

Tusker Nation

SOMERS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT NEWS
FOR SCSD FAMILIES

Important Updates

- SHS schedule change informational meeting - January 31 at 7 p.m., SHS Auditorium
 - Board of Education meeting February 12 at 7 p.m., SMS Library
 - Half day of school February 6 - Professional Learning Day
 - Winter Break February 18-22
 - New Tusker Talk episodes - a podcast from Somers Schools. Search Tusker Talk on your podcast app and subscribe, or look under the [Community](#) tab on the SCSD homepage.
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New Security Vestibules to Open Soon

The new security vestibules at Somers Middle School and Primrose Elementary School are in the final stages of construction. The district anticipates they will be in operation at the end of February or early March. When the vestibules open, a greeter will monitor everyone coming and going from that entrance.



Looking through the greeter window to the new middle school entry point.

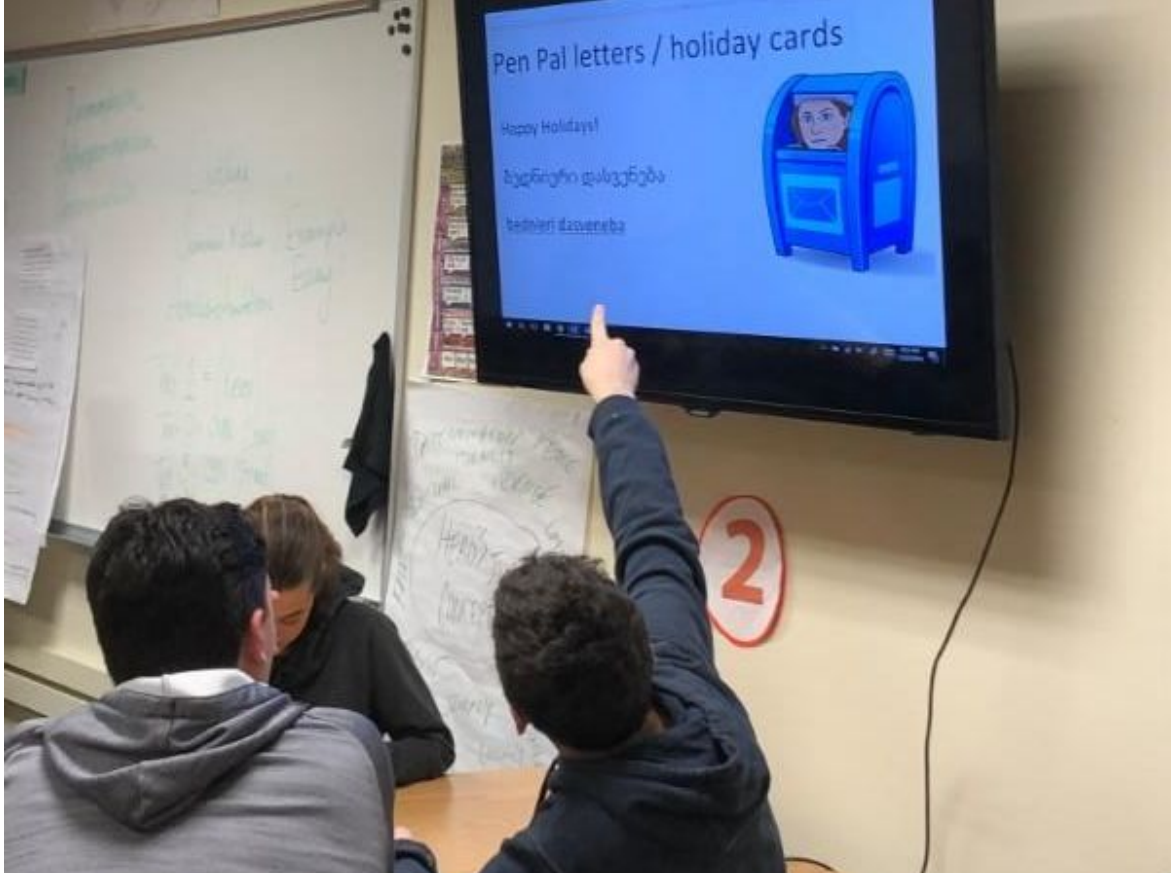
Elconin selected as Director of Special Services

Somers Intermediate School Principal Stacey Elconin has been selected as the finalist for the Director of Special Services position. Superintendent Raymond Blanch will be recommending her formal appointment at the February 12th Board of Education meeting, with a start date of July 1, 2019.

Elconin has been a valued member of the Somers Central School District for many years, first as an elementary school teacher, then as assistant principal at Somers Intermediate School before becoming that school's principal. Current Director of Special Services, Annamarie Maggio, is retiring in June



Embedded Honors Increases Engagement



Students learn to write "happy holidays" in the Georgian language.

Savannah Baloy is reading aloud from a slip of white paper, stumbling over the quirky grammar.

"I like to watch comedy show and sports TV. I am very happy to know about you. I want to you to come to my country in Tkibuli.

Baloy and her fellow grade nine Humanities classmates have just received their second letters from pen pals in Georgia, a country at the crossroads of Western Asia and Eastern Europe. English teacher Katherine DeLandri organized the exchange with fellow Somers High School graduate Kendra Burpee, who is in the Peace Corps teaching English in the small town of Tkibuli.

"So far I've learned they have similar interests as me, even though they are far away," says Robbie Conti. "My pen pal, Dato, and I have the same favorite actor - Adam Sandler."

Humanities 9 is a hybrid English and Social Studies course in its inaugural year at the high school, co-taught by DeLandri and history teacher Tara Kearns. Students spend a double period every day in the class and will continue the course with the same teachers in grade 10. In addition to satisfying the state English and Social Studies requirements, this course is piloting an embedded honors program.

Embedded honors is a format that allows students to choose Regents-level assessments or honors-level assessments at the end of each unit of study. In this class, all final unit assessments are in the form of tiered projects. In order to achieve an honors distinction at the end of the year, the student must have taken at least five of the seven unit assessments at the honors level, and both the English and history finals at the honors level. So far, almost every one of the 35 students in the class has taken at least one assessment at the honors level.

"The diverse group of learners created by the embedded honors model fosters a growth mindset," says Kearns. "Kids are being challenged and pushed by the other students around them and they're succeeding at a higher level of thinking and learning."

The recent graphic novel project is a good example of the combined English/history course work. It also illustrates the difference between Regents-level and honors-level work. In writing their graphic novels, students had two options. If they chose Regents-level work, their novel needed to show symbols for one belief system, evidence of information, and two graphic novel techniques. If the students chose honors-level work, their novel needed to compare and contrast two belief systems, show multiple stages of the hero's journey, and exhibit four graphic novel techniques.

Feedback from the students on the embedded honors format has been overwhelmingly positive. They say they enjoy the challenge, but feel less stressed because they can choose when and how to challenge themselves.

"I evaluate criteria more and I have to understand the option to decide if I can do well with it," says one student.

"This format gives us time to process what we're learning," says another student. "Teachers have to hear our voices to know what we're thinking."

Given the success of the Humanities 9 embedded honors, the district is looking into expanding the pilot program.

Joseph Wins Prestigious Science Award

For the fourth year in a row, a Somers High School student has been named a semi-finalist in the prestigious Regeneron Science



George Latimer, Westchester County Executive, SHS Senior Rachel Joseph, Science Research teacher Bill Maelia.

Talent Search competition. Senior Rachel Joseph is one of 300 students selected as an STS Scholar by the nation's oldest science and math competition for high school seniors.

Joseph's environmental engineering research project, which explores ways to make waste water treatment more energy efficient, was one of 1,964 entries in the competition. Her research wasn't the only accomplishment that caught the eye of the contest judges.

"One of the reasons this contest is unique," says Science Research teacher Bill Maelia, "Is that it takes into account not only the research but the whole child. They look at transcripts, test scores, extracurriculars. They're searching for well-rounded scientific minds - the STEM [science, technology, engineering, math] minds of tomorrow."

As part of her award, Joseph won \$2,000 for herself, and for Somers High School. Congratulations Rachel!

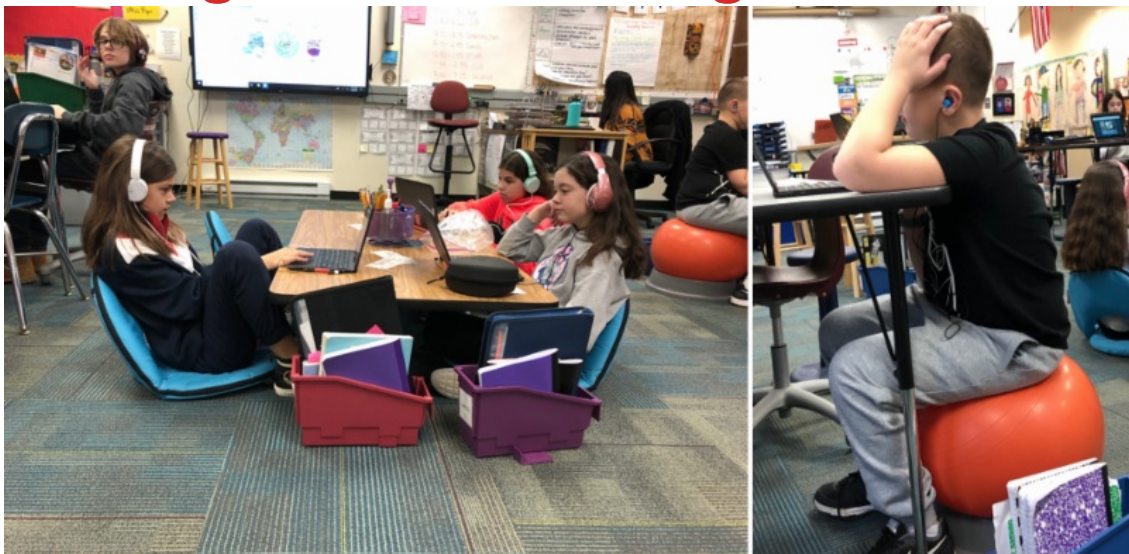
Teamwork Keeps Students Afloat



Grade 10 physical education students complete the River Crossing challenge.

One of the more challenging activities for Somers High School sophomores in their physical education class is the River Crossing Challenge. This team building activity requires constant communication, the ability to manage impulses, learning from past mistakes, and practicing empathy. It is an important precursor to the ropes course the students experience this spring. **Watch** this group make their way across the 60 foot "river" and encounter a few shaky moments along the way.

Focusing on Flexible Seating



Fifth-graders at Somers Intermediate School take advantage of flexible seating options

On a recent afternoon in a fifth-grade classroom at Somers Intermediate School, students are scattered around the room focused intently on their work. Some are reclining on floor chairs, others are gently rocking on wobble stools, and one is bouncing quietly on an exercise ball. Julian Rosa's favorite spot is a standing desk.

"It helps me focus more when I'm standing up," Julian says. "I'm an active person and I do better work when I'm standing."

Special Education Teacher Randi Pepe outfitted the classroom in which she co-teaches with Kelly

Gronert with flexible seating options thanks to a \$500 grant from the Special Education Parent Teacher Association (SEPTA). It was such a positive experiment, Pepe and district Occupational Therapist Allison Quincoses were awarded another \$1000 SEPTA grant to create a Flexible Seating Lending Library at the intermediate school. A similar grant was given to Primrose Elementary School. Quincoses says the lending library has been such an overwhelming success she can't keep up with the demand for the seating.

"These seating options increase focus, attention and engagement by increasing alertness," says Quincoses. "The kids make more informed decisions about what kind of learners they are and where they learn best, and then we give them the tools to do it."

"This stool was great for my student who often tips his chair," says third-grade teacher Stacey Lockard. "He just needs a little bit of movement to keep him focused."

Third-grade special education teacher Melissa Mamarella echoed the sentiment about her student and his increased focus while sitting on an exercise ball.

Teachers have put in requests for other seating options, including bean bag chairs, surf desks, and swivel chairs. Research shows that flexible seating options, which can be easily and quickly moved around to accommodate small groups, are beneficial in developing 21st century learning skills. Not only does the alternative seating help students do well in the classroom, it is reflective of many modern-day office spaces where employees are encouraged to set up laptops wherever they are comfortable and settle in to work.

PTA throws a middle school social



The Somers Middle School Parent Teacher Association organizes socials for sixth and seventh grade students twice a year. Centered on different themes, the socials are a time for the students to socialize while enjoying music and pizza. Money raised from these events help fund Author's Day, Cultural Affairs Assemblies (Electricity & Human Body), scholarships for students in need, Living History Day and the Holocaust Presentation.

Spotlight on Somers: Middle Years Programme



Somers Middle School is transitioning to the Middle Years Programme, the middle school extension of the International Baccalaureate Programme. [Watch](#) Superintendent Ray Blanch and SMS Principal Jeff Getman discuss why they are making the change, and how it will benefit students.



Somers Central School District
250 Route 202
Somers, NY 10589
914.277.2400
www.somersschools.org

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