOMECOMING REWIND <<**

The Byram Hills community celebrated a wonderful Homecoming Week in October! The traveling pep rally kicked off the week on Oct. 11, with high school varsity athletes spreading Bobcat spirit at the lower schools.

The high school also celebrated Spirit Week, as students got decked out for fun theme days and participated in the high-spirited pep rally on the turf field on Friday.

The week was filled with exciting athletic games, including varsity home games under the lights. On Friday night, the community gathered for the football game as the Bobcats notched a 38-6 win over Bronxville. The high school band, joined for the first time at homecoming by the eighth grade band, added to the festive atmosphere.

The Sports Hall of Fame ceremony also took place, on the Saturday before Homecoming, and seven alumni and the 1977-78 boys basketball team were inducted and former coach and faculty member Bob Croke received the Lifetime Achievement Award. Homecoming Week concluded with a great turnout for the BHEF Outdoor Family Movie Night, with students and families gathering to enjoy "Sing 2" on the turf field.

