

## Spartans help bring *Indigenous history to life*

After weeks of studying Indigenous history in social studies classes, fourth-grade (and some fifth-grade) Spartans across the district were treated to a special interactive learning experience. Each elementary school welcomed Master Storyteller and Cultural Educator Perry Ground, a Turtle Clan member of the Onondaga Nation of the Haudenosaunee (Iroquois) Confederacy, for an engaging and authentic look at Indigenous culture and history in New York State.

Each of the four elementary schools hosted two interactive sessions with Ground, both of which align with New York State English Language Arts and Social Studies Curriculum standards.

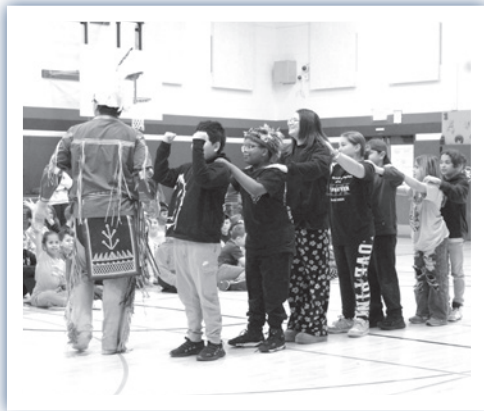


Ground's dynamic storytelling and engaging presentation style captivated students from start to finish. Every time he asked for a volunteer, nearly every hand in the room shot into the air. Throughout each session, laughter, curiosity and excitement could be heard from Bears, Dragons, Panthers and Stars as they immersed themselves in the legends and history of the Haudenosaunee people.

Through experiences like these, Gates Chili continues to bring history to life in meaningful ways, helping students connect with and appreciate the rich cultural heritage of Indigenous peoples.

The first session, "Life in a Longhouse Village," gave students a broad overview of Haudenosaunee history, culture, and traditions. Using genuine Indigenous artifacts, Ground made history come alive—offering students the rare opportunity to see, hold, and even pretend to use these historical objects. He explained how the Haudenosaunee people thrived by using natural resources, covering topics such as hunting, cooking, building, clothing, tools and more.

The second session focused on traditional Haudenosaunee storytelling, an art form that has been passed down for generations. Students not only listened to these legends but also became part of them, as Ground invited volunteers to help bring the stories and characters to life.



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# Letter from the Superintendent

Dear Gates Chili School Community,

It's hard to believe we are already midway through the 2024-25 school year! Each day, I continue to be inspired by the hard work, dedication, and resilience of our students and staff as they strive for excellence in all they do. Whether in the classroom, on the stage or on the field, our Spartans are demonstrating what it means to persevere, collaborate, and grow.

This time of year is also a time for reflection. As a district, we remain committed to fostering belonging, supporting wellness and maximizing student achievement. The stories

in this issue highlight the many ways we are bringing that mission to life—through engaging learning experiences, strong community partnerships and moments of connection that make Gates Chili such a special place.

As we move through the second half of the school year, I encourage you to stay involved, support our students and celebrate their successes. There are so many great events and opportunities coming up, and I invite you to check the back cover of this publication or visit our district website to stay connected.

Thank you for your ongoing partnership and commitment to our students.

Go Spartans!

Christopher J. Dailey  
Superintendent of Schools

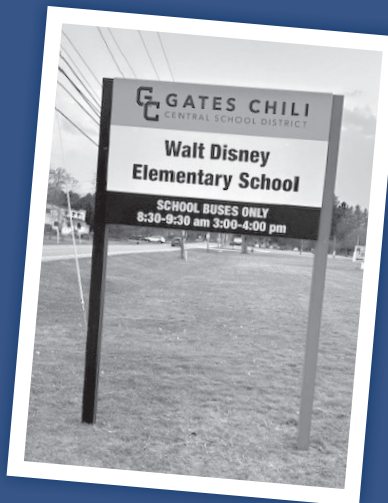


@GatesChiliSuper



## Disney campus outfitted with new signs

Walt Disney Elementary School campus is now a little easier to navigate thanks to new signage! You may remember that the district installed a series of new signs on its main campus as part of the ongoing efforts to improve navigation and provide clear information to visitors and staff. Disney's signage includes a main school identification sign, wayfinding signs, parking lot signs, a main entrance sign at the entrance driveway, and a bus-only sign near each school's bus loops.



## BUDGET AMBASSADORS ANNOUNCED!

Thank you to the following individuals who have volunteered their time to serve as Budget Ambassadors for the 2025-26 budget development process:

Karen Bafford-Bubel

Scott Bubel

Alexandria Collins

Charles Johnson

Emily Klinzing

Andrea Minchella

Jackie Mundell-Bosley

Don Windhauser

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

# Capital Project Update

## Building Brighter Futures

Students are now enjoying their new Family and Consumer Science (FACS) classrooms at Gates Chili High School!

Crews completed work on FACS spaces at GCHS just after the new year, clearing the way for staff and students to move in and begin the second semester in their new classroom spaces. Meanwhile, crews continue to work on technology classrooms at the high school and middle school. All classroom updates include enhanced technological interfaces, better layouts for new programs and teaching methods, integrated clean rooms and production space, and a brighter more welcoming

appearance.

At the same time, staff and crews are getting ready to begin work on phase two of this project, which includes upgrades to middle school music classrooms and multi-purpose turf fields between the middle school and Buffalo Road. Upgrades at Florence Brassier include relocation of the main entrance, main office and health office to a different part of the building, reconfiguration of the bus and vehicle traffic pattern and additional parking.

Finally, work at the newly established Gates Chili Operations Center will begin



this winter and spring with select flooring replacement and finishes in major office areas. Facilities staff is expected to move into this portion of the building before the end of the school year. The next stage of the renovation is still in the design phase, with plans to submit the design to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) for review. Construction for this phase is anticipated to begin early next year.

The entire project is expected to be completed in 2026. For updates on this and other capital improvement projects, visit [gateschili.org/CapitalProject](https://gateschili.org/CapitalProject).



## Gates Chili recognized as a leader in clean initiatives

Gates Chili has been honored for its leadership in incorporating electric school buses (ESBs) into its transportation fleet.

Greater Rochester Clean Cities (GRCC) presented the district with an achievement award during its annual meeting and awards ceremony on Jan. 23. The honor recognizes regional organizations and individuals for their commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and advancing clean energy and transportation.

In 2022, Gates Chili became the first district locally and across upstate New York to add electric school buses to its fleet. Last spring, voters approved the purchase of 1 additional electric buses, including one with a wheelchair lift, bringing the district's total number of ESBs to 15.



## FUTURE READY >>>

Preserving our Resources, Maintaining our Schools

Gates Chili voters have approved a capital project that will provide facilities improvements throughout the district.

Yes – 238 (76%)

No – 74 (24%)

Planned construction in all district buildings includes work in four key categories: failing infrastructure needs, renovations, replacements and new work. In the coming weeks and months, the district will begin working with internal groups and architectural firm SEI Design Group to design plans that will be submitted to New York State for approval. Construction is expected to begin in the summer of 2026. Residents also approved proposition 2 in a 248-61 vote, with more than 80% approval to authorize the district to use capital reserve funds for security infrastructure.

Thank you to the Gates Chili CSD community for its continued support of our students, staff and programs!

Apply for a spot  
in Gates Chili's  
**UPK  
PROGRAM!**

Gates Chili is looking forward to its 11th year of hosting Universal Prekindergarten (UPK)! Prekindergarten programs are free for residents and teach kindergarten readiness, early math and literacy skills. Children must be 4 years old on or before Dec. 1, 2025 and students who are age-eligible for kindergarten are not eligible for this program.

Openings will be filled through a lottery process. To be considered, families should complete the online application available at [gateschili.org/UPK](http://gateschili.org/UPK) by Friday, March 7.

Calling all members  
of the Gates Chili  
**Class of 2038**



Kindergarten registration is now open! Children must be 5 years old by Dec. 1 in order to attend kindergarten during the 2025-26 school year.

Download and complete a registration packet at [gateschili.org/Kindergarten](http://gateschili.org/Kindergarten). Submit forms and other required materials to the district registrar by email to [registrar@gateschili.org](mailto:registrar@gateschili.org) or drop off in person at the Gates Chili District Office at 1 Spartan Way, door 73 between 7:30 a.m. to 4 p.m. on weekdays.

## Dragons explore new sensory pathways



In the halls of Walt Disney Elementary School, you may see students hopscotching from one spot to another or doing a bear crawl. These movements are encouraged on Disney's two new sensory pathways. The paths are a system of interactive decals placed on hallway floors and walls that provide students with a safe space for sensory activities, including movement, touch and balance, which can be calming for students who may be feeling overstimulated and overwhelmed by the hustle and bustle of the school day. Since opening a sensory room for students in its 6:1:1 classrooms last year, Disney has been expanding its resources to support the sensory needs of all students. In addition to the pathways, the school's sensory toolbox will soon include an LED touch wall panel, which is expected to be installed in the coming months.

## HS students bring Armstrong drawings to life



Family and Consumer Sciences (FACS) students at Gates Chili High School collaborated with Neil Armstrong first-graders on a scary good project. First-grade students were given monster templates to fill out. They colored, named and shared fun facts about their monster creation. That's when students in the high school's Creative Design class took over. Over the course of several weeks, they brought those monsters to life, designing and sewing plush creatures straight out of the first-graders' imaginations. In early December, the first-graders journeyed to the high school to receive their plush monster and meet the students who 'Frankensteined' them. It was a heartwarming moment between the two groups that high schooler Lily S. enjoyed, having shared, "I liked that we were able to create what the students imagined for their monster. It was nice meeting the first-grade students. They enjoyed the activities that we did with them, and they were very polite."

## Bears delivering more than mail

Brasser Bears have something to write home about — their very own post office! The Brasser Express has Bears writing, mailing and delivering letters throughout the school. The post office is run by students, with some help from fifth-grade teachers Lauren Ewart and Katie Larkin, who launched the project in February 2024. Postal workers apply for their jobs with specific jobs determined by grade level. Fifth-graders train their fellow workers, fourth-graders oversee operations, third-graders sort the mail and second-graders deliver it to classrooms, which have each been given their own "street" names inspired by books. Students have also designed the postage stamps affixed to each piece of mail. In the year it's been operating, Ewart and Larkin say Brasser Express has helped bolster connections and a sense of belonging within the school community.



# Panthers celebrate the *Year of the Snake*



For the first time in history, Gates Chili Central School District was closed in honor of Lunar New Year. While the holiday was officially recognized by the district and New York State this year, Lunar New Year has been observed for thousands of years across many East and Southeast Asian countries.

The day before schools closed to honor the beginning of the Year of the Snake, kindergartners at Paul Road Elementary School put on a festive celebration. The young learners made lanterns, snake hats and worked together to craft a giant dragon to proudly parade through the school's hallway. The display acted as an adaptation of the traditional Dragon Dance, which dates back 2,000 years.

Leading up to the festivities, students learned about the history of Lunar New Year and explored Asian culture. They read and enjoyed books by Asian authors, such as "Amy Wu and the Perfect Bao" by Kat Zhang and "Drawn Together" by Minh Le. While learning math and ELA, students also took part in activities that incorporated various Asian symbols.

## Staff Spotlight: A journey of courage, connection and learning



**Heba Tulah Wafai**  
ENL Teacher Aide

**Walt Disney**  
Elementary  
School

Heba Tulah Wafai is no stranger to taking risks. Less than two years ago, she made the bold decision to leave Syria and start anew in the United States with her daughter. While the transition was daunting, the move brought her closer to family—her two sons

had already established themselves in the U.S. One is pursuing a Ph.D. in Nebraska, while the other works in the engineering field right here in the Rochester area.

Determined to reunite with her children and build a new future, Wafai began preparing for her move in 2020. She enrolled in courses at the American Language Center in Syria, a program run by the U.S. Embassy, to strengthen her English skills and ease the transition.

"I'm happy that I'm here now," she said, reflecting on her journey.

Once settled in Rochester, Wafai was eager to find meaningful work—something that would not only utilize her education but also allow her to grow and contribute. Within just two days of arriving, she learned about Gates Chili's

Support Staff Job Fair. She attended, applied and soon after, accepted a role as a teacher aide at Walt Disney Elementary School. From the moment she stepped into the classroom, Wafai knew she had found her place.

"The students—I love working with them," she said with a smile when asked about her favorite part of the job.

She began her role supporting students with autism, learning from the experienced teachers and staff around her. Never one to shy away from learning, she immersed herself in the new environment, constantly asking questions to better understand her role.

"I kept asking, 'Why do you do this? How do we do this? Why should we do this?'" Wafai recalled. "I have learned so much from this work, and it means a lot to me."

Her passion for education and cultural understanding led her to transition into a new role at the start of the 2024-25 school year—working as a teacher aide supporting students in the English as a New Language (ENL) program. As someone who recently learned English herself, she immediately connected with English Language Learners (ELLs), understanding firsthand the challenges they faced.

"I always say to the students, 'We are not different. We are unique.'"

Every day in the classroom is a learning experience, not just for her students, but for Wafai as well. She embraces the opportunity to grow alongside them, often turning moments of uncertainty into opportunities for shared discovery.

"Sometimes students will say, 'I don't know what this means,' and I'll say, 'I don't know either—let's figure it out together!'"

Beyond the classroom, Wafai has found something even more meaningful—a sense of community. When she first arrived, she knew no one besides her children. Moving to a new country can be isolating, but she quickly found warmth and belonging at Walt Disney Elementary.

"When I came here, I met so many lovely people. Everyone was so nice to me, and I felt welcome," she shared, expressing deep gratitude for the team that embraced her.

For Wafai, this journey has been about more than just taking risks—it's been about building connections, embracing lifelong learning, and finding a new home in a community that supports her.

## All rise: students preside over historical *mock trial*

Seventh-grade students at Gates Chili Middle School stepped into the “courtroom”—playing the roles of attorneys, witnesses and jurors—as they put their historical knowledge and critical thinking skills to the test.

As part of a hands-on mock trial experience on Dec. 4, students analyzed evidence and argued their cases like real lawyers. It was the culmination of weeks of preparation by two social studies classes. One class took on the role of the prosecution, while the other served as the defense. Students worked in teams to research historical evidence, prepare arguments and even craft witness testimony to support their case.

Divided into three trials—The State of the Americas vs. the King and Queen of



Spain, The State of the Americas vs. the Men of Columbus, and The State of the Americas vs. Christopher Columbus—students had to defend or prosecute key historical figures based on their actions during European exploration.

Students analyzed primary and secondary sources, developed opening and closing statements and conducted

cross-examinations, all while following real courtroom procedures.

“I liked that it was like a real court, but it was nerve-racking,” said seventh-grader Maddox I.

“I loved how I got to socialize with people I never talked to before, and how the trial felt so professional,” said student Dante C.

Beyond the excitement of debating in a courtroom setting, the mock trial helped students develop essential academic skills, including evaluating historical evidence, understanding bias and recognizing how different perspectives shape history. The project also reinforced the district’s emphasis on civic engagement and critical thinking.

## *Creativity and innovation take shape in GC's* new Makerspace

A new space in the Gates Chili High School library is giving students the opportunity to design, experiment, and invent with hands-on, creative tools and technology.

The GC Makerspace launched at the start of the 2024-25 school year, thanks to funding from the Rochester Regional Library Council through a special project grant. Since then, it has become a hub of creativity and exploration for students looking to bring their ideas to life.

Library staff have been introducing students to the space through “Maker Friday” events, offering a new project each week. From designing pixel art with Perler beads to building with KEVA planks to turning digital ideas into physical objects with the 3D printer, students are finding endless ways to express their creativity. “It’s so fun to see students’ creativity brought to life,” said Library Media Specialist Angelina Brodie, who applied for the grant that made the space a reality.



Among the most popular tools in the makerspace is the 3D printer, which allows students to request or design their own creations using a program called Tinkercad. So far, students have printed board games, custom gift boxes, figurines, fidgets, and more.

Tenth-grade student Gabe T. is a frequent user of the 3D printer and has found that sharing his creations has sparked conversations with his peers—and even led to new friendships.

“[The Makerspace] sparks creativity,” Gabe said. “I’ve even gotten a lot of other students interested in coming in and using the 3D printer.” Beyond the fun, the makerspace is proving to be

an invaluable tool for helping students develop problem-solving and creative thinking skills outside of the classroom.

The latest addition to the makerspace is a Cricut, a smart cutting machine that allows students to design and cut personalized projects on a variety of materials. This new tool opens up even more possibilities for students to explore and innovate. “We are grateful to have received funding for this space and are excited to see the program continue to expand and grow,” Brodie said.

Looking ahead, Brodie envisions even more opportunities for students to engage with the makerspace, including new tools, expanded programming, and the possibility of opening the space to the community during the summer months.

With its ever-growing offerings, the GC Makerspace is proving to be more than just a place to create—it’s a space where students can experiment, collaborate, and turn their ideas into reality.



## BUILDING A CHAMPIONSHIP CULTURE: Armstrong Stars practice their lacrosse skills with the Rochester Knighthawks

At Gates Chili, Building a Championship Culture goes beyond competition—it's about fostering a love for the game, instilling teamwork and providing students with opportunities to grow both on and off the field.

This fall, third- and fourth-grade students at Neil Armstrong Elementary School had a chance to experience that championship mindset firsthand during a special physical education class with the Rochester Knighthawks, the region's professional box lacrosse team.

The visit wasn't just about watching the pros in action—it was about learning, practicing and embracing the spirit of the game. Students worked on ground balls, passing, shooting and cradling, with guidance from Knighthawks

players. The session wrapped up with high-energy relay races, where students put their new skills to the test.

For the Knighthawks, this visit was part of their mission to "grow the game"—introducing lacrosse to a new generation and inspiring future athletes. For Gates Chili lacrosse coach and Neil Armstrong P.E. teacher Glenn Pittman, it was an opportunity to fuel student interest and strengthen the foundation of the district's lacrosse program.

"A common saying in the lacrosse community is 'grow the game,' and that is exactly what the Knighthawks are trying to do with visits to schools," Pittman said. "We would love to see our program grow and become more popular with our students."



This hands-on experience is exactly what Building a Championship Culture is all about—introducing students to new opportunities, building confidence and fostering a love for teamwork and competition. With experiences like this, more students may be inspired to pick up a lacrosse stick and carry that championship mindset into the future. And who knows—maybe one day, a Gates Chili graduate will be suiting up for the Knighthawks themselves.

## Spartans "Rock With" RBTL for the eighth year

The award-winning ARTS Partners program, a collaboration between Rochester Broadway Theater League (RBTL) and area schools, keeps climbing "Higher and Higher" as it enters its eighth year at Gates Chili.

The ARTS Partners program infuses arts into the classroom by integrating curriculum to selected touring Broadway productions presented at the West Herr Auditorium Theatre. At the end of the program, participating students get the opportunity to see the selected production live and in person.

In December, middle and high school students learned all about the creative process with "MJ the Musical", a jukebox musical based on the life of American entertainer Michael Jackson. The show is focused on Jackson's creative process prior to his famous Dangerous World Tour.

Before seeing the show, students learned about and utilized critical

thinking skills to analyze readings and lyrics. They studied several themes present in "MJ the Musical" including defining visionaries, how the past can help us move forward, pushing through negativity to stay motivated and engaged, finding your own power, balancing the pressure of perfection with success, and creating meaning and making an impact.

Students in Gates Chili High School Studio Art classes also learned about these themes and used them to create portrait artwork. Many of the portraits painted by students were proudly displayed at the West Herr Auditorium Theatre during showings of "MJ the Musical."

Meanwhile, our elementary students have been hard at work prepping for their own ARTS Partners program. In late February, third-grade students at all four of the district's elementary schools will journey down the yellow brick road, to performances of "The Wiz", a musical

twist on "The Wizard of Oz", featuring soul, gospel, rock and 70s funk.

Just like middle and high school students, third-graders have been studying themes and connecting them to the show and their own lives. Some of the themes they have been analyzing from "The Wiz" are changing your thoughts, changing the world, asking for help and showing strength, finding home, and unlocking your own power.

Fun fact: "MJ the Musical" and "The Wiz" share a connection to Michael Jackson, as a 1978 film adaptation of "The Wiz" starred Michael Jackson as the Scarecrow. Both musicals also feature the song "Ease on Down the Road."





**GATES CHILI CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT**

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A NYSPPRA award-winning publication

*Gates Chili High School  
Musical Theatre proudly presents*



**Friday, March 21 at 7 p.m.**

**Saturday, March 22 at 7 p.m.**

**Sunday, March 23 at 2 p.m.**

Gates Chili Performing Arts Center  
1 Spartan Way, Rochester, NY 14624

Buy tickets starting March 1 at [gateschili.org/tickets](http://gateschili.org/tickets)

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**Upcoming events and  
important dates to remember**

**MARCH**

- 1 HS ASVAB Exam
- 3 MIOSM Instrumental Concert 7 p.m.
- 11 **Board of Education Meeting** 6:30 p.m.
- 14 MS Grades 7-8 Social 7-8:30 p.m.
- 21 **#GCPride Day**
- 21-22 HS Musical: Mary Poppins 7p.m.
- 23 HS Musical: Mary Poppins 2 p.m.
- 25 **Board of Education Meeting** 6:30 p.m.
- 26 MIOSM Choral Concert 7 p.m.
- 27 PR Day of Play
- 27 HS Choral Concert 7 p.m.
- 28 **Superintendent's Conference Day -  
No School for Students**

**April**

- 1 MS Art Show 5:30-7 p.m.
- 3 MS Talent Show 6-8 p.m.
- 8 **Board of Education Meeting** 6:30 p.m.
- 10 Elementary Staff Volleyball Tournament 5 p.m.
- 14-18 **Spring Recess - No School for  
Students and 10-Month Staff  
Good Friday - District Closed**
- 18 **Board of Education Meeting** 6:30 p.m.
- 22 **Board of Education Meeting** 6:30 p.m.
- 23 HS Band Spring Concert 7:30 p.m.
- 25 **#GCPride Day**
- 28 - May 9 NYS 3-8 Assessment Window
- 29 HS Grades 8-9 Transition Night 6:30-8 p.m.