



Orchard Park Central School District

January 2022 Community Report

OPCSD Community Embraces the Giving Spirit

At seemingly every turn throughout the Orchard Park Central School District (OPCSD) in November and December, students, faculty, and staff took initiative to give back to people and organizations in need throughout Western New York. While this issue of the *Community Report* covers just a few acts of kindness, and while those involved performed these acts selflessly and not to seek attention, we share these stories to illustrate the admirable ingenuity and breadth of generosity to end the year of 2021.

Pictured at right are representatives from the Girls Modified, JV, and Varsity Soccer teams with New York State Senator Tim Kennedy at John R. Oishei Children's Hospital in Buffalo. The student-athletes chose to become involved with Warm Up WNY, a drive to collect warm blankets to improve pediatric patients' stay at the hospital. Altogether, they collected 144 blankets!



The entire school at Windom Elementary had extra incentive to wear pajamas on Friday, December 10. Special education teacher Kelly Barnhart (pictured at lower-right in the middle of two aides, Kathleen Rygielski and Courtney Martin) spearheaded a "Pajama Day Fundraiser" to benefit the P.U.N.T. Foundation Pediatric Cancer Initiative. Students, faculty, staff, and supporters collectively raised \$6,855 to help families affected by pediatric cancer who need rent/mortgage assistance. Windom Elementary also has special connections to the P.U.N.T. Foundation. The foundation has strong ties to the Buffalo Bills, whose stadium is located just a half-mile from Windom Elementary. In addition, Kelly Barnhart's son, Carson, is a brain cancer warrior and is featured in the foundation's recent promotional video. Carson's older siblings, Bryce and Reagan, recently attended Windom Elementary and are now at Orchard Park Middle School.



*Story and
Additional
Photos
Continue
on Page 4.*

Winter Community Education Brochure Enclosed. Pull Out and Save Center Insert!

Superintendent's Column

By David Lilleck

As we enter the second half of the 2021-2022 school year, I want to take a moment and thank the OPCSD students, families, and community for the cooperation and resilience each of you have shown during this year.



than being quarantined out of school for a period of seven to 10 days.

This is important as school data shows that students who are quarantined due to being a close contact rarely become COVID-19 positive themselves. There are

currently a few examples of pilot programs for test-to-stay in place across the state, and we are appreciative that Governor Hochul announced a statewide test-to-stay program that will be implemented during the month of January.

The ENSSA also asked Governor Hochul to work with the NYSDOH to remove open-ended COVID-19 related mandates and restrictions for schools, and instead move to utilize data- and science-based metrics for implementation and de-implementation of mitigation strategies. Safety is always our top priority and our data clearly shows that school is one of the safest places for students to be during the pandemic. We must work to keep students in school as much as possible. A copy of the letter that ENSSA sent to Governor Hochul can be found on our website under the Superintendent's homepage.

I hope everyone has a great start to the New Year. Wishing everyone health, peace, and prosperity in 2022.

There is no doubt that, in many ways, this year has been more challenging than last. However, we have stayed focused and true to our guiding principles that have allowed us to navigate through the pandemic successfully:

- *The health and safety of our students and staff is our top priority, and;*
- *Students need to be in school, face to face, five days per week.*

With this in mind, we have advocated for important measures that would allow more flexibility when it comes to keeping healthy students in school. On November 27, 2021, the Erie-Niagara School Superintendents Association (ENSSA), which I am a member of, sent a letter to Governor Hochul expressing our desire to have the New York State Department of Health (NYSDOH) implement a statewide "test-to-stay" opportunity for students who are deemed close contacts and currently must quarantine. A test-to-stay option will allow healthy students to remain in school, rather

Applications Available for Universal Pre-Kindergarten 2022-2023 School Year

The OPCSD announces the availability of applications for Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) during the 2022-2023 school year. To participate, children must reside in the OPCSD's attendance area and be four years old by December 1, 2022 - meaning, their birthdate must fall between 12-02-17 and 12-01-18. Applications are available online and due by March 4, 2022.

The OPCSD is once again able to offer UPK through a grant provided by the New York State Education Department. This grant covers the cost of the program but does not cover transportation. It is the responsibility of each family to transport their child to the UPK site.



UPK Classroom at Ellicott Elementary

There are only a designated number of UPK spots available. If the OPCSD receives more applications than available openings, there will be a "digital lottery" to determine

who will qualify to attend. Children are randomly selected for the program and selection is not based on academic or economic need. All registered children are equally eligible for participation.

All students with complete registration before the March 4, 2022 deadline will have an equal chance for selection in the lottery. More information about the registration process and UPK program is available online and by contacting Amy Woodward at 716-209-6440 or awoodward@opschools.org. Registration questions may be directed to the Central Registrar at 716-209-6325 or registrar@opschools.org.

OPHS DECA Excels at Regional Competition

Students from the Orchard Park High School (OPHS) DECA chapter recently participated in the Region 12 competition and competed in various business-related contests, including marketing, finance, and human resources. Eleven of these outstanding students placed in their events and have qualified to represent OPHS DECA at the State Career Conference/Competition this March in Rochester.



Inclement Weather Procedures

At this time of year, it is very important to be aware of our inclement weather procedures. The decision to close schools is not an easy one to make; it often needs to be made quickly and decisively, and always in the best interest for the continued safety of our students and staff. We begin the decision process at 4 a.m. or sooner, depending on the weather and the forecast. With more than 50 other locations where we transport students (BOCES, private schools, special programs), a delayed start is usually not an option for a district our size.

Once the decision is made to close, radio and television stations are contacted, the OPCSD webpage is updated and an iConnect e-mail notification is sent out. Parents should take a few moments to sign into the Parent Portal and review their contact information to make sure it is current. For more information, please visit <https://powerschool.opschools.org>.

The OPCSD covers approximately 50 square miles, and much of the area is hilly terrain shaped in a narrow band that stretches south. Because of the land formation, it is common to have varying weather at different ends of the district. So even though school may not be closed, your decision to keep your child home is quite appropriate if the weather conditions around your home are a safety concern.

If weather turns bad during the school day, students will remain at school until the weather is clear enough to travel. Typically, we begin the dismissal process early, which allows the extra travel time needed in bad

weather to get students home - close to the regular time. To increase the potential for older siblings to be home when the younger ones arrive, the dismissal sequence starts with high school students. Middle school dismissal follows, and elementary students are dismissed last. If parents or older siblings cannot be home for the returning youngsters, please make sure your child knows of an alternate place to go, like a specific friend or neighbor's home.

It is a good idea to talk to your child about cold weather safety. It is important to check your child's (even teenager's) outerwear. Protecting exposed skin during cold weather is extremely important: warm coats, hats, gloves, scarves, and boots will help protect your child.

When considering the safety of students in cold weather, the following information from the National Weather Service is used as a guideline in making a determination to close schools:

- Cautionary: Wind chills of -18 to -20 degrees
- Advisory: Wind chills of -25 degrees or below
- Warning: Wind chills of -35 degrees or below

In many areas of the country, schools will not close until the wind chill temperature is at the Warning level of -40 degrees or below. The American Academy of Pediatrics recommends that no one should be outside with unprotected skin with wind-chill factors in the range of -40 degrees or below. In Orchard Park, if the wind chill temperature reaches above the advisory level, school may be delayed or closed.

OPHS Drama Club Returns to In-Person Performances with *Beowulf (and the Bard)*



Pictured, left to right: Moira Reine Blood as the Bard, Michael DellaContrada as Beowulf.

In mid-November, the OPHS Drama Club proudly presented the return of an in-person stage production with *Beowulf (and the Bard)*. The play, described as a mix between *Beowulf* and *Spamalot*, is a comedy about friendship, duty, and what it means to be a hero.

Drama Club Advisor Maria Szczepanik directed the cast of 15 students who performed the relatively new play, written by Vidas Barzdukas and Christopher R. Barlett. This fun, frenetic, and freewheeling farce updated the Old English poem about the warrior Beowulf, who must rescue the mead hall from a hideous ogre and its even more hideous mother. Unlike the traditional story, Beowulf is an out-of-shape prince hoping to fulfill the heroic code, while the storyteller bard is a desperate poet struggling with a nasty case of writer's block.

Proceeds from *Beowulf (and the Bard)* will benefit the OPHS Drama Club's fall production in 2022. The entire community is invited to the upcoming spring musical from March 17 to 20: *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat* by Andrew Lloyd Webber and Tim Rice.

Virtual Backpack



The OPCSD's Virtual Backpack is a central repository of informational flyers that can be found at:

<http://opschools.org/domain/1752>

New flyers are added on a weekly basis, so please be sure to check your school's Virtual Backpack regularly for the most up-to-date information. Scan the code at right to view now.



OPCSD Community Embraces the Giving Spirit *(continued)*



Luca Clerici (*pictured at far left*), a student in 5th Grade at Ellicott Elementary, became inspired upon reading *Home of the Brave* as part of a grade-wide assignment. The book's main character is a refugee who comes to the USA. He and student leaders from each of the 5th Grade classes (*pictured at left*) organized a collection to benefit Journey's End Refugee Services in Buffalo.



To celebrate nearby neighbor Catherine Abate's 112th birthday, students 100 years younger at Orchard Park Middle School (OPMS) created 112 unique cards. Teacher aide Tracy Schosek delivered the cards to Catherine (*both pictured at far left*) at Elderwood Assisted Living Facility in Hamburg. An extended video is available online at wgrz.com.



Tara Zimmerman's Kindergarten class at Eggert Elementary (*pictured at left*) participated in the Samaritan's Purse Shoe Box Project on Friday, November 12. They celebrated the day by first reading about what it means to show kindness. Then they donated items and created holiday cards for children in need around the world. The students continued to focus on acts of kindness every Friday through December.



STAP Comm set up donation boxes, had a sticker sale, and did a door decorating contest of ribbons (*see the winning "Just Keep Swimming" homeroom at far left*) for an Adopt-a-Family program through Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center, raising \$2,400 in gift cards. Last but not least, an OPHS holiday jazz concert fundraiser raised \$1,000 toward new boots for Journey's End Refugee Services (*see immediate left*).

January 2022 Regents Examinations Cancelled Due to Pandemic

The January 2022 administration of the High School Regents Examination Program is cancelled due to the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, State Education Commissioner Betty A. Rosa announced on December 21, 2021. This cancellation applies to all Regents Examinations that had been scheduled for the January 2022 Regents Examination period. No decisions have been made regarding the June and August 2022 administrations of Regents Examinations or any other State assessment programs.

Due to this cancellation, students will attend school following their normal schedule on those days. Please continue to check our online calendar regularly at www.opschools.org for ongoing updates.



Students Learn About Holidays in November



Sargeant First Class Joseph O'Connor with the Army Reserve National Guard visited Eggert Elementary on November 10 with an M997A3 Ambulance to discuss the military and explain the importance of Veterans Day. He is part of the Company C 427th Brigade Support Battalion, the largest medical unit in New York State. His son, Cameron, attends 2nd Grade at Eggert.



Jane Tweed, a teacher aide at OPMS, was a guest speaker during 7th Grade social studies classes to discuss the significance of Native American Heritage Month. She shared artifacts from her grandfather, a member of the Lakhota Sioux in Wyoming.



Henry Roche prepares to enjoy a Thanksgiving feast at South Davis Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK). Students created maize bead table centerpieces and turkey headbands with three drawings of things they are thankful for. UPK teacher Leah Coder also helped Henry and students learn to set the table properly, try everything, and wait until everyone is served before eating.

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CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
TRANSPORTATION OFFICE AT**

716-209-6237

Responding to the Needs of Our Students with a Focus on Wellness

By: Dr. Lisa M. Krueger*, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction & Pupil Services

As a school district committed to educating the whole child, we take pride in our comprehensive educational program. Our vision of a comprehensive program is one that meets the needs of students academically, physically, and socially-emotionally. From our varied course offerings at our high school to our visual and performing arts, athletics and rich extra-curricular offerings, we strive to create courses and learning experiences to fulfill our mission.



The Mission of the Orchard Park Central School District (OPCSD) is: *In partnership with families and community, the OPCSD will prepare our students to:*

- *Achieve their fullest potential*
- *Develop critical thinking, creativity, and character*
- *Become healthy, lifelong learners*
- *Be responsible and contributing members of an ever-changing and global society*

In alignment with our mission, Orchard Park Middle School (OPMS) launched a 6th Grade Wellness course three years ago in response to the needs presented by our students. 6th Grade wellness teacher Laura Lukowski believes her instructional focus on peer relationships, making positive choices, and social media is having an impact on her students. She said, "My classroom is a safe space where we study topics from mental and emotional health to vaping." Mrs. Lukowski regularly collaborates with her colleagues and her lessons often feature guest speakers such as our School Resource Officer John Starr, who leads lessons on use and abuse of drugs, alcohol, and vaping.

In preparation for the 2021-2022 school year and to be responsive to the needs of our students resulting from the pandemic, OPCSD launched a K-5 Health & Wellness curriculum. Under this new model, health and wellness is taught as a once-weekly class by the Health & Wellness teachers. The instruction supports the NYS and National Learning Standards for Health Education, as well as the seven domains of health education: self-management, relationship management, stress management, communication, decision making, planning, and goal setting and advocacy.

Initial feedback on this programmatic change is incredibly positive. "Our students are lucky to have learning experiences so pertinent, relevant, and responsive to their needs," said Chad Filipski. Interpersonal skills such as teamwork and communication are important life skills sought by employers, yet their development has been challenging through the complications of the pandemic.

Health and wellness lessons focusing on listening skills, eye contact, greetings, and using another individual's name are interpersonal skills our students learn and practice.

To promote health and safety, the K-5 Wellness teachers also support school-wide learning activities and events such as Red Ribbon Week and Fire Prevention Week. Mary Claire Vivian enthusiastically described the rewarding nature of this work, saying, "It is so incredibly powerful to have a positive impact on our students' behaviors."

During our recent parent/teacher conferences, several parents expressed their appreciation for this new program. Parents described how their children are identifying their emotions and using breathing techniques to help calm their frustrations at home. For example, Eggert Kindergarten teacher Kim Criscione reported, "Mrs. Starosielec's lessons are having an impact on our students, and parents are so appreciative of this opportunity for their kids!"

Providing our students with a strong foundation to support their physical and mental wellness are skills that can benefit our students for the rest of their lives. "We are raising children in unprecedented and difficult times," explained Julie Rupp. "We strongly value our students' emotional and physical wellbeing. The direct and specific instruction on skills that promote resilience, good decision making, respect, and empathy at such an early age will support our students as they grow into citizens of our world."

**Contributing story writers included the following Health & Wellness Teachers: Victoria Cavanagh (Windom), Chad Filipski (Windom & Ellicott), Laura Lukowski (OPMS 6th Grade), Julie Rupp, (South Davis & Eggert), Jaclyn Starosielec (Eggert), and Mary Claire Vivian (Ellicott).*

Upcoming Dates and Topics for the 2021-2022 Parent Information Series

- *Thursday, January 13: Gender Identity/LGBTQ+*
- *Wednesday, March 9: "Screenagers" Film Discussion*
- *Tuesday, April 5: The Legalization of Marijuana*
- *Thursday, May 26: Teen Driving Safety*

www.opschools.org/PIS

Ten OPHS Seniors Commit to Play Sports at the Collegiate Level



Pictured, left to right, standing: Madalyn Covelli, Madison Stevenson, Joshua Stegner, Sean Becker, Patrick Evans, Miles Haak, Brady McGowan. Pictured, left to right, seated: Emily Brock, Grace Schmelzinger, Olivia Lucidi.

Sean Becker intends to play baseball and study accounting at SUNY Brockport. He has maintained an average in the high 90's throughout middle and high school while playing both school and travel baseball as well as ice hockey. Throughout Sean's 12 years of playing baseball, he has played nearly every position and primarily covered third base for Orchard Park High School.

Emily Brock intends to join the bowling team and study business administration with a minor in sports recreation and management at Medaille College. She has bowled since age 3, starting at Kenmore Lanes – where her mother worked at the time. Emily enjoys the atmosphere of team competition and is excited to bowl at the collegiate level.

Madalyn "Maddie" Covelli intends to play softball and study applied economics and management with a concentration in finance at Cornell University. She aspires to become a financial analyst and eventually advance to the level of chief financial officer. Maddie chose Cornell University for its academic rigor, quality softball coaching staff, and Ivy League competition. She began playing softball eight years ago. Maddie earned ECIC I First Team honors in 2021 as a pitcher.

Patrick Evans intends to play baseball and study business management at SUNY Niagara. He felt inspired by his older brothers to play baseball, beginning 12 years ago. Patrick is impressed by the coaching staff at SUNY Niagara and is confident their expertise will help improve his play.

Miles Haak intends to play soccer and study graphic and multimedia design at SUNY Canton in northern New York State. He first began playing house league soccer 13 years ago. Miles chose SUNY Canton for its academics, the campus, and the opportunity to continue playing soccer at a competitive level.

Olivia Lucidi intends to play lacrosse and study nursing at Gardner-Webb University, a private Christian university located 50 miles west of Charlotte in southwestern North Carolina. She is excited for the opportunity to play Division 1 lacrosse while gaining knowledge to become a nurse practitioner or anesthetist. Olivia first began playing lacrosse 12 years ago in kindergarten and received coaching instruction from her father.

Brady McGowan intends to play lacrosse and study elementary education at Alfred University. He began playing the sport in high school upon inspiration from his older siblings. Brady chose Alfred University for its class sizes, campus, outstanding lacrosse coaches, and the opportunity to learn how to teach young children.

Grace Schmelzinger intends to play field hockey and study political science at Colgate University, located in Central New York. She aspires to graduate to law school and eventually work for the federal government in Washington, D.C. Grace first began playing field hockey 10 years ago and became acquainted with Colgate University through training with the prestigious USA Futures Program. She believes Colgate offers the perfect combination of academic and athletic challenge as well as a strong sense of community. As a field hockey player, Grace achieved First Team All-Western New York and Section VI All-State.

Joshua Stegner intends to participate in men's swimming and study business and real estate at Loyola University Maryland in Baltimore. He first began swimming at the local YMCA 12 years ago and enjoys it as a competitive sport. Joshua chose Loyola University Maryland for its competitive Division 1 program as well as the university's strong academics and beautiful campus. This past March, Joshua and three teammates set a Section VI record and All-America qualifying time of 1:34.56 in the 200-yard medley relay.

Madison Stevenson will fulfill a lifelong dream to play Division 1 basketball at an HBCU (historically black college and university) when she attends Howard University in Washington, D.C. on a full athletic scholarship. Madison will study marketing and management before applying to law school. She aspires to own a sports agency and represent professional athletes. Madison is 6'4" tall and joined Orchard Park's varsity women's basketball team in 8th Grade. She is excited to attend an HBCU and learn more about her heritage.



Resident

Upcoming Events in January and February

January 11 – Board of Education Meeting
January 14 – Middle School Half Day Dismissal at 10:30 a.m.
January 14 – Universal Pre-K Half Day Dismissal at 11:00 a.m.
January 14 – Elementary Half Day Dismissal at 11:30 a.m.
January 14 – High School Early Dismissal at 12:45 p.m.
January 16 – Quaker Cheer Challenge
January 17 – Martin Luther King Jr. Holiday – No School
January 19 – High School Festival of Bands at 7 p.m.
January 25-28 – High School Regents Exams CANCELLED
January 28 – Middle School 2nd Marking Period Closes
January 28 – Middle School Musical at 7 p.m.
January 29 – Middle School Musical at 2 p.m.
January 31-February 4 – Middle School Yearbook Sale

February 5 – High School Winter Homecoming Dance at 7:30 p.m.
February 8 – Board of Education Meeting
February 9-10 – Windom Elementary Musical at 7 p.m.
February 14-15 – Eggert Elementary Musical at 7 p.m.
February 16-17 – South Davis Elementary Musical at 7 p.m.
February 18 – Middle School Half Day Dismissal at 10:30 a.m.
February 18 – Universal Pre-K Half Day Dismissal at 11:00 a.m.
February 18 – Elementary Half Day Dismissal at 11:30 a.m.
February 18 – High School Early Dismissal at 12:45 p.m.
February 21-25 – Mid-Winter Break – No School

Petitions for Candidacy on the Board of Education Begin March 1, 2022

Petitions for school board candidates in the Orchard Park Central School District will be available beginning March 1, 2022 in the Office of the District Clerk, 2240 Southwestern Blvd, West Seneca, Monday thru Friday during normal business hours.

To be a qualified candidate for the Board of Education, you must be a resident of the district for at least one year prior to the election, a citizen of the United States, at least 18 years of age, able to read and write, and cannot be an employee of the district.

The terms of two trustees on the seven-member school board are up for election: Mr. Dwight Eagan and Mr. Robert Mahany. Each term is for three years, July 1, 2022 – June 30, 2025.

Candidates must obtain at least 33 valid signatures. Petitions are due in the office of the District Clerk by 5 p.m. on Monday, April 18, 2022.

Public voting on the budget and Board of Education candidates will be held on Tuesday, May 17, 2022 from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the Orchard Park High School Gymnasium. Please use the Freeman Road entrance.

Championship Sports Teams for Fall 2021

Boys Varsity Golf

ECIC Large School Champions and ECIC League Champions
(7th championship in the past 10 years)

Boys Varsity Volleyball

Section VI Division 1 Champions (2 years in a row)

Girls Varsity Cheerleading

Class B Game Day Cheer Champions

Girls Varsity Swim

Section VI Class A Champions (6 years in a row)

Girls Varsity Tennis

Section VI Team Champions

Jimmy the Pig: A Mascot for Financial Literacy



The piggy bank, a symbol of saving money, has come to life at OPHS to promote financial literacy. Its name also pays homage to a retired OPHS accounting teacher.

Jimmy the Pig, named after Jim Agnew, proudly dons business attire and promotes the importance of saving, investing, budgeting, and planning for a stable financial future. He serves as the official mascot for the OPHS Academy of Finance and aims to spread awareness of financial literacy throughout the Orchard Park community.