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AT BYRAM HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

LITTLE BOOKWORMS

DEVELOPING YOUNG READERS AT COMAN HILL

DEVELOPING THE YOUNG ARTIST

AT WAMPUS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

STRENGTHENING SCHOOL COMMUNITY

AT H.C. CRITTENDEN MIDDLE SCHOOL

SEAL OF CIVIC READINESS

AT BYRAM HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

AWARDS AND HONORS

AT BYRAM HILLS HIGH SCHOOL

BUILDING ROBOTICS AND COMMUNITY

IN THE BHHS ROBOTICS PROGRAM

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BYRAM HILLS HIGH SCHOOL: *LIGHTS, LEARNING, ACTION!*



Renderings of the proposed new Learning Commons at Byram Hills High School.

The Byram Hills High School library features a wide open area that is largely original to the 1960s-era building, filled with utilitarian square and rectangular tables and wooden desk chairs.

“The library offers the same learning environment that was available to the first Byram Hills students in 1966,” Superintendent Dr. Jen Lamia said. “Since the library is not up to date with our current teaching and learning standards, it denies students the opportunity to work in small groups, to use state-of-the-art equipment and to prepare for today’s working world.”

With that, the District is proposing to renovate the library and nearby hallway and lecture hall to create the Learning Commons, an intellectual learning hub. The District is also proposing to install turf on the high school’s practice field and lighting at the fields and courts.

On the day of the Budget Vote, May 21, 2024, the District will ask the community for permission to use \$8 million from the District’s Capital Reserve Fund for a three-phase renovation, called *Byram Hills High School: Lights, Learning, Action!* The Capital Reserve Fund was created in anticipation of large projects, such as this, and its existence means that Byram Hills does not need to request a bond for such work.

The District is also anticipating a generous donation from the Byram Hills Education Foundation to support the project.

The updated library would include comfortable seating, enclosed spaces for small group work or quiet reading, two classroom-size areas for group instruction with a removable wall to expand the space farther, and a new outdoor courtyard area for students to enjoy the natural environment.

Continued on page 6

LITTLE BOOKWORMS: DEVELOPING YOUNG READERS AT COMAN HILL

A walk through Coman Hill Elementary School finds students engaged in many types of books and texts throughout the day.

“The heartbeat of Coman Hill is reading,” Principal Peggy McInerney said. “During these formative years, our children spend time learning how to read while using reading to learn. Our children are learning how to read at the same time they are developing comprehension skills to make sense of the world. Reading is used in every discipline and is a big part of every school day.”

The District’s youngest learners participate in many daily activities that instill a love of reading.

Teachers share stories through read-alouds, in which they read a book to their class and discuss the story and ask probing questions. “Every teacher engages children in read-alouds that allow our students to interact with a storybook as a classroom of learners,” Mrs. McInerney said.

There are school-wide read-alouds throughout the year at the Coman Hill community meetings. The first meeting of the school year included Mrs. McInerney reading “Have You Filled a Bucket Today?” a story about kindness.

Students enjoy choosing their own books for independent reading from the extensive classroom libraries. “This allows our students to explore areas of interest, passion or prior experiences that they connect with, which fosters a love of reading,” Mrs. McInerney said.

Every class takes a weekly trip to the school library, where students can check out two books, a fiction and a nonfiction book. Students learn about



the different genres in the library, which is filled with books including fairy tales, folktales, poetry, biographies, mystery books and informational and expository texts.

Another way that Coman Hill nurtures a love of reading is through Parents as Reading Partners, which was held during the first week of October in a precursor to the PTSA Book Fair. For PARP, as it’s called, parent volunteers visited the classrooms to read “The Resilient Sloth,” a story about mental toughness and overcoming obstacles, and led an activity.

“We love having our parents come in to read to the children,” Mrs. McInerney said. “It is a valuable experience for our children to see parents modeling reading, another example of how we want to foster a lifelong love of reading. This year’s book connected to traits from the Social-Emotional Learning Curriculum. Read-alouds serve different purposes depending on the focus of the learning objective.”

On the first day of PARP, Jen Clark read to her daughter’s kindergarten class, an experience she called

fulfilling and special. “It’s great to see all the kids’ faces and how they respond and react to another parent,” she said after reading in Fran Poniatowski’s classroom. “It’s so much fun being here.”

Allyson Cusumano also said it was special to read to her son’s second grade class. “Reading is such an important part of the day,” she said. “I loved coming in to read to all of the children and to listen to and help answer their questions.”

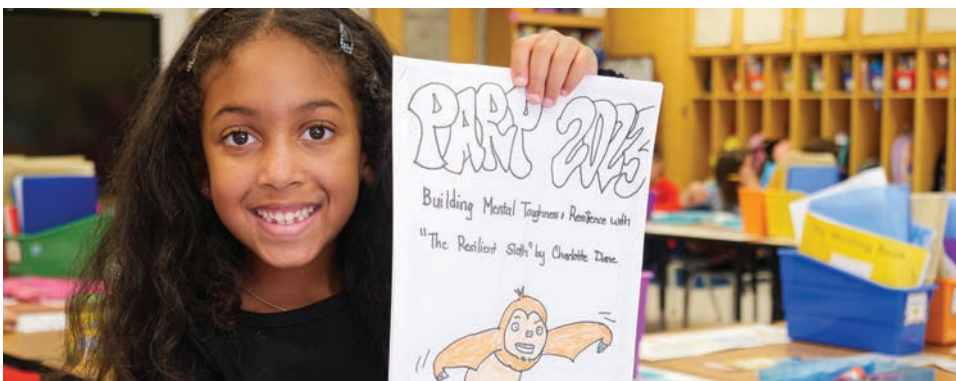
Sam Cusumano said his mom did a good job reading the book. Having her at school was “fun and I was happy.”

Sam’s teacher, Jennifer Rowell, says reading is integrated into all parts of the school day. Each morning, two of her students practice public speaking skills by reading the morning slides, which contain a daily schedule, calendar and other important information. Her students have studied the habits of strong readers, they learn decoding and comprehension skills during ELA, read to kindergarten buddies once a week, read directions and story problems during math and sometimes read from apps like PebbleGo and Epic.

“That’s the beauty of Coman Hill,” she said. “Many different forms of reading are integrated throughout the curriculum and throughout their days. The students are reading all the time.”

Another one of her students, Maeve Wolthuis, said she enjoys the reading opportunities she has every day. At school, she said, she is learning tricky words, which helps her with reading.

On reading, she said: “I love it. Reading helps me calm down and reading is one of my hobbies. I read every day.”



One way Coman Hill instills a love of reading in students is through PARP, or Parents as Reading Partners. For PARP, parent volunteers visited classrooms in October and read “The Resilient Sloth” and led an engaging activity.



Students at Wampus Elementary School helped transform a long white wall of cinder blocks into a beautiful mural full of school pride. In October, students painted alongside a visiting muralist, Joe Pimentel.

WAMPUS ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: DEVELOPING THE YOUNG ARTIST

In the span of a week in October, a 67-foot stretch of wall near the Wampus Elementary School cafeteria was transformed from plain white cinder blocks into a beautiful, vibrant mural bursting with school spirit and pride.

The exciting project was created with the input and artistry of Wampus students who painted alongside muralist Joe Pimentel.

“This mural brings so much beauty and school pride to Wampus,” Principal David Mack said. “It was amazing to see our students brainstorm ideas for the design and paint it with our visiting artist. It is a wonderful representation of the Wampus community and the strength behind it.”

This project-based learning opportunity was a special chance for students to put their art skills into practice on a large work of art that will beautify Wampus and build unity for years to come.

What goes into the making of a Wampus artist?

The art curriculum at Wampus gives students many chances to develop their artistic voices as they engage in the creative process.

“Our comprehensive art program encourages students to expand their perceptions of art and discover the many roles art plays in society,” art teacher Katherine Constantine said. “Students are introduced to traditional and unconventional forms of art, they explore a variety of techniques and concepts, and are challenged to use

their imagination as they experiment and create.”

In third grade, students study the collage work of Henri Matisse and explore organic shapes to create a collage project that mimics lines found in nature. They also study frottage, drawing and painting.

Fourth graders explore the ways art is perceived and art as a form of self-expression through a study of nonobjective abstraction, or work that is purely abstract. They study Helen Frankenthaler’s color-stain paintings and paint a wet watercolor piece in the style. They also explore communication through visual imagery and symbol-making.

The technical and conceptual aspects of art-making are studied in fifth grade. Students learn about shape, value and composition. They are also introduced to the way artists use sound and performance as a means of artistic expression.

Before a single brushstroke was painted for the new mural, Wampus students studied the history of mural-making, and viewed murals from periods including the Stone Age, Antiquity, the Renaissance, Mexican Muralism and contemporary life.

Students also attended an assembly in the spring with Mr. Pimentel and were captivated by the story of how he became a muralist and seeing his work.

Wampus students were asked to think of ways to visually represent

their school and the surrounding community. Mr. Pimentel interpreted their ideas and sketched the mural, which features many Wampus symbols including the Bobcat, Field Day and the Buddy Bench.

During the week of Oct. 16, small groups of students, selected from a lottery from each homeroom, painted under the direction of Mr. Pimentel. Working with acrylic paint, sometimes sitting on the floor or standing on a ladder, students brought their designated area of the mural to life.

Students loved creating art in the center of the school, for all to see.

“It’s cool I can be a part of this,” said fifth grader Anna Detmer. “I’m happy for everyone that gets to see this.”

“This is what I’ve always wanted to do,” third grader Ricky Arguello said. “Paint a mural that people can see.”

Another third grader, William Snyder, said he liked working with a professional artist and felt proud to have a hand in the mural. “It feels really good because I’ve always wanted to paint a big thing for everyone to look at and admire,” he said.

The mural was made possible by the generosity of the Byram Hills Education Foundation, and Ms. Constantine and retired fourth grade Wampus teacher Cathleen Oliveto, who both donated the money from their Teacher Recognition Award to the project.

THROUGH OUTDOOR CHALLENGES, H.C.C. STRENGTHENS SCHOOL COMMUNITY AND BELONGING

With bandanas shielding their eyes and their hands on the shoulders of the student in front of them, eighth graders from H.C. Crittenden Middle School began climbing a path in the woods, leaves crunching underfoot.

Under the watchful eye of a facilitator, the student at the front led the group up a hill and around a bend until they reached a rope maze. As they marched, communication was key: "Is everybody ready?" "There's a rock on your left." "We need to reconnect our line." "We're good!"

This was one of many activities at the challenge course at Putnam/Northern Westchester BOCES, where all H.C.C. students spent a day in the fall with their X-Pod for a community-building experience focused on strengthening students' feeling of belonging.

Students participated in lower stakes team-building activities in the morning, preparing for more difficult physical group challenges ahead of them on the low ropes challenge course. These activities, situated in the woods, would challenge students as they required teamwork, communication, collaboration, planning and strategy.

How would a group get each member up and over a large wooden wheel or cross from one platform to another via a rope swing that hung between them? A blindfolded student needed to complete tasks with the help of classmates, but one half couldn't see the student and the other couldn't speak.

The daylong outing gave students a shared experience that allowed them to form connections with classmates they don't usually work with, take risks, honor different perspectives and show kindness, respect and empathy as they worked together to complete the challenges.

"This was a phenomenal experience for our students," Principal Kim Lapple said. "They were reliant on one another, as they needed each other's help to succeed. In the end, the students were all rewarded. There wasn't a group that didn't clap or high-five because they worked together to be successful."

It is an experience she wants to see replicated often at H.C.C.

"The more we allow our students to collaborate, to work through a challenge or problem together, to laugh and smile and have fun, the more opportunities they have to connect and feel a sense of community and belonging," Ms. Lapple said.

Those feelings have important academic and social benefits for students.

"When students feel more comfortable with their peers, they're more likely to take a risk and answer a question in class they're unsure of," Ms. Lapple said. "They're more likely to listen to their peers and see the value of what they're hearing and they're more likely to lend a hand or have empathy for others because they have been connected in different ways, like at the challenge

course or in their X-Pods."

On a September day when a group of eighth graders attended, the area was filled with laughter, clapping and cheering from the various groups. Students said the day was fun and worthwhile.

"I got to get closer to my X-Pod and meet people I didn't really think I'd meet," said eighth grader Taylor Todman. "We learned how to work together, we got more comfortable with each other and we had a lot of fun."

Ava Dichek agreed that the experience helped students get to know each other better, which is good because "you won't feel as awkward when working in groups" at school.

"It can help everybody learn how to take part in something and not just stand on the sides," she said. "It helps build teamwork, everybody having a part."

Several students thought the day of group problem solving will help them when working on projects at school.

"I learned that working together can actually be more helpful than working alone," Amanda Abraham said.

Joe Schiliro learned "that talking and communicating is a big part of life," and Madelyn Tambini said she learned about the value of working with others: "Even when you think you can do it yourself, sometimes other people's opinions or ideas can still help you if you need it."



LIGHTS, LEARNING, ACTION!

Continued from page 2

The hallway would feature a seating area and food kiosk. The lecture hall would be reconfigured to have areas where students could work in small groups or participate in the larger classroom, and it would be geared toward offering multiple types of instruction.

A key goal of the Learning Commons would be to give students a place to congregate for conversation and collaboration, much like college campuses do. Students would not be shushed like they were in the libraries of yesteryear.

“I would like to see every student utilizing the library in a different way,” Dr. Lamia said. “Our students need updated resources, but most importantly, they need opportunities to collaborate and learn together. Shushing is not a 21st-century skill.”

The practice field that would be turfed is parallel to the school’s main turf field. Introducing a second turf field would offer a multitude of benefits for physical education classes, sports practices and gameplay. The durability of turf fields ensures year-round usability. The installation of lighting systems on the fields and courts would provide students with the opportunity to be a part of community-wide events, whether through twilight or early evening games.

Principal Christopher Walsh called the project a great addition that would benefit all students.

“A library with 21st-century attributes, designed for the ways students work today, would allow the members of our school community to learn, investigate and be curious in new, different and modern ways,” Mr. Walsh said. “The turf field would help from safety, scheduling and performance perspectives, and the lights on the fields and courts would create opportunities for our community to become stronger through athletics.”

The District estimates that the Learning Commons would be completed by March 2025, the turf field would be completed by September 2025, and the lighting would be installed over two years, with its completion by September 2027.

Thank you for being an informed voter!



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BYRAM HILLS STUDENTS EARN PRESTIGIOUS NEW CIVIC READINESS DIPLOMA SEAL

Byram Hills High School students are earning a prestigious new mark of distinction on their transcript and diploma: the New York State Seal of Civic Readiness.

The seal recognizes students for exceptional proficiency in civic knowledge, skills, mindsets and experiences, and symbolizes a commitment to participatory government, civic values and social justice.



Two students who earned the Seal of Civic Readiness are seniors Jonathan Manowitz and Allie Waxman.

“The Seal of Civic Readiness perfectly embodies our mission,” Principal Christopher Walsh said. “It’s a testament to some of the values we hold dear: responsible citizenship and leadership in the modern world.”

To obtain the seal, students must meet the requirements for a New York State local or Regents diploma. They must also demonstrate civic knowledge through social studies courses and civic participation through extracurricular activities, work- or service-based learning experiences, or civics projects.

Social Studies Chairperson Dr. Jennifer Laden said the seal is a way for students to distinguish themselves for their strong commitment to civic engagement.

“Our students really see the role they can play in making a difference in the lives of others and the importance of understanding issues in the community, how government works and the role they play as citizens in the world,” she said.

Twenty-two students earned the recognition in the fall.

“I feel fortunate to have had the opportunity to be involved in and give back to a community that has given so much to me,” said one of them, senior Jonathan Manowitz. “I earned my seal in part through my participation on Byram’s Unified Basketball team, a really great program that embodies and promotes the core value of inclusion at Byram Hills through shared sports experiences.”

Another senior who earned the seal, Allie Waxman, said: “Earning the seal is extremely important to me because I have a strong desire to make a positive difference in our world. Both civic engagement and civic readiness are key factors in society today because they contribute to changing the world for the better.”

BYRAM HILLS HIGH SCHOOL AWARDS AND INDUCTION CEREMONIES

NATIONAL MERIT SEMIFINALISTS

Congratulations to the six Byram Hills High School seniors selected as semifinalists in the 2024 National Merit Scholarship competition.

The students are Cyrus Aly, Samara Brown, Aaron Lestz, Daniel Ndocaj, Alexander Woodworth and Yicheng Yang. They can compete for 7,140 scholarships worth nearly \$28 million.

More than 1.3 million high school juniors entered the scholarship competition last year by taking the Preliminary SAT. The Byram Hills students are among more than 16,000 semifinalists, academically talented students who represent less than 1% of high school seniors nationwide.

School leaders congratulated the semifinalists and wished them luck in the scholarship contest.

"We are so proud of the achievements of our outstanding National Merit semifinalists," Principal Christopher Walsh said. "It is terrific to see their hard work and dedication recognized."

Guidance Chairperson Kristina Wilson added: "Their achievement is a reflection of individual excellence and the outstanding support they have received from dedicated teachers, staff, and their families. We are immensely proud of these students."

About 95% of semifinalists are expected to become finalists, and about half of the finalists will win a scholarship. Merit scholars are chosen for their skills, accomplishments and potential to succeed in a rigorous college program.



The National Merit Scholarship semifinalists are, from left: Cyrus Aly, Yicheng Yang, Daniel Ndocaj, Alexander Woodworth, Aaron Lestz and Samara Brown.



The Cum Laude Society inductees are, from the left, in the front row: Grace Lin, Eerika Karttunen, Margaret Pollack, Samara Brown. In the second row: Ayaka Ammon, Zachary Pero, Benjamin Levy, Aaron Lestz. Third row: Alexander Woodworth, Jonathan Manowitz, Jack Canter, Jacob Fenster, Lily Anchin. Fourth row: Joseph Palackal, Daniel Ndocaj, Aidan Aldea-Lustig, John Quinn, Jake Santos.

CUM LAUDE SOCIETY

Eighteen Byram Hills High School seniors were inducted into the prestigious Cum Laude Society, celebrated for their superior academic performance.

The students inducted at an Oct. 19 ceremony in the high school theater have reached the height of academic success at Byram Hills: Their weighted GPAs put them in the top 10% of the Class of 2024.

The students are Aidan Aldea-Lustig, Ayaka Ammon, Lily Anchin, Samara Brown, Jack Canter, Jacob Fenster, Eerika Karttunen, Aaron Lestz, Benjamin Levy, Grace Lin, Jonathan Manowitz, Daniel Ndocaj, Joseph Palackal, Zachary Pero, Margaret Pollack, John Quinn, Jake Santos and Alexander Woodworth.

In his welcoming remarks, Principal Christopher Walsh congratulated the students, and noted the myriad COVID-19 restrictions that marked the beginning of their time in high school. "Nobody could have planned for what they had to deal with, but yet somehow, they were still able to excel academically, which is incredible," he said.

In the Cum Laude address, English

teacher Catherine Eshoo dispelled myths about the inductees' generation, Generation Z, while praising their individual accomplishments.

"Let's allow their brilliance, hard work and kindness to write the story of who they really are as they embark upon their journeys and form their generation's legacy," Ms. Eshoo said. "I can't wait to see what they accomplish."

The new faculty members of the Cum Laude Society were announced: science teacher Heather Manriquez and Math Chairperson Lisa Pellegrino.

WORLD LANGUAGE HONOR SOCIETY

Sixty-five seniors were inducted into the World Language Honor Society, a recognition of their excellence in the study of French, Italian or Spanish.

At the Oct. 4 induction ceremony, World Languages Chairperson Melissa Stahl thanked the world language teachers for their dedication, congratulated the students for their academic excellence and expressed appreciation for the strong support of their parents.

Ms. Stahl said she hoped the inductees had gained an appreciation for engaging and communicating with other people.

"Learning a world language is like acquiring a new set of keys, each one unlocking a door to a different culture, a new perspective," Ms. Stahl said. "It's not just about the words you learn. It's about the worlds you open up."

She told the students to remember that "you're not just acquiring language proficiency, you're becoming ambassadors of understanding in an interdependent world."

"Your language skills are not just tools for communication," she said. "They're instruments for building bridges, breaking down walls and creating a harmonious global community."



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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 and leaders of the twenty-first century.
"A great place to learn."

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BUILDING ROBOTS - AND COMMUNITY - IN THE BHHS ROBOTICS PROGRAM

Working in pairs at lab stations, Byram Hills High School students are trying to figure out what it will take for their robot to win the first fall challenge, a game called Triball. Should they add a claw, a pusher or a component to gobble up the curved, pyramid-shaped balls and spit them back out when the time is right?

Welcome to the robotics classroom, where students in the Robotics I, Robotics II and Robot Master semester-long electives work and learn together in a collaborative environment, with advanced students mentoring beginners.

Students use the VEX Robotics platform to build, program and drive robots. As they face increasingly difficult challenges, students assemble more complex robots from scratch that may include a ramp, lift or claw.

"This class challenges students to be relentless problem-solvers and the robots are the medium to get them to exercise that part of their brain," said robotics teacher Peter Lichten. "They will be better able to handle all other problems they encounter in life."

On an October day, students were preparing their robots to battle in two-on-two matches in a fight for dozens of

hard-to-manipulate Triballs. Students compete alongside - and against - every member of the class, which helps build community in the classroom.

They learn technical skills, including the mechanics of building a robot with tools, the C++ language or block coding to program the robots, and how to incorporate electrical systems to provide power.

"The goal is to make it look effortless, but it's never easy," Mr. Lichten says. "When the robot finally does what they wanted it to do, the students have a real sense of satisfaction on their faces. They're real, authentic smiles."

The robotics program, which began with Robotics I in the 2017-2018 school year, is thriving. Students test their skills in regional competitions and the classroom is buzzing with constant conversation about retooling and testing the robots.

Students enjoy the hands-on class, which allows them to be creative while deepening their collaboration skills. And it's fun, especially when it's time for battle, with robots, which students drive with remote controllers, whizzing around the field.

Senior Timothy Petrenko, a Robot Master student, said it's awesome to be getting a head start on his goal of working in the field of robotics. "It's the perfect blend of every aspect of engineering," he said of the robotics program. "I feel as if I found my passion here."

