



# Watchung Hills Regional High School District

## Newsletter

November 2015



### From the desk of the Superintendent

As I entered my third year as superintendent of the WHRHS District, I was inspired to see the young and energetic faces of the incoming freshmen - the Class of 2019! I was also reminded that this past September, the elementary schools in our community opened their doors to the future members of the WHRHS Class of 2028. The great patriot, Benjamin Franklin, once wrote, "An investment in knowledge pays the best interest." The Board of Education, administration, faculty and staff of the Watchung Hills Regional High School District take this sacred trust seriously. We collectively feel that it is imperative that we engage in long range planning so that we can provide our current students, as well as the students who have yet to enter our doors, innovative and relevant learning opportunities that will prepare them for success well beyond their date of graduation. Benjamin Franklin went on to say, "If you fail to plan, you are planning to fail."

Toward that end, we are currently engaged in a strategic planning process that will shape our work in the district over the next five years and beyond. At our October 20th meeting, the WHRHS District Board of Education officially adopted Strategic Plan Goals that were the culmination of a process that involved input from all stakeholder groups - students, staff, parents, community members - through data collection via surveys, focus groups, interviews, and a two-day planning team session in early October. In the coming months, we will be continuing to solicit feedback from the members of our learning community regarding what the goals mean for your children and the future of the Watchung Hills Regional High School District. I encourage you to avail yourselves of these opportunities to provide input and feedback as we shape the path for achievement of the Strategic Plan Goals.

An essential component for successful implementation of the plan is a robust communication plan. A component of that communication plan is this quarterly newsletter which will be posted on our web site and distributed electronically to our community-at-large.

Our district is fortunate to be a part of such a supportive, student-centered community. I look forward to continuing to collaborate with you toward our overarching goal of becoming even better tomorrow than we are today. I have included the Strategic Plan Goals for your review. We are committed as a learning community to confront reality and take tough issues head on. Education, school funding, and the changing landscape of the delivery of instruction are just some of the challenges we face today. We look forward to you sharing your insight and expertise through feedback systems - formal and informal. We want to meaningfully improve our system and processes to ensure our children are receiving a world-class education!

Have a wonderful Thanksgiving, and may it be a time to connect with family and friends with an attitude of gratefulness.

Regards,

*Elizabeth C. Jewett*

Superintendent



**Strategic Plan Goal Setting  
October 1 and 2, 2015**

### **WHRHS Strategic Plan Goals 2015-2020**

***With an intentional focus on putting students first, the WHRHS District will provide the resources, technology, and organizational change to achieve the following goals:***

- ***Create and expand programs and services that enhance the social and emotional wellness of all students within a compassionate learning community.***
- ***Build and strengthen support structures that engage students in developing their individual potential, enable students to experience success in high school, and empower students to plan and prepare well for post-secondary learning.***
- ***Integrate creative, innovative, and interdisciplinary learning throughout the district to empower and inspire students to succeed in a changing global community.***

## Newsweek's 2015 America's Top High Schools Ranking

WHRHS is number 142!!! The 2015 rankings of America's Top 500 High Schools were just released in August. WHRHS moved up from 212 in 2014 to 142 in 2015! This ranking is based on a variety of factors, including AP and SAT performance, dropout rates, graduation rate, college enrollment rate, and counselor to student ratio. Out of 56 NJ high schools that made the list, WHRHS is 30.

## New Teachers for 2015—2016 School Year

Fourteen teachers new to Watchung Hills Regional High School were introduced to the school's entire faculty during a staff development assembly, Tuesday, Sept. 1.

The new faculty members in the World Languages Department are: David Weiner, Italian and English as a Second language; Lorraine Harwelik, Latin; Greg Wickey, French and Mery McNicholas, Spanish.

New teachers in the Music and Arts departments are: Minesh Shah, who had previous positions for band and music instruction at West Side High School, Newark, and Elizabeth High School, is band director and music teacher; and Emily Jordan, a Watchung Hills graduate who studied at the Pratt Institute, Brooklyn, teaches art.

In the Special Services Department is Michael O'Brien, who is certified in both math and special education, and has served for 10 years in multiple coaching roles and as an aide, completed his student teaching assignment at Watchung Hills, and is now a special education teacher.

Goodness Herrera is an instructional aide. Marybeth Clark, R.N., who has worked as a nurse at Overlook Hospital, Summit, and Northside Hospital, Jersey City, among other assignments, is a member of the school nurse team. Allison Oliveira, who holds a doctorate from Rutgers, is a school psychologist. Sara Ahmed-Imadi is a health teacher on a leave replacement assignment.

In the Science Department, Chasity Tedeschi teaches Biology. Kathryn Matulo-

nis is the new teacher in the English Department.



## Back To School Night

One of the highlights of the annual Back To School Night on Thursday, Oct. 8, was the displays sponsored by extra-curricular activity groups, class and student-wide government representatives, and sports teams.

Representatives from as many as 14 such student groups greeted parents, faculty and administrators with smiles and welcoming remarks, information about their clubs, and Watchung Hills apparel for sale.

Among the groups included were student government, the Script & Cue student theater group, the Choir and the Environmental Club, and the Softball, Field Hockey, Girls Lacrosse, Frisbee and Robotics teams.

The Watchung Hills Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) also had an informational display. PTO parent volunteers distributed maps of the school, and mem-

bers of the Student Peer Leaders group staffed key major corridor intersections in the sprawling Watchung Hills building complex, to help parents locate their child's classrooms.



## WHRHS Marching Warriors Band Victory

The Watchung Hills Regional High School Marching Warriors Band won first place in their class of schools, and fourth place overall, at the U.S. Bands-sponsored band competition held on Saturday, Sept. 12, at Edison High School, Edison Township.

New Watchung Hills Band Director Minesh Shah said the strong showing in the competition is particularly significant and impressive since it comes after the band has had to deal with both his arrival this year as the new band director as well as his introduction of a new system of teaching for marching band. He is familiar with this method, because he has used it as band instructor and director in other schools, but the students had not been familiar with it.

"Early on, however, the students realized they could get very good at marching band very quickly if they stuck to this system of learning," Shah said.

The Watchung Hills Warrior Band finished first among Class A schools, and fourth overall, Shah said. Class A schools are considered "emerging," or seeking to present consistently better performances, Shah said.

The theme for the band's routine this year is "A Night with Netflix." The set performance

piece includes three musical selections, one each from three popular categories used by the internet-based broadcast network, Netflix. From "Classic Animation," the Band performs "The Circle of Life," from the movie "The Lion King." From "Trending

performance of their band in the competition at Edison High School, and eager to see just how far Mr. Shah's new teaching methods can help them to improve their musical and precision marching capabilities.



Now," the Band performs, "March from Captain America," from the movie, "Captain America." And from "Watch It Again," the Watchung Hills band performs "Jai Ho," from the movie, "Slumdog Millionaire." There is also a Color Guard Solo and dance solo during the "Circle of Life" selection.

There are some 100 students participating this year in the Watchung Hills Marching Band, Shah said, with roughly equal numbers from each of the four years. Student musicians reported being proud of the per-

formance of their band in the competition at Edison High School, and eager to see just how far Mr. Shah's new teaching methods can help them to improve their musical and precision marching capabilities.

This year's Drum Majors are: Senior Drum Major Alyssa Rosenblum and Junior Drum Major Andrew Morrison.

***"We should not let our fears hold us back from pursuing our hopes."***

***John F. Kennedy***

## Malala

On September 24, the English and Social Studies Departments held interdisciplinary lessons on the school-wide summer read, *I Am Malala*. Students watched interviews given by Malala Yousafzai and wrote poems based on her experiences and perspectives. Students also explored the rights of women to education in other parts of the world and discussed the effects of the Taliban in Pakistan and neighboring countries.





## Community Book Night

A Community Book Discussion of the memoir, "Tales From the Bed, On Living, Dying and Having It All," was held for the general public at 7 p.m., Wednesday, Oct. 21.

The memoir was written by the late Jenifer Estess, as told to her sister, Valerie Estess. The Estess sisters and representatives from Project A.L.S., which was founded by the Estess family, spoke to the student body during grade-level assemblies at school on Wednesday, Oct. 14.

Tales From the Bed was one of the assigned summer reading selections last summer for all students at Watchung Hills. At her appearances, Valerie Estess spoke about the overall journey the Estess family has taken since their sister, Jenifer, was diagnosed in 1998. Jenifer Estess succumbed to A.L.S. in 2003. The memoir was first published in 2005.

Watchung Hills teachers have been using the book as a jump-off reference for dis-

cussions, and class lessons to guide students to learning about A.L.S. (Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis), also known as Lou Gehrig's Disease. Throughout the year, students may explore various efforts that have been made to find treatments and a cure for A.L.S., as well as efforts by various groups to advocate for more research about A.L.S., and for better care opportunities for A.L.S. patients and their families.

One of the leading groups advocating for more innovative and collaborative research about A.L.S. is Project A.L.S. It was started by the Estess family after Jenifer Estess, a New York theater and film producer, was diagnosed. Jenifer was 35 when she was diagnosed. Project A.L.S. has already

raised millions, and has worked closely with leading university-based research scientists to find treatments for A.L.S., and to actively collaborate in their research to bring about more breakthroughs.



Watchung Hills student extracurricular groups, including the student government, plan to also hold Project A.L.S. fundraising and awareness raising events all year.

## First Music Honor Society Induction

The first Music Honor Society induction at Watchung Hills took place on October 22 at 7:00 pm in the PAC. Twenty-six students were inducted based on their auditions. The music honor society students will be performing together at the Meyersville Tree Lighting in December. They will also perform at St. Vincent's Church in Stirling. One of the requirements to be part of the Music Honor Society is to participate in community events.

The society is a program of the National Association of Music Education (NAfME). As described on the NAfME Web site, [www.nafme.org](http://www.nafme.org), "The Tri-Music Honor Society is the international music honor society for middle/junior high school and high school students. It is designed to recognize students for their academic and musical achievements, reward them for the accomplishments and service activities, and to inspire

other students to excel at music and leadership." Tri-M offers chapters and members webinars, chapter resources, service project and fundraising ideas, awards, scholarships and merchandise.



The students who were inducted for vocal performance are: Nikhil Bhat, Krishti Bhaumik, Jillian Carbone, Allison Horvath, William Johnson, David Kalwicz, Sarah Kelly, Hannah Melillo, Veronica Mu, Jack

Pacetti, Jordon Reynolds, Julia Sluyter and Amelia Stapperfenne.

The students who were inducted for instrumental performance are: Chris Barry, Ryan Branco, Owen Di Donna, Stella Hung, Andrew Morrison, Ethan Marmolejos, Laura Osborne, Justin Panzarino, John Ray, Emilie Ricciardi, Alyssa Rosenblum, Simon Yang and Isis Zhang.

The students named as officers of the Watchung Hills chapter are: President-Vocal, Jillian Carbone; President-Instrumental, Andrew Morrison; Vice President Jordon Reynolds; Secretary, Alyssa Rosenblum; Treasurer, Justin Panzarino; and Isis Zhang, historian.

## Homecoming Court King and Queen

The Watchung Hills Regional High School Homecoming Court King and Queen for 2015 were announced and presented on Friday, Oct. 23, at Watchung Hills' Tozier Field during halftime ceremonies at the game versus Union High School.

King is David Kalwicz and Queen is Giuliana Popolillo.

They were selected from among five boys and five girls who form the Homecoming Court. Last Spring, the Junior Class nominated the court. The All



School Council (ASC) determined the the entire school voted for King and Queen from among those five boys and five girls.

The five boys in the Homecoming Court are: Kyle Andersen, David Kalwicz, Jack Lane, Connell Rae, and Gregory Seawright.

The five girls in the Homecoming Court are: Stacie Bernhaut, Parima Kadihar, Claire Chen, Giuliana Popolillo, and Lauren Stone.

nominees: The top five girls for queen and the top five boys for king. In September,

## The Hills Roundup

- ◆ We are pleased to report that Claire Chen, Emily Kim, Kunwoo Park, Isis Zhang, Eric Zhu, and Henry Zhu, are National Merit Semi-finalists.
- ◆ Two of our students, Natalie Kim and Evani Ricaldi, each won a distinguished writing award from SNO, School Newspapers Online. Their articles were printed on the "Best of SNO" site. Refer to [www.bestofsno.com](http://www.bestofsno.com) where you can view their articles.
- ◆ WHRHS student Justin Horowitz was part of the New Jersey Youth Chorus who sang the National Anthem at the Jets/Redskins game played in the Met Life Stadium (East Rutherford, NJ) on October 18. There were 38 singers, 14 from the Camerata (young men's) division of NJYC and 24 from Coro Viva (boy's) division of NJYC.
- ◆ WHRHS Students David Kalwicz, Sarah Kelly, Julianne Lin, and Emma Marszalek all attended an AMA festival this summer (American Music Abroad). They toured Europe and sang in Europe's most prestigious churches and other various locations.
- ◆ Science teacher Anne Marie Johnson and 29 of our WHRHS students joined 27 other New Jersey high schools who worked with Rutgers University research scientists and project staff on the Waksman Student Scholars Program (WSSP) and contributed to an authentic research project in molecular biology and bioinformatics. At our school, Ms. Johnson collaborated with the WSSP and instructed the 29 students. The students purified and analyzed ten DNA fragments, and five of them were suitable for publication on the NCBI DNA sequence database.
- ◆ A college essay writing workshop was held for seniors on September 21. Students examined the five Common Application essay prompts, brainstormed ideas for each topic, evaluated sample essays, and began writing an opening paragraph. The workshop was led by English teachers Roy Bumiller, Heather Farrington, Kim Gajewski, and Kristin Mannion; English Supervisor Marlene Stoto; and Director of Curriculum and Instruction Mary Ellen Phelan.
- ◆ On the morning of October 14, all freshmen, sophomores, and juniors took the PSAT. In the afternoon, the leaders of Project A.L.S. spoke at student assemblies, providing information about the disease and the organization's efforts to fund research. The student government will be engaged in fundraising activities to help the cause throughout the year. English teacher Laura Goodson has led the effort to partner with Project A.L.S.
- ◆ WHRHS hosted its fall college fair on Tuesday, October 20. Admission representatives from University of Chicago, Rutgers University, Seton Hall University, Rider University and The College of New Jersey attended. The evening began with a general panel followed by information sessions for students and parents.

***"If we did all the things we are capable of doing, we would literally astound ourselves."***





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