



GATES CHILI

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Fall Newsletter 2020

Spartans return to learn in person and online

It may have looked different this year, but face coverings couldn't hide the smiles of students and staff, along with the accompanying enthusiasm felt on the first days of school on Sept. 14-15. Students engaged in learning, laughing and connecting with classmates, and staff welcomed students both virtually and in person for this first-of-its-kind school year.

Gates Chili welcomed back approximately 70% of its students in person, while roughly 30% of district students opted to remain fully remote and engage with their teachers online. The 70% of students who are in-person learners attend school two or more days per week and learn remotely on the other day(s). This makes it possible to have fewer students in the classroom at once, which makes adhering to social distancing guidelines attainable.

Superintendent of Schools Christopher Dailey said a lot of work went on behind the scenes by district staff, who spent months planning, preparing and wading through new requirements from the New York State Education Department to make sure the buildings were ready, and systems were in place.

“As this pandemic evolves, we will continue to adapt and adjust, so that our students will have equitable and accessible learning experiences.”

- Superintendent of Schools
Christopher Dailey

“Our staff and families have quickly adapted to these new routines,” said Dailey. “From mask-wearing to social distancing, everything we are doing has helped to keep illness out of our schools as much as possible. We urge our school community to be vigilant with safety procedures outside of school, so we can keep our students and staff safe and healthy.”

Before coming to school each day, students and staff complete a health screening, which determines if they are eligible to come to school or not. This tool helps nursing staff and administrators sort and monitor responses quickly to keep all students and staff safe.



In the classroom, educators are overcoming new challenges every day as they seek to meet the learning needs of all students. They are finding a balance between fostering relationships with students in the classroom, while also making important connections with students learning from home.

“Every day since this pandemic began, our teachers and staff members have been reinventing the way they teach and interact with students in our buildings,” Dailey said. “As this pandemic evolves, we will continue to adapt and adjust, so that our students will have equitable and accessible learning experiences.”

To see more photos of in-person and remote learning in progress, go to pages 6-7.



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Together we teach and inspire excellence for all learners.

Letter from the Superintendent



Dear Gates Chili Community,

The students, staff and families of the Gates Chili Central School District have had a wonderful start to the 2020-21 school year! I want to

begin by thanking our administrative, technology, facilities and clerical staff for getting all our buildings ready for another successful year. I also want to thank the teachers, support staff, school nutrition and transportation teams, and administrators for an outstanding first few months for our Spartans. Our district is ready to facilitate more success stories for our community each day.

Gates Chili continues to stay focused on moving forward with engaging

students in their education during these unique times. Whether hybrid or remote, we will carry on our tradition of academic, art, music, technology, and athletic excellence, while looking for new opportunities to grow and provide each child with the best experience in every aspect of their education.

This year, we will continue our goal of engaging staff in targeted professional development opportunities that build capacity to support student-centered learning. We will also continue to develop an understanding of culturally-responsive practices to cultivate the power of relationships and foster meaningful connections. Throughout this issue, you will see stories of how we are coming together as a district to meet these goals.

Our district is continuously seeking to improve, and we look forward to the educational journey that this year holds. We thank you for your partnership in doing all we can to provide a safe and healthy environment. As a community, we must continue to be vigilant about handwashing, mask-wearing and social distancing so that we may provide a learning experience that maintains high standards for each student while developing the whole child.

Go Spartans!

Christopher J. Dailey
Superintendent of Schools



BOARD OF EDUCATION



Dear Gates Chili Community,

We are very proud of how the district and the community have collaborated to ensure a great start to the 2020-21 school year. The hard work and preparation that went into the COVID-19 transition is evident each day.

We urge all community members to productively contribute to ensuring our students continue to receive the best educational experience available in Monroe County. One way to do so is to stay up on Board of Education business. Go to gateschili.org/BOE for updates and to watch Board of Education meetings live online.

See you at our next meeting!

Your Gates Chili Board of Education

Gates Chili makes moves on *equity*

Nearly 200 staff members, students and other school community members took part in the United Way's 21-Day Equity Challenge that began on Oct. 23. This virtual event, open to people across the Rochester area, gave participants an opportunity to develop a deeper understanding of how inequity and racism affect our lives, our community, our students and our colleagues.



In addition to the equity challenge, the Gates Chili Root Cause team has been working together for more than a year to identify disproportionality within the district and recognize and plan for ways to affect permanent change in practices. As a group, they have invested hundreds of hours into our professional learning to create a research-based, strategic multi-year plan to improve outcomes for all students. Look for more specific information about the strategic plan in the winter issue of this newsletter.

WANTED: Budget Ambassadors

To gain valuable feedback during the budget development process, the district is launching a Budget Ambassador Program for the 2021-22 school year budget.

To apply to participate in this program, complete the form at gateschili.org/BudgetAmbassador by Monday, Jan. 4, 2021 at 5 p.m.

No experience is necessary, but ambassadors must be residents of the district.



Capital Project Update

Another school year brings more progress to several phases of the Gates Chili capital improvement project.

Construction is moving right along at Neil Armstrong and Walt Disney elementary schools. Playgrounds at both schools are complete and already in use this school year. Crews at each site continue to work on metal stud framing and mechanical rough-in. At Disney, roof work is complete and masonry brickwork is underway. At Armstrong, a water line has been relocated, foundations are complete, and crews are now working on structural steel.

At Gates Chili High School, the skyline has changed as crews make progress on the Gates Chili Performing Arts

Center. The inside of the PAC is beginning to look like such, with the stage house wall now complete. Over the next couple of months, masons will continue to lay block. Mechanical and electrical trades are working with the mason. Meanwhile, the new parking lot for the PAC is nearly complete with light pole bases being installed. When complete, the parking lot will accommodate more than 260 vehicles during events.

Gates Chili Middle School is nearly complete and most of the building made its debut to students on the first day of school on Sept. 14. The upgrades include Main Street Middle School, new art and family and consumer sciences (FACS) classrooms, a new counseling suite and much more.



Gates Chili Middle School

Crews at GCMS are still working on several areas. The old counseling and health office rooms are in the process of being renovated into an adaptive living space, OT/PT room and other classroom spaces for our special education programs. These rooms will be completed by the end of the year.

The entire project is expected to be completed by the end of 2021.



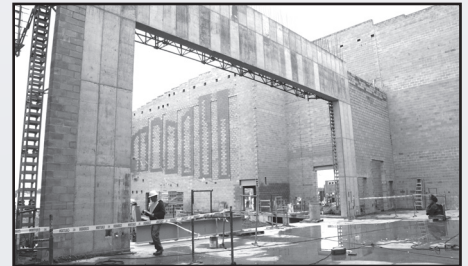
Neil Armstrong Elementary School



Walt Disney Elementary School



Gates Chili Performing Arts Center



Celebrating state-of-the-art upgrades at GCMS

Gates Chili Middle School students helped to cut the ribbon on new construction just ahead of the new school year. The event held Sept. 1 featured remarks from Superintendent Christopher Dailey, GCMS Principal Dr. Lisa Buckshaw and NYS Board of Regents Vice Chancellor T. Andrew Brown. After the ceremony, students led small groups of board members and other staff around the building to show off the upgrades mentioned above. For a virtual tour of the upgrades at GCMS and updates on other phases of the project, go to gateschili.org/CapitalProject.



Promoting social-emotional wellness with *circles*

Research shows that resilience, self-regulation and healthy relationships have the power to insulate children against adversity and help them to better handle life's ups and downs. Taking this into consideration, teachers throughout the district are focused on building trust and relationships through community circles.

In Christine Smelt's fourth-grade class at Florence Brasser Elementary School the focus of the circles changes daily, but the meetings follow a similar format. Students make a circle around the perimeter of the room and go around the circle sharing anything

on their minds. Often, it's upcoming life events, how they are feeling or important accomplishments. The second go-around is a more directed share such as, "what do you do when you feel stressed?"

"It is amazing how quickly some students have opened right up to share things that are bothering them or things they are proud of," Smelt said. "Through these circles, they are learning how to be confident and how to be an active listener when someone else is speaking."

At the kindergarten level, circles look very similar and often begin with a

simple prompt. In Katie Reinhardt's class at Walt Disney Elementary School, students also focus on body language and eye contact. The end-result is that creative ideas are valued, and concerns are addressed all before 9:40 a.m.

"Often, I have a child take over leading the circle and I become just a participant," Reinhardt said. "They pop into the leadership role, pointing to or calling on children by name and asking follow up questions. During these uncertain times, community circles give them a chance for their voices to be heard."



GCMS *students inducted* into NJHS

The Gates Chili Middle School National Junior Honor Society added 34 new members to its ranks.

National Junior Honor Society is founded on the principles of leadership, character, citizenship, scholarship and service. To be eligible for NJHS, middle school students go through a rigorous application process. This year's inductees completed this application process during the pandemic at the end of last school year. Students were also required to have a 93.0 average or higher in grades 6-7, have excellent character, be connected in their community through service and seen as a leader in school and in their community.

Congratulations to the Gates Chili Middle School NJHS class of 2020: Kayla Anthony, Anna Brewer, Elizabeth Cassidy, Emily Christopher, John Coval, Katherine Cuyler, Nicholas Dallo, Logan Feissner, Makayla Flanagan, Ryleigh Forte, Abigail Graupman, Cole Goreman, Marissa Griffin, Connor Hahn, Camryn Kingsbury, Noah Leathersich, Nina Lenzi, Benett Marconi, Lorelai McCulloch, William Menard, Gabriella Meyers, Bennett Miley, Drea Otis, Jocelyn Simone Parris, Alexander Quartley, Khristina Quan, Carli Quinlan, Lauryn Reyes, Samuel Remp, Michaela Scott-Jones, Colton Short, Myla Seng, Heidi Tran, and Isabel Zoller.



Keeping remote learners *engaged*

More than 450 fully-remote students in elementary school are utilizing various computer programs to further their learning and engage with teachers in real-time through Microsoft Teams.

“We didn’t really know what to expect, especially after last year,” said Shayna Ruckdeschel, whose daughter is a fully-remote kindergartener. “She’s grown more independent as the weeks have gone on. She’s actually thriving.”

For these 22 classes of fully-remote students in grades K-5, learning goes beyond the computer screen. Students are also having the chance to take part in hands-on learning. Monthly, teachers send home bags



of learning materials that include manipulatives for math, tools to support literacy, fine motor kits, writing and science journals, supplies for music, art and physical education classes, flash cards and more. Students use these tools to support the lessons they receive virtually.

“It has to be a balance of instructional technology and hands-on learning experiences,” said Early Learning Coordinator Erin Ugine. “By seeing, doing and creating in different ways, these students are deepening their understanding.”

Getting learning materials in the hands of students was no easy task, but the district had some help from community partners at Tops, The Garden Factory and Target,

who donated hundreds of bags to help with sorting and distribution. The district also had help from its bus drivers, who delivered learning materials to families unable to pick up. All these tools are helping students to form important connections to their schoolwork and their classmates.

“She has never met her teacher or any of her classmates in person, but she talks about them all the time,” Ruckdeschel said. “I was very concerned about the social development, but she is really getting to know her friends. She often talks about their likes and dislikes and can’t wait to meet them in person. I’m so grateful to the teachers who are working so hard to make these students feel connected.”



Videoconferencing migrates to *Teams*

When schools first shut down back in March, districts nationwide scrambled to move to remote learning, many utilizing Zoom videoconferencing to stay in touch with and provide lessons to students.

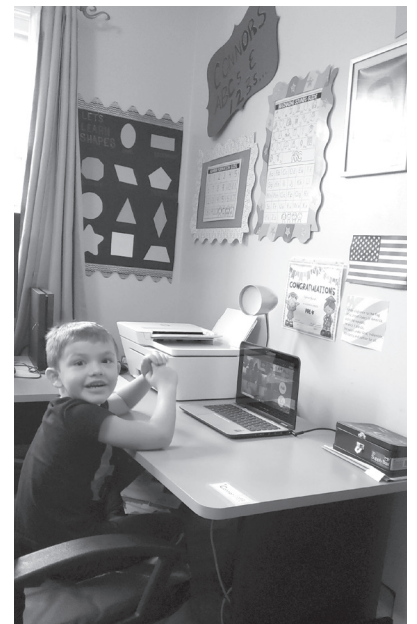
Ahead of the start of the new year school year, district leaders came together and made a methodical decision to move the entire district to Microsoft Teams, which has similar functionality, and is already integrated with the district’s use of Microsoft Office 365.

“Providing a safe and secure remote learning experience for our students is critical,” said Director of Technology Troy Olin. “In Gates Chili, we were already on track to move to Microsoft Teams, so we simply expedited that process to maximize online safety and security.”

As more schools move to Teams, Microsoft is continuously evolving and adapting to meet the needs of educators. Some recent changes include increased functionality and options for virtual classrooms.

“ Providing a safe and secure remote learning experience for our students is critical. ”

- Director of Technology Troy Olin





We can't mask our



excitement to be back



SENIORS BREAK FOR THE MOST IMPORTANT MEAL OF THE DAY

A spooky and spirited, but also safe and socially distant, Halloween-themed breakfast served as the first official senior event for the Class of 2021.

With face masks and costume masks galore, the annual event moved outdoors to the GCHS parking lot on Oct. 29. Dozens of seniors arrived as early as 6:15 a.m. to show off epic costumes for a costume contest, eat breakfast served on the Spartan Eats bus, stay warm by fire pits and make memories as a class. It was the first time this year they've been able to gather as a class.

"It was so nice to be able to finally have a senior event in a fun, safe environment," said senior Kalissa Marks. "I loved hanging out and catching up with people I don't always see on in-school days."

Class advisors, volunteers, security and facilities workers, the Gates Chili School Nutrition team and members of the high school leadership team worked to make the event as "normal" as possible, but with COVID-19 cases on the rise again, their top priority was safety.

"Despite the masks and the distancing, the students were in great spirits," said Principal Ken Hammel. "This event was a great reminder that it's on all of us to take health and safety seriously by wearing masks and social distancing outside of school, so we can keep hosting events to celebrate our students."



Contributions to the GCEF now on display

The latest round of brick pavers, purchased to benefit the Gates Chili Education Foundation (GCEF), have been installed at Spartan Stadium.

GCEF Brick pavers, which line the stadium walkway, are still available for purchase. Your personalized paver can honor a graduate, inspire a student, thank a teacher, remember a loved one, show community partner support, recognize a PTO organization or acknowledge a local business.

Each four-by-six-inch paver is \$60. For more information on the GCEF or to purchase a brick, go to gateschili.org/GCEF.



Peer leaders continue their *Service* to the community



The pandemic is putting limits on many things, but not the service of Gates Chili High School Peer Leaders. On Oct. 22, groups of students took time to volunteer for FoodLink, distributing food to those in need at the Gates Recreation Center. Through the Peer Leadership I and II classes taken in the 11th- or 12th-grade year, students complete 210 hours of community service.



Building a *CHAMPIONSHIP CULTURE*

Months after the COVID-19 pandemic shut down all sports and activities, Gates Chili student-athletes are finally getting back in the game.

On Sept. 28, 10 high school teams returned to athletics: boys and girls varsity and JV soccer; boys and girls varsity cross country; girls varsity swimming and diving; girls varsity tennis; varsity field hockey; and gymnastics. Then on Oct. 5, five middle school teams began practicing: boys and girls modified soccer; modified cross country; girls modified swimming and diving; and girls modified tennis. For the class of 2021, playing sports for the first time in months is especially momentous.

“Through these hard times I feel like being able to play a sport and do something that you are truly passionate about can really lift your spirits,” said Sierra Fernandez, captain of the varsity field hockey team. “As a senior this is a great opportunity to make our final memories with each other as a team.”

“We are excited to welcome school-based athletics back to Gates Chili,” said Director of Physical Education, Health and Athletics Dr. Patrick Irving. “These athletic opportunities are invaluable for our students’ development and overall educational experience in our district.”

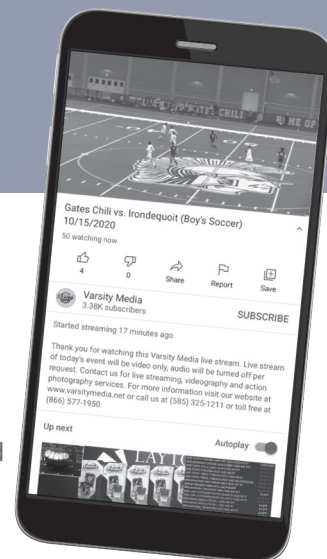
Other traditional fall sports, such as football, volleyball and competitive cheerleading, were deemed high-risk activities so the New York State Public High School Athletic Association moved those sports to the spring. Their season, set to begin on March 1, has been dubbed “Fall II.” A silver lining to the changes in the athletic calendar is that students now have a unique opportunity.

“ Through these hard times I feel like being able to play a sport and do something that you are truly passionate about can really lift your spirits. ”

- Sierra Fernandez, varsity field hockey captain

“We always have dozens of student-athletes play three sports throughout the year, but now for the first time ever, Gates Chili students will have the opportunity to become four-sport athletes,” said Irving. “From improved health and wellness to decreased injury rates and improved athletic and academic performance, there are many benefits to students playing multiple sports.”

Both three-sport and four-sport student-athletes will be recognized and celebrated this spring for their dedication to the athletic program.



Due to ongoing concerns about COVID-19, the district is adhering to strict safety protocols during practices and competitive play. Those protocols include wearing masks and social distancing whenever possible. For now, spectators are limited to two per player, but all fans are invited to watch many of the contests streamed live from Spartan Stadium and the Gates Chili HS Field House pool provided by Varsity Media. Several other local districts are also streaming events, so fans can watch the Spartans in action when they are on the road as well.

While each team is always striving for a championship, the championship culture is palpable according to Fernandez, “It’s not always about the wins or the losses for me, it’s always been about making memories and self-improvement.”

To watch fall sports live online, go to gateschili.org/AthleticsLIVE.



Staff Spotlight



**Carla
Halstead**

Art Teacher

**Neil Armstrong
Elementary
School**

It is said that 1,000 paper cranes bring peace, hope and healing. For Carla Halstead, they also symbolize a way to connect with the school community during COVID-19.

It was inside a classroom similar to the one she now teaches in at Neil Armstrong Elementary School that she first fell in love with art.

"I was that little girl in second grade drawing everything. I've loved art since then and I love working with kids," shared Halstead, who paired those two interests to create her career.

That career has spanned over two decades, all but two years have been spent teaching in the Gates Chili Central School District. This spring, she challenged herself to step outside of her comfort zone during the school closure and brought her artwork to life out of the classroom.

Halstead applied for and secured a grant, inspired by her Disney colleague, Kelly Hanning, who did something similar. For Halstead, it launched a community art project centered around the paper crane. She set the goal to fold 1,000 origami cranes, encouraging her students to take part as she guided

them through the steps with her YouTube channel while they learned remotely.

"It was such an isolating spring for so many people. This project let me connect with the community, while also exploring the city and the people in it," expressed Halstead.

In total, Halstead and her students folded more than 1,000 wishes into a community-wide project. Cranes are now on display in area nursing homes, community centers, hospitals and Gates Chili classrooms throughout the district.

While she has folded many cranes, she continues to teach her students the art of origami, often taking requests and researching different animals for them to fold.

In a pandemic, *teachers are students too*

Teaching in a pandemic has become the ultimate juggling act. From teaching to tech support and everything in between, classroom staff are working harder than ever to keep up with the new and different ways educators are required to teach in the COVID-19 era.

To kick off the school year, hundreds of teachers and other staff members took part in the GC CARES Professional Learning Series from Sept. 8-11. The focus of the series was to collaborate and communicate; advocate for equity; revitalize teaching and learning; enhance health and safety; and support social-emotional wellness. The sessions covered in these first four days set the stage for ongoing professional development available to staff each week.

Since then, Gates Chili High School health teacher Janell Bernas has attended virtual sessions about each week focused on Teams, Schoology and One Note, led by Innovation Coaches Chris Amesbury and Mike Munski. The time spent honing skills helps her to support students during in-person and

virtual class time.

"Our coaches have been lifesavers," said Bernas. "These technology sessions have given me an opportunity to learn more best practices and new tricks that can help me in my new day-to-day routines. If I try something new and it goes wrong, I know I have a chance each week to follow up with them and ask questions to learn even more."

The district also continues to make strides with deepening its understanding of culturally-responsive education. The first cohort of 25 K-12 staff began their training this August. After investing 30 hours in race and equity work, they will complete that training in early 2021. A second cohort will begin sometime next year.

"My colleagues demonstrate time and again what it means to do right by our students," said Coordinator for Professional Development and Community Engagement Suzanne Goff. "Whether it's on their own time or together with others, our teachers actively pursue formal and informal

learning opportunities so that they can be certain they have the knowledge and skills to meet their students' academic and social emotional needs."

This September, the district held 15 varied in-services or collegial circles facilitated by its own K-12 instructional staff. These collaborative courses happened outside of school hours and helped to better equip teachers with the knowledge and skills needed for their teaching roles and to support the district's focus areas.

With so much change in such a short period of time, it's also important that staff take time to focus on their own social-emotional wellness. Districtwide, teachers and other staff are participating in community-building circles and courageous conversations around race and equity in the workplace.

"Gates Chili teachers won't settle for 'good enough,'" Goff said. "Their drive to excel is another reason Gates Chili is the district it is and why I am inspired by and appreciate the opportunities to work alongside them regularly."

GC PRIDE Award

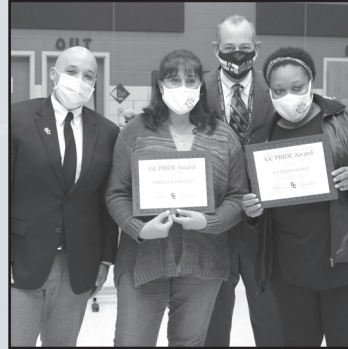
Gates Chili CSD is proud to recognize students, staff and community members who go above and beyond on behalf of the district and its students. The GC PRIDE Award stands for and honors professionalism, respect, innovation, dedication and excellence. Congratulations to the all of the recipients for September and October.



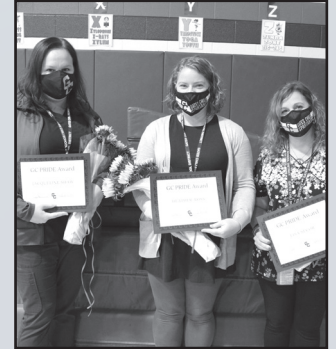
Sept. 1 recipients: GCMS Head Custodian Rick Butler and Custodian Kelly Waydelis



Sept. 14 recipients: GCHS Counselor Tracy Vander and Main Office Clerk Nancy Trulli



Oct. 6 recipients: Paul Road Nursing Aide Theresa Banfield and School Nurse Cynthia Cole



Oct. 20 recipients: Neil Armstrong School Nurse Jacqueline Shaw, Computer Aide Heather Boss, and Nursing Aide Lisa Secor

Spartacus celebrates bus safety

Spartacus shared important reminders about bus safety during National School Bus Safety Week on Oct. 19-23. Spartacus, together with our community partners at the Gates Police Department were featured in a video with important tips about keeping students safe while they ride the bus. These tips include watching for yellow and red flashing lights, stopping whenever a bus's stop sign is on display, and using caution whenever there is a bus nearby.

You can find the video of Spartacus on the district Facebook page.



Bus driver honored with efficiency award

Gates Chili Bus Driver Patricia Ferrigno has been awarded the Fuel Champ Award by fuel vendor Vnomics. Each year, Ferrigno logs thousands of miles driving students to and from school. This year, she achieved a fuel efficiency of 99.75%. Congratulations!



**HANDWASHING
IS KEY
TO STAYING
SYMPTOM-FREE!**



GATES CHILI CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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FREE meals for all students!

The USDA has extended free meals for all students
whether they are in school or learning remotely from home.

Every Gates Chili cafeteria
every school day or at our
daily drive-up meal site at
Gates Chili Middle School
12:30-1:30 p.m.



The district still encourages families to apply for free and reduced-price meals, as the free meals program may end at any time. The free and reduced status will take effect once the USDA Free Meals Program ends.

Stay Connected!



@GatesChiliInfo #GCPride #GCCares