

# Syosset Pride

*A Publication of the Syosset Central School District*

[www.syossetschools.org](http://www.syossetschools.org)

## Adding Depth and Fulfillment, K-12

*New practices and pilots focus on inquiry, innovation and expression from start to finish*

Syosset High School was recently named one of 329 National Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence in the country. This isn't the first time a Syosset school has been honored with the Blue Ribbon award or received national acclaim. While the recognition underscores the exemplary efforts of the school's faculty and leadership, the student success behind this culminates a K-12 experience that continually emphasizes thinking and working creatively. It begins in kindergarten and culminates with the conferring of diplomas.

"The National Blue Ribbon School of Excellence Award is one of the most prestigious recognitions a school can receive," said Superintendent of Schools Dr. Thomas Rogers. "This award illustrates the tremendous effort and dedication of our faculty, leadership,

students and parents at Syosset High School. But the entire Syosset School District shares this award since, like a relay race, it is the excellent start students receive in our elementary and middle schools that makes possible Syosset High School's Blue Ribbon finish."

The metaphorical relay builds momentum with every grade level. The district continues to refine the K-12 curriculum to provide students with the best paths and knowledge to achieve their long-term goals.

### BUILDING THE FOUNDATION

At the elementary level, the district is implementing a program to develop a more uniform and thorough curriculum for teaching literacy at the primary grades. Last year, the district piloted Columbia University's Teachers College Reading and Writing Project at A.P. Willits,



*Baylis fifth-grade students analyze and discuss texts during a reading workshop.*

Baylis, and Berry Hill elementary schools. This fall, every elementary school is implementing this widely regarded program, which provides significant training to teachers to guide young students to take control – and ownership – of their own learning. According to Deputy Superintendent Adele Bovard, teachers provided input toward designing a sequence of study and overall literacy curriculum that achieves this while covering all the necessary genres.

"The Teachers College Reading and Writing Project takes a holistic approach to how children think and express themselves creatively," said Bovard. "We are looking to draw out each student's voice. Our focus is to develop avid and skilled readers, writers and thinkers."

This approach to reading and writing allows students the flexibility to choose what they read, including the kinds of texts. It also encourages daily discussions on book themes, characters, plot and setting and how all of the elements of the story affect one another.

"In understanding all of this,

young students are able to make personal connections between the stories they read and their own lives. Consequently, their writing is authentic, grabs the reader and has more of a voice," said Baylis Principal Lisa Greiner.

Students are learning to view reading and writing as a powerful vehicle to learn about themselves and one another. They understand how they can use it to communicate, persuade and inform and have even written letters to Greiner, as well as President Obama (who wrote back), wrote newspaper articles from live interviews and incorporated writing craft from authors they have studied. From kindergartners reading "How to Books" and writing a "Guide to Tying Shoelaces" to fifth-grade research reports on Latin America, students are excited about reading and writing.

Greiner said that using a wide variety and more complex level of texts helps to make reading and writing an enjoyable, engaging experience. "They are reading and writing for pleasure, as well as for academic success."



*Congratulations*  
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# A Message from Your *Superintendent*

Dear Community Member,

Shortly after I joined the District, the Board outlined an ambitious vision to be achieved. Now, a little over two years later, it makes sense to take stock of our progress and outline both the challenges and opportunities ahead.

Education topped their priorities, and our focus has been similarly aligned. In addition to the many building-level instructional initiatives, there are several district-wide efforts underway:

1. Recognizing that early literacy is the foundation for all subsequent learning, we are in the second year of a renewed effort to take advantage of the Teachers College Reading and Writing Project including ongoing professional development for all of our elementary teachers.
2. Although the State's recent emphasis has centered attention on Math and English, we don't want to overlook building on the rest of the curriculum. We have hired a K-12 Science Coordinator and plan to shift our early science instruction to build on the concepts behind the "Next Generation Science Standards" – that all of the sciences are interconnected and that many essential skills and habits of mind are common to all of the disciplines. We expect another shift in focus to occur once the "New Social Studies Frameworks" are adopted.
3. We are also engaged in a two-year project to embed more education technology in our classrooms. Resisting the temptation to buy devices first and articulate their use

later, an internal workgroup of teachers and administrators wrote detailed proposals for pilot projects. We have been following their progress in a number of classrooms and are identifying the highest leverage uses at each grade span, and expanding on those models. One early takeaway is clear – our goal should not be to simply increase children's screen time, rather we are emphasizing ways in which technology allows for powerful shifts in how students learn. Or as one workgroup member put it, we are moving from "pilots" to "pivots."

4. Lastly, we recognize that we are in a period of incredible change in the current and future economy and it is no longer just manufacturing jobs that are being lost to automation. We know that our students' insights, creativity, and originality enhance their excellent academic preparation, and these skills will be even more valuable in the future. Thus, we have started a long-term project to be even more intentional about how we nurture these skills by drawing connections across the curriculum and helping students do likewise. Syosset is known for the breadth and quality of its program – this initiative leverages both.

We have managed to achieve these efforts while remaining under the tax cap each of the past three years, and we're thankful to the community for its support. Now we're turning our attention to our facilities needs. The Board is pursuing a multi-pronged strategy that would enable the District to address all of the needs identified in its building condition survey as well as safety and

security needs, parking, and air conditioning – all without increasing the tax levy for debt service – by using state grant funds, budgeted maintenance, an Energy Performance Contract, the Capital Reserve, and the proceeds of the Woodbury property sale.

Winning the National Blue Ribbon Schools Award was a recognition in which the entire school district shares since every school feeds the high school and thus shares in its success. Just as the student accolades that fill this issue help illustrate our successful outcomes, we congratulate Syosset High School teachers Ms. Steinberg and Mr. Chae for joining Mr. Slesinski as recognized New York State Master Teachers, illustrating the hard work and high standards of the people who make our students' outcomes possible.

As proud as I am of the Blue Ribbon designation, I worry awards create a temptation for complacency, something former superintendent Dr. Friedman warned against in his outgoing message: "sitting still is equivalent to falling behind." Even as we savor this success, our focus is on the horizon – to build a school system that will serve our children's future every bit as well as our existing system does their present.

My very best holiday wishes to all,

Dr. Tom Rogers  
Superintendent of Schools



# A Message from Your *Board of Education*

Dear Syosset Community,

Although we are just a couple of months into the 2016-17 school year, many important initiatives are underway. As you will read in this edition of The Pride, we have developed a new framework for reading and writing instruction in all of our elementary schools, stepped up our focus on inquiry and exploration, and implemented the second phase of our technology pilots.

Many successes have already been celebrated, including Syosset High School's National Blue Ribbon designation for the 2016-17 year! Congratulations to Principal Dr. Giovanni Durante and the entire high school community, as well as our other schools that have all played a role in preparing students for the rigors of high school. Prior to hearing this wonderful news, the Board was proud to congratulate the 14 National Merit Semifinalists at our September Board of Education meeting, and the following month, we honored a record nine Siemens competition semifinalists, two of which are advancing as regional finalists. We look forward to honoring many more of our community's children during the year.

Several outcomes of the Food Allergy Committee are coming to fruition, with additional EpiPens being placed in all Syosset school buildings with the necessary staff training in progress. Additional proactive measures have been taken to reduce the risk of student exposure to known food allergens, including the establishment of an approved snack list and greater communication and

consistency among the buildings.

At our September meeting, Dr. Thomas Rogers, superintendent of schools, gave two very important presentations to our community: one regarding the sale of a parcel of property in Woodbury near the Walt Whitman School and another regarding facility challenges identified in the district's building condition survey, including some key priority projects under consideration and potential funding/financing mechanisms. The Board approved the sale with stringent limitations on its future use to ensure compatibility with the school and is now considering a request to increase the size of the sale in exchange for significant improvements to the ballfields and play areas.

Proceeds from this sale are a key component in the Board's plan to offset the cost of some of the work outlined in the building condition survey by over \$5 million, and we will keep you informed as we work closely with central administration and our architects to finalize our plans. Extensive presentations on both of these matters are available on the district website, [www.syossetschools.org](http://www.syossetschools.org), via the Board of Education tab under "Board Discussions."

We also fought back against newly proposed state and federal accountability systems that would penalize schools with high rates of test refusal and we are reviewing the revised regulations that appear to have softened.

Finally, at our October meeting, we were proud to become the first school district on Long Island



to officially acknowledge Diwali, Eid-ul-Adha and Eid-ul-Fitr as official district holidays. The Board is proud of this community's diversity and we feel that it is important to respect our families who wish to spend time together on these days.

For a summary of the events of every Board meeting, please refer to our monthly "Board Meeting Notes," also found under the Board of Education tab on our website. To contact us, you can refer to our email addresses online or in the district calendar. Online question forms are also available on the Board of Education section of the website by clicking on "Audience to the Public."

Warm Regards,  
The Syosset School District Board of Education

Dr. Michael Cohen  
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# Adding Depth and Fulfillment, K-12

*New practices and pilots focus on inquiry, innovation and expression from start to finish*

## DEVELOPING LITERACY FOR INNOVATION

While the State Education Department has yet to adopt new learning standards for science, the district has been preparing students well in advance. Syosset's focus has been to find "crosscutting" concepts that apply to multiple disciplines. Instruction is steadily shifting from teaching the content to the processes, with a greater emphasis on engaging students in relevant problem solving activities. The new approach makes learning science more authentic.

Once students are exposed to scientific phenomena, they plan investigations and develop models to test their ideas. "It's as simple as 'if I change this, what will happen?,'" said Coordinator of Science Raymond Loverso.

A project such as designing and building a windmill can touch on life science, physical science and engineering all at once. A student may be asked to create a model and test different features of their design. The idea is to teach the concepts and scientific practices together from kindergarten, so that students can use their natural curiosity about the world to learn about science.

As the concepts and practices are introduced vertically through the grades, the content becomes more complex and students make deeper connections. These experiences occur across different content areas, from life science and English Language Arts to technology and robotics.

While a Lego Robotics Program has already been providing students at Harry B. Thompson Middle School with a strong foundation for hands-on robot design, this year South Woods Middle School is building robots for competition, providing a steady ramp to the high

school robotics program at both middle schools.

Enrollment in the high school's SySTEM Robotics courses has expanded this year. According to robotics teacher John Chae, his students have been conducting demonstrations and classes in different areas of the high school (the library, the commons area, etc.) to generate interest in robotics. Along with the strong focus on inquiry-based instruction, innovative offerings like this have inspired more students to pursue high-level scientific research and submit their work to national competitions such as Siemens and Intel.

"We want the curriculum to build in complexity," said Loverso. "Every layer is another interdisciplinary connection across content areas. With tools such as Chromebooks, you can teach peer editing to instill confidence in one's writing while using it to write code for robotics. The content, science and engineering practices, coupled with technology fosters creative thinking and the type of 'innovative literacy' that we want to see from our students."

## PILOTING NEW TECHNOLOGIES

Last year, the District's Technology Workgroup comprised of teachers and administrators, launched 16 pilot programs across the district to engage students, promote a collaborative environment, and inspire innovative thinking. Based on their success, more pilot technology projects are being implemented in the current year. One pilot included creating more collaborative learning spaces throughout the district that incorporate mobile devices and a flexible setting design. Last year, the



High school robotics students conduct a demonstration in the school's commons area.

Harry B. Thompson Middle School library served as the model; this year, the concept is being expanded to the elementary libraries, with library media specialists and classroom teachers working together to design authentic experiences using new digital tools and library resources to foster inquiry, gather research and work together in support of curricular projects. Last year's middle school Makerspace and FabLab concepts, which promote creative tinkering and design, have become successful models to encourage creativity at all levels.

Some pilots from last year used Chromebooks and tablets; this year, the use of Chromebooks has expanded to English Language Arts, World Languages and English as a New Language curriculum. Last year's 1:1 tablet initiative in a kindergarten class at Robbins Lane Elementary School is being expanded to more classes, grades and schools. The expansion is enabling students to use technology to create, communicate and collaborate in

areas such as literacy, the humanities, mathematics and the sciences.

A university-style model for the flipped classroom is also being developed at the high school to help prepare students for the rigors of college, while digital mobile language support is being introduced to eighth-grade "English as a New Language" students. The use of iPads to promote greater independence among the special education students is also being expanded from the middle school to elementary schools and the high school, with project-based learning projects being added for those students who used the iPads at the middle school level last year.

The goal of the second year pilots is to expand both vertically – from grade level to grade level – and horizontally across disciplines and refine what works best in Syosset going forward.

"We want to engage students so that they become curious and connected to their education in a meaningful way," said Bovard. "By instilling this approach in every facet of our education program, every Syosset student entering the high school can pursue their passion, experience fulfillment and success in their education, and have the freedom to create their future."

*"We want to engage students so that they become curious and connected to their education in a meaningful way."*

# AROUND THE SCHOOLS



Students have supply, demand and profit covered at South Grove.

## All Business

Second graders at South Grove Elementary School simulated a business as an extension to their economics social studies unit. Students worked collaboratively in one of seven “companies” to bring a product from inception to market. Over the course of five weeks the companies developed their products from clay, created advertising posters, then set up shop in the school’s all-purpose room “marketplace” to sell their products to other companies, while also playing the role of consumers.

## Boxing Out Bullies

Robbins Lane Elementary School kicked off the year with the “Box Out Bullying” program. Students enjoyed an interactive assembly that covered the difference between bullying and conflicts. Workshops were held in each classroom to provide children with tools to negotiate their own conflicts with their classmates.

## For Your Health

Syosset High School recently hosted its 10th annual Health Awareness Day, during which teachers, students and outside organizations manned stations in the school gymnasium that

featured a wide range of wellness-related topics to promote a healthier lifestyle. Student clubs such as the Fresh Group and Substance Free Alliance shared their expertise on making smart decisions and nutritious choices.



Members of Syosset High School's Substance Free Alliance.

## HBTv Taking the News to a New Level

Channel 6, otherwise known as HBTv, is benefitting from some new digs in their pursuit to keep the students and staff at H.B. Thompson Middle School informed. The school’s television station, which conducts a daily live broadcast online and over the public address system, has a new space this year, with its own classroom and some additional audio/visual equipment to make for a more authentic broadcasting and production experience for the students involved.



Students and advisers on the set of HBTv.



## Learning About Diwali

A recent Brown Bag seminar at Berry Hill Elementary School offered interested fourth- and fifth-graders an opportunity to learn about the cultural significance of Diwali, a religious celebration associated with Hinduism, Sikhism, and Jainism, also known as the Festival of Lights. Participating students were shown different items that are prominent during Diwali, including special clothing, Diyas (oil lamps), and colorful Rangoli designs.

## Reading for Recreation

As part of its annual celebration of PARP (Parents as Reading Partners), Walt Whitman Elementary School welcomed children's author Dan Guttman. Addressing students in the school library, Guttman gave his personal account of how he fell in love with the writing process and where he finds inspiration for his books. The school also welcomed guest readers from throughout the community and students read extensively on their own time during the two-week observance.



Author Dan Guttman with students and staff in the library at Walt Whitman.

## Navigating the Cache

The South Woods Middle School Outdoor Education Club took its first geocaching trip to the Stillwell Preserve where students hiked 1.5 miles using the geocaching app coordinate system. Geocaching is an outdoor treasure hunting game that places GPS devices in students' hands to navigate a specific set of coordinates and attempt to find a hidden treasure, which in this case was a container with a small stuffed teddy bear inside.

## Kids in the Hall

Thanks to the generosity of the school's PTA, every student at Village Elementary School had the opportunity to visit the New York Hall of Science in Queens. Students made their way through various hands-on exhibits including the physics-themed "Sports Challenge" and "Seeing the Light" stations, as well as the Living Environment-themed "World of Microbes" and "Search for Life Beyond Earth." They also enjoyed a 3-D movie titled "Journey into Space."



Village students tinker away at the New York Hall of Science.

## The Recipe of a Cell

Cold Spring Harbor Laboratory's DNA Learning Center continued its partnership with the district with a presentation on cell structure for fifth graders at Baylis Elementary School. The instructor likened the DNA of a cell's nucleus to a "cookbook" with genes serving as "recipes," also drawing an analogy between cell structure and a "chocolate factory." Students constructed cell models by filling plastic baggies with different items, including gelatin and water to represent cytoplasm.

## A Unifying Day

In observance of National Bullying Prevention Month, A.P. Willits Elementary School hosted its second annual Unity Day celebration as students wore red clothes and pledged to stand up to bullying and treat one another with respect. A special assembly was held and a banner was raised at the school to remind everyone that they are united in kindness, acceptance and inclusion.



Kindergartners and faculty show their unity at A.P. Willits.



# STUDENTS IN THE

## SIEMENS COMPETITION: *Nine Semifinalists and Two Finalists*

*Ties for most semifinalist projects and finalists of any L.I. school*

Congratulations to the nine Syosset High School seniors named regional semifinalists in the Siemens Foundation Competition for Math, Science and Technology, the nation's premier science research contest for high school students.

A day after learning that the high school had achieved a school record with the most semifinalists in its history and second-most semifinalists of any Long Island school this year (tied for most projects selected at seven), it was announced that two students

advanced as finalists.

Finalists Eric Pun and Nikhil Saggi collaborated on a project that infused the chemical sodium silicate into concrete for durability, while introducing different conditions to determine their impact. They used varying temperatures, water absorption and extreme pressure to conclude that cold weather and water had a mitigating effect on the chemical's ability to strengthen concrete.

Mohamed El-Abtah, Crystal Li, Rushabh Metha, Dahyun



*Syosset High School's nine semifinalists in the Siemens Foundation Competition for Math, Science and Technology are pictured with their science and research teachers.*

Park, Yash Samantaray, Jordan Sanford and Jonah Wu round out the school's semifinalists.

Dahyun and Jordan worked as a team while Yash and Crystal collaborated with students from other school districts. All of the students worked under the

guidance of Research Facilitator Veronica Ade and their teachers.

While contributing mightily to the Island's total representation of 69 semifinalists in the competition, Syosset was one of three high schools with two finalists.

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## 14 National Merit Semifinalists *23 Commended Students Named*

Fourteen Syosset High School seniors have been named National Merit semifinalists.

Sarina Awatramani, Michelle Gery, Jared

Goff, Andrea He, Philip Jang, Eugene Kim, Natalie Lo, Jessica Page, Janvi Pamnani, Ben Rhee, Yash Samantaray, Sabrina Sussman,

Jonah Wu and Michael Ye are being

honored by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation among approximately 16,000 high school students nationwide.

Semifinalists qualified by scoring among the highest in the state on the Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test in 2015, including the top one percent nationally. As a result, they are in the running for approximately 7,500 National Merit scholarships worth more than \$33 million. Finalists will be announced in February 2017, with the winners to be named in the spring.

Additionally, 23 Syosset seniors were named Commended Students in the competition. They represent the top five percent of more than 1.6 million students who entered the 2017 NMSC competition.



*Assistant Principal Christopher Ruffini, Superintendent of Schools Dr. Thomas Rogers and Principal Dr. Giovanni Durante are pictured in the back row congratulating the high school's National Merit Scholarship semifinalists.*



# SPOTLIGHT



## 4 All-National Musicians

### 27 All-State Musicians: Tops in NYS

Four Syosset High School students were selected to perform at the National Association for Music Education's All-National Honor Ensembles Conference in Grapevine, Texas held in November. Three were selected to perform with the All-National Symphony Orchestra, while one sang with the All-National Mixed Choir.

Dylan Eliassof (chorus, bass 2), Vivian Lin (orchestra, cello), Ben Rhee (orchestra, violin) and Cameron Zandieh (orchestra, violin) represented the Syosset community

through their respective ensembles. Dr. William LaRue Jones, director of orchestral studies at the University of Iowa, conducted the All-National Orchestra, while Dr. Anton Armstrong, Tosdal professor of music at St. Olaf College, led the choir.

Additionally, 27 students were named to the New York State School Music Association's All-State Winter Conference – the most of any school in the state. Congratulations to all of our All-National and All-State musicians!



*School and district administrators join Syosset High School music teachers in congratulating the school's All-National and All-State musicians.*



*Pictured from left are Superintendent of Schools Dr. Thomas Rogers, theater teacher Gene Connor, Maxwell Herman, art teacher Demi Protonentis, Brooke Shore, Bijia Wang, dance teacher Marisa Sanders and Syosset High School Principal Dr. Giovanni Durante.*

## Syosset Scholar Artists

Three of the 18 Long Island Scholar Artists being honored by Newsday during the 2016-17 school year are from Syosset High School. Congratulations to Maxwell Herman, Brooke Shore and Bijia Wang, who were selected based on an impressive portfolio submitted by their teachers.

Maxwell has been acting professionally since the age of six. A member of the school's Association of Creative Thespians, he has participated in many school productions, most recently "Les Misérables."

Brooke is an accomplished contemporary dancer who has won regional and national recognition through first-place awards and scholarships.

She is an advanced dancer in the school's program and co-captains the nationally ranked varsity kickline team.

Bijia's paintings and drawings have been displayed at the Tilles Center, the Walt Whitman Historic Birthplace and the Long Island Museum in Stony Brook. She has received All-County Artist honors since the seventh grade and is a member of the National Art Honor Society.

Every month, in conjunction with the Long Island Arts Alliance, Newsday features scholar artists at [www.newsday.com/scholarartists](http://www.newsday.com/scholarartists). Maxwell was featured in October, Brooke, will be featured in March and Bijia will appear in April.

## International Thespian Society Inducts 45

Once again, Syosset High School theater students can take a bow. Forty-five members of the school's Association for Creative Thespians have been inducted into the International Thespian Society's honor society for secondary school students. These fine young performers join the likes of society alumni including Julia Louis-Dreyfus, John Goodman, Tom Hanks and Jane Lynch.

Under the leadership of troupe director Gene Connor,

Syosset's inductees have logged more than 100 hours of time either studying or performing in the theater arts or related disciplines. Many of the students play major roles in the variety of productions held throughout the school year.

Three of this year's members/inductees – Emily Krichmar, Lauren Kueper and Steven Kueper – received the "Honor Thespian" distinction for accumulating more than 600 hours of theater performance and study. Congratulations to all!



# WRESTLING WITH *All-World Talent*



Three-time state wrestling champ Vito Arujau is congratulated by Director of Athletics, Physical Education and Recreation Drew Cronin and his coach Mike Murtha.

Congratulations to Syosset High School senior Vito Arujau who placed second in the 58 kilograms category at 2016 the Cadet World Championship held in Tbilisi, Georgia in September. The Cadet World Championship is considered the premier wrestling tournament for high school students in the world.

With an outstanding record of 179-1, Vito has wrestled for Syosset High School since the eighth grade with his only defeat coming in his first year. He is currently enjoying a 136-match winning streak and this winter will attempt to become a four-time state champion, a feat that has only been accomplished by a handful of wrestlers in New York State and never at Syosset (Vito's older brother Nick was a three-time champion for Syosset).

Vito also finished first in his weight class at the recent Super 32 national competition held in Greensboro, North Carolina. He will attend Cornell University next fall and wrestle for their team.



## 2016 HOMECOMING

Syosset High School culminated a week of spirited activities with its annual homecoming celebration and football game, which proved to be a success. The Braves dominated the game from start to finish, defeating visiting Hicksville 32-0.

Syosset's Christian Skorka rushed for 118 yards and three touchdowns, including scores of 56 and 44 yards. David Moyett and Laith Nanous each added a touchdown for Syosset and Laith recovered a fumble on defense. The game kept the Braves alive for a playoff spot. Cheerleaders provided support throughout the game. Syosset youth cheerleaders also performed at halftime, joining youth football players on the track.

Leading up to homecoming, Spirit Week was held at Syosset High School, in which students dressed in different themes each day of the week. During the week, the school held its annual walk-a-thon, dedicated to the Organization for Autism Research. Student Government kicked off the week of celebration with its annual carnival, as various student clubs and organizations manned booths to fundraise for student activities. Community members also enjoyed traditional carnival rides and games.

FALL 2016

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