



GATES CHILI

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Winter Newsletter 2021

Creating a *stranger*, more equitable school community

Gates Chili Central School District is home to more than 3,700 students with unique cultural identities representing many races, religions, languages and more. Despite Gates Chili's reputation as one of the most diverse districts in Monroe County, state data showed troubling disparities in student success across various subsets of the student population.

"District data over the last several years revealed disproportionality, or inequity, in academics and in the way that we discipline students," explained Director of Pupil Personnel Services Jason deJong. "For example, the data showed us that as a district, we were suspending students with disabilities at a higher rate than their general education peers. When students with disabilities are suspended, it limits their ability to access needed resources, which can further affect their learning."

District leaders suspected the disproportionality seen with students with disabilities was a microcosm of disproportionality within the district as a whole. This prompted about 50 members of the school community, including faculty, staff, administrators, parents and Board of Education members, to come together last school year to form

the Root Cause Team. They worked with the New York University: Metropolitan Center for Research on Equity and the Transformation of Schools to analyze district data and find the root cause of the inequity. Together, they also worked to identify the beliefs, policies, and practices that were contributing to that inequity.

At the same time, dozens of staff members throughout the district also began taking part in comprehensive culturally-responsive education training. This work focused on implicit, or unconscious, bias and the effects it can have on students.

"Equity cannot be achieved without an understanding of inequity," said Associate Superintendent for Instruction Carol Stehm. "Unconscious bias can manifest in small interpersonal interactions but has broader implications for our students, particularly students of color and other underserved populations. By becoming responsive to the needs of all students, we are creating a learning environment where every student feels safe, respected and heard."

These difficult conversations and revelations led district leaders to create a strategic, multi-year plan to improve

outcomes for all students. The Gates Chili Strategic Plan for Equity is divided into five focused areas of improvement: improving data systems, teaching and learning, multi-tiered systems of support, recruitment and hiring, and restorative justice. Over the next three to five years, teachers and staff will use this strategic plan as a blueprint for change and the dismantling of disproportionality.

In addition to the strategic plan, the Root Cause Team and others came together to develop the district's moral imperative statement. This guiding principle was adopted by the Board of Education in October, and serves as the district's pledge to it students, families and community present and future.

Superintendent Christopher Dailey, who served as a root cause team member, explained, "our diversity and multiculturalism are an asset, and by celebrating that, we have an opportunity to create a stronger, more equitable learning community where all students can thrive."

To learn more about the Gates Chili Strategic Plan for Equity and the Moral Imperative or to sign up for the District Equity Team, go to gateschili.org/Equity.



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Together we teach and inspire excellence for all learners.

Letter from the Superintendent



Dear Gates Chili School Community,

As we continue to navigate education in a pandemic, I am moved every day by the dedication and hard work of our amazing faculty

and staff. I'm extremely proud of how resilient our team has been in this very challenging educational environment. Despite the unique obstacles we've faced this year, Gates Chili has been named a Top Workplace USA for 2021. This is especially exciting because this honor reflects our employees' own feedback. You can learn more about this recognition on page 11.

Throughout this issue, you will also see several ways the district is engaging in culturally-responsive education and practices, a key

component of the strategic plan outlined on the front cover. Though topics such as equity and race may be difficult to engage in, I encourage members of the school community to join our staff in pushing their growing edge in order to create a more inclusive world for our students.

Please continue to wear a mask and practice social distancing to keep infection rates low in our area. Our collective efforts will help maintain the health and safety of thousands of amazing Spartan students and staff.

Go Spartans!

Christopher J. Dailey
Superintendent of Schools

 @GatesChiliSuper

Hundreds complete United Way's equity challenge

This fall, Gates Chili educators, students and community members completed the 21-Day Equity Challenge sponsored by the United Way. The challenge was focused on developing a deeper understanding of and willingness to confront racism, bias and other social inequities. Daily videos, articles and activities were shared, many of which were specific to life in the greater Rochester area. Here is a sample of some of the facts shared during the equity challenge:

- Rochester has the most economically segregating school district border in the country, walling off the high-poverty education system from its affluent suburban districts. -EdBuild Study via LA School Report
- In Monroe County, 64% of children have experienced one or more adverse childhood experiences (ACEs). Of these, 23% are carrying 3 or more ACEs, causing a higher risk for poor mental, physical, and emotional health outcomes. -CCSI
- White families have an average net worth of more than \$934,000, compared to Black families with an average net worth of \$138,000 and Hispanic families with an average net worth of \$191,000. -U.S. Federal Reserve

To learn more about the challenge and what steps you can take to combat racism, bias and social inequities, go to gateschili.org/EquityChallenge.

BOARD OF EDUCATION

UPDATE

Graduates boast of their Gates Chili education

The Board of Education held its annual graduates feedback night on Jan. 5, a long-held tradition and source of valuable insight into the strengths and opportunities the district offers its students. The mix of students included those who attend college, those who entered the workforce and those who explored other options. Students provided board members with honest feedback on the importance of Gates Chili's life skills education, including the newly-required personal finance course. They also discussed Gates Chili's high level of academic rigor that equaled or surpassed that of local districts and even private institutions from other regions and states.

Richards elected Black Caucus director

Board of Education Vice President Dr. Christine Brown Richards has been elected to serve as a director for Area 2 of the NYS Caucus of Black School Board Members. The group, which is affiliated with the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA), serves in an advisory capacity to the NYSSBA on policy and program issues. Directors are nominated and elected by members in their designated geographic areas.

Looking ahead: Three candidates will be elected to the Board of Education at the annual district vote May 18, 2021.



Capital Project Update

As the weather turns colder, Gates Chili capital project construction sites are heating up with the buzz of progress.

Work at Gates Chili Middle School is nearly complete. Crews are working on finishing out punch list items and closeout procedures. The final areas of the building under construction, which include an adaptive living space, OT/PT room and other classroom spaces for special education programs, are expected to be ready for use this spring.

Across Spartan Way at the Gates Chili High School Performing Arts Center, masons continue to lay block while mechanical and electrical trades crews work alongside them. Structural steel and ductwork have begun and will continue for several months. Back hallways are now water-tight, which will allow crews

to work on mechanical equipment. Concrete for the mezzanine floor as well as the concrete roof deck over the stage has been poured. In addition, three air handlers have been installed. Next steps for this project include completing the metal roof decking, getting the seating area water-tight, and closing in the east end of the building.

At Neil Armstrong and Walt Disney elementary schools metal stud framing is nearly finished and mechanical rough-in work continues. At Disney, bathroom ceramic tile and plumbing fixtures are complete, and windows have been installed. At Armstrong, roofing work is underway. Next steps in these phases of the project include finishes over the next three months.

The entire project is currently on budget and expected to be completed by spring 2022.



Neil Armstrong Elementary School



Walt Disney Elementary School



Gates Chili Performing Arts Center



Budget Ambassadors announced

Thank you to the following individuals who have volunteered their time to serve as Budget Ambassadors for the 2021-22 budget cycle:

April Anderson
Tina Carney
Charles Johnson

Carol Jean Miceli
Steven Nole
Morgan Randolph

Jason Scott
Lisa Singletary
Louis Witt IV

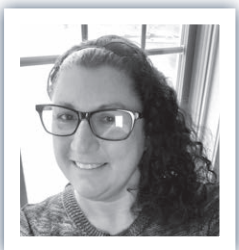
Jenna Wolfley
Theodore Wolfley

This group will provide valuable feedback during the budget development process and recommend any modifications to the Board of Education.

7,645.05
210.95 12,411.80
149.16 27,752.93
23.26
1.41%

Staying *connected* while apart

Through the ups and downs of the pandemic and the onset of winter weather, one constant has remained unchanged: students are engaging in learning. Gates Chili is still offering two learning models for its more than 3,700 students. Roughly two-thirds of students are considered hybrid and attend school in person at least two days per week and learn remotely on the other days, while a third of students learn remotely from home every day of the week. On remote learning days, students connect with their teachers through live and recorded lessons.

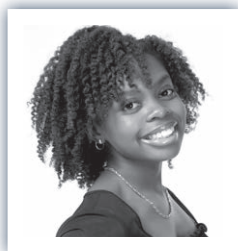


"I have always loved to be creative and incorporate my own style into teaching. Once I readjusted how I viewed creativity within the online teaching format I feel like my love for teaching was restored. I love teaching, it's still hard work, but it's always been, but at the end of the day the smiling faces on my

students make it all worth it!"

- Amy Laude, teaches fully remote second-graders

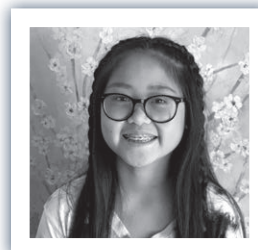
"As a remote student, I appreciate the effort that my teachers put into making the synchronous learning easier. I feel that I received the same instruction and information as the students in hybrid learning. For example, my Junior Achievement Economics teacher, Mr. Marco, responds in a timely manner which allows me to do well in class while minimizing confusion. Despite the limits, he has made virtual learning intriguing and sparked my interest in economics."



- Reya Thompson, grade 12

"Personally, my remote learning experience has been unexpected. There have been some troubles but one of the good parts of remote learning is that our teachers have been working hard to make sure everything is as normal as possible."

- Ella Ly, grade 7



"Teaching synchronously, or 'live,' not only engages students but offers them connectivity with adults and peers. There have been challenges with technology, Wi-Fi access, and students with obligations at home, which demands problem-solving. However, our students are resilient, courageous and honest, and have overcome these challenges. I welcome the communication back and forth with them and the vulnerability that we all seem to be facing. Our 'tribe' is supporting one another to get through this together."

- Kristin Elliott, teacher at Gates Chili High School



Register for **Kindergarten** at Gates Chili!

Download and complete a registration packet at
gateschili.org/Kindergarten

or pick one up at 3 Spartan Way.

Return completed packet by email or at Kindergarten
Registration Packet Drop-Off March 2-3 at 5-7 p.m.
Gates Chili High School Field House

*Children must be 5 years old by Dec. 1 in order to attend
kindergarten during the 2021-22 school year.*

UPK LOTTERY applications now being accepted

Gates Chili CSD offers a free exploratory Universal Pre-Kindergarten program that teaches kindergarten readiness, early math and literacy skills. Children must be 4 years old on or before Dec. 1, 2021. A lottery for admission will take place at the Gates Chili Administration Building on April 5 at 5 p.m. The deadline to apply for the lottery is April 4. You can find the lottery application at gateschili.org/UPK.

Creating a culture of *Kindness*

Hundreds of Gates Chili elementary school students joined more than 15 million others around the world to take part in the Great Kindness Challenge from Jan. 25-29. This annual campaign was focused on positivity and bullying prevention empowers students to create a culture of kindness.

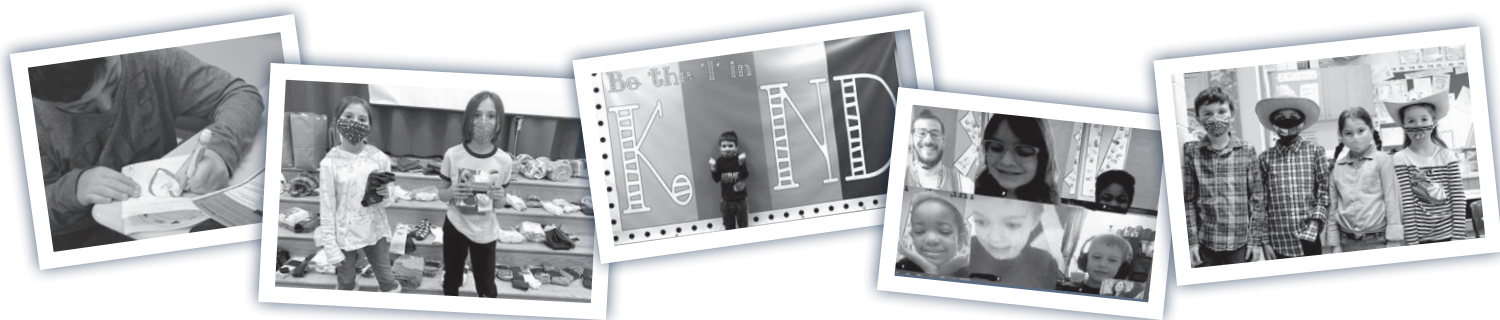
Each Gates Chili elementary school participated in different kindness activities over the course of the week, including spirit days, artwork and a kindness act checklist. Checklist items were featured safely inviting a new friend to play, waving

or complimenting people, learning to say “hello” in another language and creating thank you notes for essential workers and others.

Counselors and teachers at each building led students through various events and activities throughout the week. Students at all four building posed for pictures as the “I” in KIND. At Walt Disney, students also created a kindness tree and wrote thank you notes to community partners and Gates Chili’s very own National Guard member and Walt Disney teacher Vinny Candleri. At Paul Road, learners made

posters demonstrating kindness and took part in important conversations about what kindness means to them.

Meanwhile at Neil Armstrong, students created “Happy Grams” for someone who think it is important for their life such as their teachers, bus drivers, and staff in the building. Florence Brasser students concluded a sock drive called “Sock It to Winter,” where they collected nearly 700 pairs of socks for those in need. Remote students from all four schools participated in on the fun from home, completing virtual checklists and activities.



Alum illustrates *fresh, new faces* for elementary

The Gates Chili Central School District is excited to unveil new logos for its four elementary schools. Designed by Nick Capostagno, a 2016 Gates Chili alumnus and recent graduate of Nazareth College, the new Armstrong Star, Brasser Bear, Disney Dragon and Paul Road Panther are now a group of cohesive logos that will strengthen the district's brand, all while adding a new, energetic perspective for the district's youngest learners.

“These updated mascots embody unity and connectedness, and will carry us into the next phase of Gates Chili history,” said Iva Petrosino, director of public relations. “With the renovations

to our buildings, a new strategic plan, and an increased focus on digital communication, the timing is perfect.”

Capostagno, who credits Gates Chili High School art teacher Susan McAtee and retired art teacher Nancy Swanson as a major influence in his decision to pursue graphic design, worked to modernize and align the elementary mascots with the district brand. In addition, he is illustrating a caricature of the district's mascot, Spartacus, for use at the elementary level.

“I truly enjoyed working on this project and I am very grateful to have been given this amazing opportunity,” said

Capostagno. “Aside from this being a fun experience from start to finish, as a graphic designer, this is the type of work that not only gives me the chance to connect with the history and the students of Gates Chili, but also to create something that hopefully makes a positive impact on the community for years to come.”

The district will gradually phase in the new artwork as part of the rebranding process. Plans are in the works to bring the logos to life through events and special programming at each school. To see the logos in full color, go to gateschili.org/ElementaryMascots.



Schoology for all

For years, Gates Chili teachers have been utilizing the learning management system Schoology for assignments, discussions and other teacher-student communication. Now, the district has launched the messaging function to strengthen communication between educators and families. Several teachers throughout the district piloted the new messaging feature ahead of the Jan. 25 launch.

“Families juggle a lot, especially if they have multiple students in the district,” said Gates Chili Middle School English teacher Sarah Beh. “They’re already checking Schoology for student assignments, so now it’s become a one-stop-shop. If I message a parent about an assignment, they have access to the assignment I’m referring to, as well as the comments and feedback that I added to student work right there, instead of going back and forth between emails and Schoology.”

This change also makes Schoology more accessible to all families. Previously, parents/guardians were required to sign up for a Schoology account in order to view their student’s assignments and work. With the messaging function now active, the district has pushed Schoology accounts to every primary parent/guardian.

To learn more about how to navigate Schoology and use the messaging function, go to gateschili.org/Schoology.

OVER THE NOSE IS HOW IT GOES!



LIKE OUR SPARTANS, WEAR A MASK, WASH YOUR HANDS AND PRACTICE SOCIAL DISTANCING!

No-visitor rule not hindering learning

The COVID-19 pandemic has altered many school operations. In-person lessons that were once enhanced by the perspective of a visiting author, artist or scientist are on hiatus until further notice. But as with other obstacles, teachers are finding clever workarounds, leveraging the use of technology to help important lessons come to life.

Teachers throughout the district have been able to preserve the integrity of in-person visits using Teams, which allows students to have seamless instruction.

“Connecting with an expert in the field can draw real-life parallels for students,” said Gates Chili Middle School art teacher Amy Cocuzzi, who recently hosted a virtual visit with an animator. “Students are able to ask questions about their work and engage in valuable dialogue about career choices.”

That artist was New York City-based animator and RIT alumna Julie Jurgens Shea, who runs her own media company and has done

projects for Oprah’s Oxygen Media and The American Veterinary Medical Association. After an in-class lesson on stop motion animation, sixth- and seventh-grade art students engaged the artist in a discussion about the field of animation, set and prop creation and what it is like to work as a professional artist.

“In the past, guest speakers have come to us as visitors in the classroom,” Cocuzzi said. “This time, we were able to meet the artist in her studio space. Students were able to see firsthand the materials and creation methods she uses.”

Several other virtual visits are in the works for the coming months, including one in the English department with New York Times Best Selling and Newbery Medal-winning author and poet Kwame Alexander. Students will study Alexander’s background and read “Becoming Muhammed Ali,” called one of New York Times’ best children’s books of 2020, then have an opportunity to speak with Alexander about his novel.



Together Including Every Student

An extra-curricular program new to Gates Chili is seeking participants and volunteers! Together Including Every Student (TIES) promotes belonging and participation for young people with special needs in extracurricular and community activities.



TIES pairs high school or middle school student volunteers with a student participant. The volunteer completes a short training to be able to provide the individualized support needed by TIES participants in a spirit of fun and learning. Peer volunteers learn how to support participants according to their individual needs, gain more understanding of disabilities and diversity, and make a positive difference in a peer’s life.

Go to gateschili.org/TIES to learn more and complete an application.

Choir commissions “Colorful” music and lyrics

One year and one pandemic later, the Gates Chili High School Advanced Women’s Choir has virtually debuted a song commissioned by and composed for their class.

“Learning this song has taught me different ways, despite being remote, that a choir can be put together. Being able to come together when we’re not together,” said senior Crystal Hong.

In the fall of 2019, the GCHS Music Department commissioned Dr. Philip E. Silvey, chair of music teaching and learning at the Eastman School of Music and well-published choral composer, to write a piece of music for the Advanced Women’s Choir. Dr. Silvey met with the students and spoke with them about his musical ideas and compositional process. He spoke with them about the legacy of

the women’s suffrage movement in the greater Rochester area. Together, he and the class discussed the 100th anniversary of the ratification of the 19th Amendment, and how they felt empowered, strong and brave in their own lives today. Through this important discussion, “Colorful” was born.

When the pandemic hit, finalization and performance of the piece were put on hold. By June 2020, seniors graduated without having performed the piece but knowing they had a part in creating it.

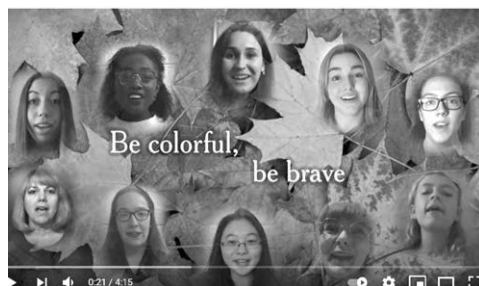
Schools re-opened this fall with heightened safety protocols in place, restricting all live performances at the public school and collegiate level. Dr. Silvey brought new ideas to the table about putting together a virtual choir. The virtual choir included students in the Gates Chili Advanced Women’s Choir and the University of Rochester Women’s Choir. All students worked diligently to learn their choral parts for the piece. Many students submitted videos, which were produced and edited by Benjamin Guerrero.

“Despite the bumps along the way, this was a magnificent, once-in-a-lifetime musical journey for our class,” said

Advanced Women’s Choir Director Christine Merkel. “As a school and as a district we are so proud of our students’ active participation in this process.”

When asked what her biggest takeaway was from helping create the lyrics to “Colorful” Junior Samantha Zugnoni explained, “It’s okay to be different because different is beautiful and unique. Every woman is strong and beautiful in her own way.”

This marks the first time in more than 25 years that GCHS has worked with a choral composer to commission a piece of music. To see the complete virtual performance, go to www.gateschili.org/Colorful.



NHS ceremony moves *virtual*

The Gates Chili High School National Honor Society welcomed 49 new members in a virtual ceremony.

Congratulations to the following inductees:

Spencer Anderson, Mia Bodulovic, Aiden Bolam, Colin Cedeno, Grace Cevicelov, Brendan Culhane, Mike Daly, Alyssa Diaz, Luke Falk, Matthew Firnstein, Olivia Fornarola, Kaitlyn Gible, Seerat Gill, Ian Hahn, Paige Hamilton, Hannah Harper, Johanna Harris, Meredith Hart, Charles Healey, Brennan Hong, Crystal Hong, Molly Hong, Kaitlyn Horne, Chealyn Howard, Malena Juif, Olivia Keller, Aaron Keyes, Gabrielle Lavallee, Grace LeClair, Vincent Lucyszyn, Marshall McRae, Aidan Nolan, Megan Olander, James Paxon, Shea Perry, Valissa Ruiz, Zachary Rush, Alexandra Servati, Emaan Sohail, Amanda Stevens, Kaley Sumeriski, Shiana Susa, Mariah Travis, Abigail Unson, Sampson Valdez, Alyssa Vukosic, Christina Wolkonowski, Amanda Wood and Karis Wynings.



To watch the virtual ceremony, go to gateschili.org/NHS2020.

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



**LIKE OUR SPARTANS, WEAR
A MASK, WASH YOUR HANDS
AND PRACTICE SOCIAL
DISTANCING!**

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.

Nov. 24 recipients at Disney:



Colleen Kelly,
reading aide



Cynthia Wilson,
special education
teacher



Kelly Hanning,
art teacher



Martha Fantauzzo,
cook manager

Nov. 10 recipients at Brasser:



Brenda Mini, school nurse teacher
Amy Larter, health aide
Sarah Cedeno, computer aide
Kim Ormsby, physical education teacher
Raiden Gardner, fourth-grade student
Leeah Jackson, fifth-grade student

Dec. 15 recipients:



Anthony Puleo,
BOCES 2
videographer



Lisa Constantine,
BOCES 2
graphic designer



Bob Renehan,
Gates-Chili
Rotary Club

Jan. 26 recipients:



Charlotte Billotti,
GCHS
grade-level
secretary



Jayda and Shannon
Brennan, Armstrong
third-grade student
and parent



Dominic Vito,
Brasser fifth-grade
student



Patti Battista,
Brasser cook
manager

Volunteers provide *priceless works* of the heart

Thank you to Gates Chili volunteers, who each year commit hundreds of hours to helping our students. Each year, these selfless individuals are recognized by the Board of Education. Last year, 12 volunteers who worked more than 100 hours in one calendar year:

During this same period, 370 volunteers clocked 5,700 hours within the visitor management system. These volunteers assisted in classrooms, libraries, copy rooms, cafeterias, and chaperoned field trips. These numbers did not include all volunteers who worked at after-hour events such as socials, family nights at elementary buildings, and athletic department volunteer coaches.

Gates Chili volunteers continue to make a difference, and we look forward to the future when we will be able to welcome them back in person!

Name	Hours served	Building(s)
Kathleen Toombs	419	Armstrong
Bob Hewitt	327	Armstrong, Disney
Fred Davis	263	Armstrong
Sarah Cedeno	252	Brasser, Middle School
Sophia Cook	248	Brasser
Theresa Davis	166	Brasser
Kelly Conlon	155	Brasser and Disney
Debora Otto	150	Brasser
Crystal Cole	144	Brasser
Heather Lange	122	Brasser
Brenda Romero	122	Armstrong
Kristine Cudzilo	120	Brasser



Building a *CHAMPIONSHIP CULTURE*

In a facility that could rival that of any area college, students are now able to use the fitness center inside of Gates Chili High School. Once it is safe to do so, the facility will also be open for public use.

The space has been overhauled and now includes a new turf strip for sleds and agility exercises, platforms built into the ground and new equipment.

From brand new free weights to a new sound system, the facility highlights GCCSD's commitment to students' overall health.



"Athletics are so important for the mental, social and physical health of our students," expressed Director of Physical Education, Health and Athletics Dr. Patrick Irving, recognizing the need to provide an outlet to student athletes who have been unable to compete due to NYS COVID-19 restrictions. Teams have been in the weight room training and conditioning so they will be ready to get back on the court and field.

COVID-19 guidelines are in place, including limiting the number of students allowed in the fitness center at one time and machines taped off to allow for proper social distancing. Soon it will also be open for community use.

In fact, the community played a key role in designing the facility, with changes made based on a survey. GCCSD looked at the machines neighbors use the most and included an additional universal machine in the plans for the fitness center.

There are also additional cardio machines, slam and medicine balls, and 14 rig-system stations connected with pull-up bars. The new turf floor, featuring a GC logo, splits the room between cardio and strength training.

When it is safe to open up for public use, GCCSD residents will only have to pay a one-time fee of \$15 and complete an orientation of the facility.



Stream the Spartans at home and on the road



Due to ongoing COVID-19 guidelines, spectators are still limited to two per player, but all fans are invited to watch many of the contests streamed live 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.

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

Save the Date



Wednesday, Nov. 10, 2021
Gates Chili Field House

Benham honored by Buffalo Bills



Jason Benham was named Buffalo Bills Coach of the Week for the Rochester Region for the week of Dec. 21. Benham, a longtime physical education teacher at Gates Chili High School, has served as head football coach for 20 seasons, compiling a record of 80-76. He led the Spartans to Section 5 titles in 2003, 2006 and 2008.

Though his team's season was delayed this year, the Bills recognized Benham for his commitment to community and school, team academic performance and team off-the-field community service.

Staff Spotlight



**John
Vazquez**

Bus Driver

**Gates Chili
Transportation
Department**

For GCCSD students, school began this year with the regular first-day jitters, along with getting used to the changes in place for COVID-19. One thing remained constant, though: the smile and positive presence of John Vazquez.

As a GCCSD bus driver, his face is usually the first one to greet students.

“When I first started driving, I realized their first ‘hello’ or ‘good morning’ is from the bus driver. It really can set the mood for their day,” explained Vazquez, reflecting on how that consistency was even more important this school year. “It

is amazing how a simple greeting can be so impactful on their day.”

For students on his bus, it is difficult not to start the day with a smile or laugh. Vazquez can often be found behind the wheel singing – holding long notes and making up melodies – or telling jokes. A few years ago, a student called him “Papa John”; a nickname that has stuck.

“I cherish it. I love seeing children smile. There is so much going on in this world, if we can just be that bit of kindness and show we care for them, we’re impacting the next generation,” expressed Vazquez.

Vazquez joined the Gates Chili family 18 years ago. Up until then, he had built a career with Xerox. In 2003, when the company downsized, he realized his faith was driving him in the direction of finally working with children.

“This is the most important, the best job I’ve ever had in my life, being able

to interact with the children and build a relationship with their parents. Over the years, I’ve been able to watch the kids grow, I love being able to keep the same run. I can see them from kindergarten to graduation. It is amazing. I love it. Love it,” expressed Vazquez.

In addition to driving a traditional bus route, Vazquez also does food delivery for GCCSD. You can always tell when those deliveries arrive because the hallways fill with the calls of children yelling ‘Mr. John is here!’ followed by laughter.



School nutrition team tackles *food allergies*

School nutrition team members have been serving free meals to students since the start of the pandemic—a whopping 300,000+ meals since March 2020!

In addition to whole grains and fresh fruits and vegetables, each meal is also packed with care, taking into account the many food allergies that are common in today’s nutritional landscape.

A food allergy is an immune system response to a food that the body mistakenly believes is harmful. People can be allergic to almost any food, but most food allergy reactions are caused by eight foods: eggs, fish, shellfish, peanuts, tree nuts, milk, wheat and soy.

“One in 13 school-age children have a food allergy; that’s two students per classroom,” said registered dietitian

Marisa Bellanca, who serves as the district’s school nutrition coordinator. “The commonality of food allergies is why it is so important for us to know where they may be hidden in the food we serve.”

All eight of the common allergens and safety protocols for each were covered in a recent training for members of each building’s school nutrition staff. It gave staff a chance to ask questions about which foods may have trace amounts of the allergens.

“Student health and safety is at the forefront of what we do so we are proud to be able to offer this important training for our staff members,” said Director of School Nutrition Janice Phillips. “Having a registered dietitian is a great asset to our team.”

BECOME A SPARTAN!

Many of our employment opportunities provide flexible schedules that align with the 10-month school year. GCCSD employees also qualify for NYS pension and may enroll in health benefits.

Apply at
gateschili.org/jobs

Removing barriers in *recruitment*

From recruitment and hiring to welcoming and mentoring, the entire Gates Chili Central School District plays a role in creating a school community that values diversity and inclusion, encourages educators and staff to learn from one another, ties the school to the community and fosters teacher and staff retention.

Gates Chili's student population represents many races and ethnic groups, meanwhile the district's instructional staff is more than 90% white. In the last several years, the district has made strides to increase the diversity of its employees. Just before the pandemic hit, the district hired a coordinator of recruitment, inclusion and retention to assist in identifying and removing potential biases in recruiting, screening, and advancing that may be unintentionally eliminating qualified, diverse candidates.

In the short time that Dr. Sandra Vazquez has been in the role, she has led the efforts to review recruitment and hiring procedures and practices, assist with culturally-responsive professional development and highlight best practices for retaining employees of color.

"Recruiting and hiring teachers and staff members of color is an intentional and inclusive practice that reflects the mosaic of the district's student population," said Vazquez.

Hiring more teachers of color provides our students the opportunity to see themselves in the adults around them and to see people of color empowered and thriving.

Millennials and Gen Z cite the importance of diversity in their careers. According to the Institute for Public Relations, 47% of those surveyed consider the diversity and inclusion of a workplace an important criterion in their job search.

The other important aspect of this work is retention. Key components of retention are onboarding and training, which helps a new employee understand

the district's culture and provides them with the tools and support needed to be successful in their positions. In turn, retention practices foster a sense of belonging, empowering employees to provide a stable, welcoming environment for all students.

"When we lose good teachers or other staff members, we lose their knowledge and abilities," said Michaela Perrotto, assistant superintendent for human resources and labor relations. "With each new hire, we have an opportunity to invest in the future of our district."

Each employee is selected for their individual attributes that make them the best fit for the position and the team. Kenya Rollins, an assistant principal at Gates Chili Middle School, joined the Gates Chili team in late summer and said she's glad to be in a place where she feels supported.

"Everyone has welcomed me with open arms and has made me feel right at home," Rollins said. "I have been provided with a mentor that answers all of my questions and walks me through important tasks my job requires me to complete."

A diverse staff has great benefits for students, but it can also have a positive impact on existing staff.

When staff members feel included and welcome at work, it can have a positive effect on their productivity, creativity and their mental health and wellness.

Rollins continued, "I am excited about the work the district is doing in terms of equity for all students and staff. I look forward to it being an integral part of the district vision and goals for the future."

The district's commitment to more equitable hiring practices is grounded in its new diversity statement: The Gates Chili Central School District is dedicated to fostering curiosity, growth and diversity within our school community. The district celebrates and embraces differences and strives to dismantle exclusion, bias, racism, and prejudice of all forms.

Gates Chili named as Top Workplace

The Gates Chili Central School District has been awarded a Top Workplaces 2021 honor by Top Workplaces USA. The annual Top Workplaces survey explores how organizations create and sustain a positive and productive culture and is based solely on employee feedback.



The sense of family and diversity are just some of the reasons identified by employees on why they enjoy working at Gates Chili. Employees also feel supported with multiple opportunities for professional growth, which contributes to an inclusive, collaborative culture.

"Gates Chili's culture is based on relationships and attracts employees who want to make a difference for students," said Superintendent Christopher Dailey. "We are committed to helping develop all learners and take pride in our values of respect, responsibility, compassion and hard work. These values play a significant role in what makes Gates Chili so special, and we are thrilled these were recognized through the survey."

"We are particularly proud of this recognition from our employees given the unique year we have just experienced," said Michaela Perrotto, assistant superintendent for human resources and labor relations. "Without our staff's dedication, we wouldn't have been able to achieve this high honor."

The Top Workplaces 2021 list is based on employee feedback gathered through a third-party survey administered by research partner Energage, LLC, a leading provider of technology-based employee engagement tools.



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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!



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