

ARDSLEY PTA NEWSLETTER

THE FOCUS

Co-Presidents: Theresa Del Grosso, Susan Morduch • Newsletter Committee: Laura Zeyer,
Laurie Leibowitz, Irene Berkowitz, Linda Horowitz • Desktop Publisher: William Zimmerman

A Message from the Co-Presidents

It's hard to believe that we are at the end of yet another school year; we hope it was a year of growth and success! This is a bittersweet time of year. We are excited to be moving on, yet sad to be saying good bye to our Concord Road and Middle School seniors who will be moving up, and our High School seniors who will be moving on. We congratulate you on your accomplishments and success; and we wish you all the best!

As a PTA, we, too, have many good-byes to make. We would like to thank Marlena Tsagaris, Stephanie Marquesano, Barbara DeAngelo and Joann Lessem, who will be leaving the PTA Executive board at the end of June. These four amazing women have always had the community's best interest in mind; they leave behind a legacy through their tireless dedication and commitment to the bettering of our children's education. For this, we say thank you, not only to you, but to your families as well for putting up with the phone calls and late night meetings. Good luck on your next endeavors!

As we look at the accomplishments of the PTA over the past year, we are thrilled to say that we raised more than \$75,000!!!! A big thank you for all of your support!!! This would not have been possible without you! When talking about fundraising, we also must say thank you to DeCicco's; and to the community for participating in the very successful DeCicco's receipt program. The money that was raised went directly to enhance the education of our students, and to support the parents in our community, in a variety of ways. We hope that you have found this year's PTA events to be a mix of fun community events and informative programs, such as the Harlem Wizards and the Ardsley Family Academy. We are always open to suggestions, and would love to hear what you have to say.

When Susan and I started the year as Co-Presidents, we didn't know much about each other, but what we did know was that we each shared the same goal for the PTA: better communication. We are very proud of the launch of the PTA Post, and hope that you have found it to be informative as well as enjoyable. Many community members were asking for a school wide directory and we heard you; we hope that you have

found the directory to be a useful tool in keeping connected to your children's friends and your neighbors. We sponsored two Principal Panels to give the community a chance to raise their concerns and find out what is going on in our schools. We hosted Coffee "Klatches" with Lauren Allen, giving parents an opportunity to speak openly about their curriculum concerns in all three schools; and we brought in our very own Ardsley Police Officer, Tony Vacca to give us a pulse on what our tweens and teens are doing when they are out and about the town. We hosted the first PTA College Conference, where this year's 10th and 11th graders were able to ask questions from High School Alumni about their college experiences, and so much more.

So what is coming on the horizon? We have already begun to plan for the next Ardsley Family Academy, and we plan to bring back many of your favorite fundraisers. We would like to give a warm welcome to the new PTA Executive Board members: Grace Charles, Deborah Pence, Missy Closter, and Rina Schunk. The remaining members of the board are Lorrie Feinsilber, Elise Friedman, Susan Morduch, Theresa Del Grosso, and Sandra Elezaj, the new co-president.

One thing that will never change is the "P" in the PTA; we need you the Parents. Whether it's a little or a lot of time you have to commit, it is highly valued. By working together we will be able to make an impact on our school community. We encourage everyone to get involved, and stay informed. Thank you to all those who have volunteered to make this year such a success! Have a great summer, and we will see you in September.

Theresa Del Grosso and Susan Morduch

P.S. I would like to give a special thank you to Susan Morduch, who served as Co-President with me this year. Thank you for your partnership, guidance, and integrity throughout the year, but most of all for your dedication and commitment. I have enjoyed working with you. I'm thrilled that you have decided to stay on the board next year as Middle School VP.

THE FOCUS IS ON...

A Conversation with Tony Vacca, Ardsley Youth Officer and Task Force Member, Officer John Sheely

For this issue of The Focus, and with the warmer weather and our kids out and about, we are focusing on keeping our children safe.

What age is it appropriate to leave a child home alone?

There is no stated legal age at which a child can be left home alone. This is a question of judgment, and you need to make a decision about when your child is responsible enough to stay home alone. Questions to consider when making this decision: Do they know what to do when the phone rings, or when someone is at the door? Do they know their escape routes, or what to do if they come home alone and see the house has been broken into? Are they old enough to be alone, but not old enough to look after others; can they look after one child, but not two? What time of day are you going out, and for how long will you be gone? When you do go out, you should always leave your contact numbers and what your plans are, so that you are always able to be contacted in case of an emergency. Do you have neighbors nearby who can help out if need be, and do your children know who they are? The Ardsley Police phone number (693-1700) should be programmed into your home phone so your child can call if need be, e.g. something suspicious going on outside. Your child could call the police when home alone even if it is not an emergency and they are unsure of any situation.

What advice do you have for a Middle School aged child who is walking into town, or home alone?

The Police are not enthusiastic about having children walk into town unsupervised, if you do allow your middle school age children to walk into town check in frequently with them. Keep in mind that your child will be unsupervised in an area where older children will be as well, and they may be exposed to a situation they are not ready or prepared for.

When walking home alone, have them walk along a regular, agreed upon route, and they should know some "safe" homes they can go to along the way in case of an emergency. Lastly, Put an ICE (In Case of Emergency) telephone number on your own phone as well as your child's cell phone and the local Ardsley Police Department (APD) telephone number 693-1700.

What should I tell my child to do if they are approached by a stranger when alone?

If a child is accosted when alone, they should try to run away, go to the police station, and get whatever information they can about the car and people involved. This is important information to discuss with your child. If a child is approached by a plain-clothes police officer,

and they are alone and unsure have them ask for ID. If they are still uncomfortable, they should ask for a uniformed officer to come to the scene.

What about the High School aged child in town?

Teens like to hang out behind Cold Stone's / Starbucks and in Bicentennial Park (between Captain Video and CVS). These are also common sites for illicit activities. While not all children are engaged in this type of behavior, parents need to be informed so that they can protect their children. Please also be aware that when you do drop your child off somewhere for the night, they may not be staying there, but only returning just before you pick them up.

What about drugs and alcohol?

Be cautious when storing medications in your home, we have seen overdosing incidents from Benadryl and the sale of prescription drugs in the community, and underage drinking is always an issue. Please encourage your children to feel comfortable calling the police if their friends have had too much to drink, or have taken drugs. It is much better to call the police (693-1700) if there is a situation than not doing anything at all. The police are not looking to arrest people in this situation. Their primary focus is on the well being of people in the community.

Any final comments?

The officers of the APD want the residents to know that their primary concern is maintaining the well-being of the community. Children should be encouraged to respect the police, and see them more as an advocate than adversary. It is best for all involved to be courteous and respectful. The Task Force members are out and about patrolling the neighborhoods, and if your child should be involved in a situation, and the occasional issue does arise, it is in everyone's best interest to maintain calm and be cooperative.

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PPLT Update

Concord Road

This spring a representative of the Concord Road PPLT participated on the Board-designated Physical Education Committee. In light of the Board's request to explore options for reinstating a third period of PE during the week for 3rd and 4th graders, this committee was asked to make recommendations for next year's schedule. Following the Committee process and Board approval, PE will be returned to its 2005-06 schedule of three times per week in the 3rd and 4th grades for the 2007-08 school year. Concord Road administration will explore a six-day teaching week for 2008-09, similar to the Middle School model to add flexibility to the schedule.

PPLT learned about new initiatives for next year, including the Geometer math program (as a complement to TERC) and a foreign language introduction to 4th graders — as a way of introducing fourth graders to foreign language and connecting them to the upper grades.

The PPLT will also be involved in setting policies regarding security procedures in the event of an emergency and protocols and procedures pertaining to lice and other illnesses. Lastly, in the wake of Principal Margaret Ruller's resignation, the PPLT looks forward to providing the Interim Principal with guidance to ensure a smooth transition in 2007-08. If anyone has any questions or concerns to express for the Concord Road PPLT, please e-mail Nancy Plotkin, Chairperson, at nancy311@earthlink.net.

Middle School

The Ardsley Middle School PPLT welcomes the middle school's newly hired assistant principal, Tom Holland, and looks forward to the '07 - '08 school year with Amy Watkins at the helm and Tom at her side. The PPLT continues to evaluate whether to include, as part of the 5th and 6th grade curriculum, the refined D.A.R.E. (Define - Assess - Refine - Evaluate) program. D.A.R.E. is a national program that focuses on establishing positive relationships between students and law enforcement, teachers, parents, and other community leaders and includes coaching kids on how to handle peer-pressure environments, particularly in areas concerning substance abuse and violence. The '07 - '08 school year introduces the 9 period day, with the PPLT further assisting in the types of classes to be included within the 9th period. Safety within the school itself remains, of course, a high

priority and discussions and future planning continue in this area. Development/upgrading of student progress reports continues and should be in place for the new school year. The PPLT also considered adding a buddy system to the 4th grade spring visit to the middle school, where each 4th grader would accompany his/her 5th grade "buddy" for two classes, including the oh-so-important locker time. Finally, now that the 6th graders have experienced Nature's Classroom, which was shortened to 4 days from 5 this year, the PPLT will assist with evaluating the impact, if any, of the shortened trip and whether this important school event should return to a 5 day experience for the 6th graders.

High School

The High School PPLT continues to examine the issue of communication. Discussion has focused on the structure and content of the high school website. In addition, the PPLT is reviewing information provided through targeted mailings and print communication.

At the April meeting, it was decided that two separate subcommittees would be formed. The first would further explore the issues of student substance use and ways to include the larger community in the discussion of prevention strategies. The second sub-committee would serve as the high school wellness committee to examine the district wellness plan and make recommendations for high school implementation.

The student representatives of the PPLT have expressed concern over the use of Honor Roll bumper stickers and have asked the PPLT to discuss the possibility of discontinuing distribution.

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An Interview with Jan Yablou

By Laurie Leibowitz



What are your duties as Pupil Personnel Director?

My job involves district-wide supervision of all pupil personnel professional staff, including the search, hiring, observation, evaluation, and tenure recommendations for all psychologists, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical

therapists, and most special education teachers. It covers most areas outside of general education for students aged two-and-a-half to twenty-one. In addition, a huge part of this job is dealing with funding issues, and getting every available legal dollar from the state and federal government for reimbursement.

What has changed since you first started working in Ardsley?

We had a substantial number of students placed in more restrictive programs outside of Ardsley, which cost taxpayers a huge amount of money every year. Now they have the opportunity to go to their home school just as their siblings and friends do. When I started 12 years ago Ardsley had two life skills classes. Now we have 15 special programs and serve about 94-95% of our children within Ardsley schools. We also admit 60 to 70 students from other school districts, whose own schools pay for their services. This tuition funding not only helps special education, but also serves the general population. Another important change was the addition of our case management system, which provides every child's family with a particular person they can contact.

What are you most proud of?

I'm proud of the talented staff who deal with such a diverse group of children, both with special needs and with regular needs. I was a teacher for many years. I taught in classrooms for the disabled, primarily for those with autism or severe emotional issues. It's one thing to be an administrator, but it's another to be there on a daily basis with the children. I'm also very proud of the parents. They are caring and well-educated and know the type of service and instruction they want for their kids. In addition, I'm proud that even when we don't find specific documentation of a disability, we still spend time talking about what to do next, at home and in the classroom, to address certain needs the child might have.

What have you enjoyed the most about your job?

I'm never bored. Everyday I jump from activity to event or crisis that has to be addressed. I go into the classrooms, meet with staff, and attend CSE meetings, which are typically two or three times a year for each student. I still find it exciting. I probably wouldn't be here all these years if I didn't. I'm happy to be leaving on a high note. I think the district is going in a good direction. We have supportive, committed board members who are the backbone of any well-running District.

What has been particularly difficult or challenging?

Unfortunately, this type of job has become too litigious due to the nature of the law. The law provides for all avenues of legal challenge and does not focus enough on the cooperation or mediation that can occur. Another challenge is long-range planning. Here we make sure that the students in our special programs in the high school get involved with adult planning and vocational training. We have many kids who are working at local businesses in order to get real on-the-job training.

What will you miss the most about this job?

I'm getting very sad thinking about not seeing the children in the classrooms. There are kids here who started at the same time I did. They were preschool babies and now they're at the high school. Some of them have graduated. It's a pleasure to stay in one place a very long time and see kids and families grow.

What would you like to see in the future for Ardsley?

I would hope for continued heavy involvement from parents who advocate for their children and the programs and want to work in a really positive manner with the school district. I also hope for strong support and continued hiring of high-quality staff. We've been really fortunate with the caliber of guidance counselors, speech therapists, occupational therapists, physical therapists, psychologists, and teachers. Also, programs sometimes need to be modified, changed, or deleted. That's part of growth.

How will the transition from you to Jeanne Farruggio be handled?

I want to make sure this is the smoothest possible transition. Jeanne and I have had dozens of conversations about programs, services, staffing, and budgets. She is going to be here for a number of days in May and June while school is still in session. On most of those days she'll be actively involved with the same activities I've been doing, which is everything from budget stuff to phone calls to administrative meetings to CSE meetings to parent follow-up conversations. She officially becomes the PPS Director on July 1st. She's done this for a long time at Yorktown Central Schools and she knows her business. I want the families to strongly support her efforts and direction.

Plans for retirement?

I have some nice choices. One of the universities has been talking with me on and off about possibly working full-time for their school of education. A few districts have contacted me about doing some consulting work and maybe some interim work. I've also started to look into a few volunteer opportunities. A fun thing for me, believe it or not, is teaching grad courses at night, and I will continue to do that. I like that it keeps me up on the latest research. I will be spending more time with family, if they remember what I look like! Hopefully I'll get to museums and the New York City Ballet more often. And I know I'll stay in contact with a lot of people here in Ardsley.

An Interview with Jeff O'Donnell, Ardsley Middle School Principal on his Retirement

By Arlyne Tessler



Mr. Jeff O'Donnell, principal of AMS these past seven years is retiring at the end of this academic year. During a recent interview with "The Focus," Mr. O'Donnell was kind enough to share some of his proudest accomplishments, detail a few unforgettable

moments, give some wise advice to his successor, and, most importantly, tell his unique message and feelings to the AMS students.

How many years have you served as Principal of AMS?

I have been principal for the past seven years, following five years as the Assistant Principal.

Share with us some of your proudest accomplishments?

There have been many, and most of them were thanks to the efforts of a great many people: students, parents, teachers, and community. Some specifics include the development of the Balanced Literacy approach in our ELA program, a greater focus on the arts, especially music, and the preparation of our students in all aspects of learning and growing. The overseeing of the improvements in the physical plant of the Middle School has also been very rewarding. With the support of the district and community, we have made our play area safer, built state of the art science labs, art rooms, and an outstanding Library/Media Center.

Are there special moments you will always remember as Principal of AMS?

There have been so many wonderful moments here in Ardsley that it is hard to select just a few. One of the moments would have to be the day we celebrated our Blue Ribbon Award with an auditorium filled with students, teachers, and parents, the three major reasons why we won the award in the first place. Another special moment was the day that Dr. Toll announced to the staff that I would move up from the Assistant Principal position to become the Principal of the Ardsley Middle School. I knew then I had been granted a very challenging yet very wonderful opportunity to lead a fantastic school and community.

What are some of your thoughts and feelings as you near retirement?

My feelings are definitely bittersweet. On one hand, I look forward to new endeavors, yet to be determined, with lots of travel involved. On the other hand, I have already begun to experience the feelings of change and loss that come with this decision. I know I will miss Ardsley greatly.

What is the most important challenge your successor will face?

The biggest challenge for Amy Watkins will be to ensure the success of the new nine period schedule. It will include Foreign Language every day and a ninth period designed to enrich, challenge, and support the needs of our wide range of learners.

Do you have any advice for Ms. Watkins to help her make a smooth transition?

The best advice I can give is to listen closely, keep communication open with all of the groups involved with the Middle School: teachers, parents, students, and community. Be open to embrace new ideas, focus upon a vision, and recognize the importance of each and every child.

Do you mind sharing some of your retirement plans with us? Are there some hobbies, or perhaps travel plans you will finally have time to pursue?

Travel will be a big part of my plans, as soon as my wife is ready to retire. In the meantime, I may do some supervision of student teachers as well as volunteer work with the Hunter College Scholarship Fund and local hospitals. I am an avid reader and now will have the time to catch up on all the wonderful books I've been collecting.

What words or message do you want to share with the AMS students?

Be true to yourselves, believe in yourselves, and be the best that you can be. It's been an absolute pleasure working with such an incredible group of students over the years. All different yet all with so much in common. I'll miss the students most of all!

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Notes from the Schools

CONCORD ROAD

Spring has finally arrived at Concord Road, and with it came preparations for the annual budget vote and the bobcat mascot vote. After many years of faithful service, we are retiring our old bobcat mascot. The process of choosing a new one has been fun for all.

The student council continues to be very busy, working hard to make a positive impact on both our community and the world. As a result of their organizational initiative, Concord Road has been honored by UNICEF as one of the top fundraising school's during this year's Trick or Treat for UNICEF campaign. The plaque they received is now proudly displayed in the trophy case by the library. Their most recent fundraising effort, Kids that Care, honors the memory of Officer Stuart Cohen, a kindergarten parent and a life-long Ardsley resident, who passed away recently in the line of duty.

Our young musicians and artists have worked very hard in preparation for their moment to shine. The third and fourth grade spring concerts have provided an opportunity to hear how our talented singers and musicians have grown throughout this year. And, Concord Road was transformed into an art lover's paradise with the return of our annual art show on May 24. We could not have done this, of course, without the dedication of our enormously gifted music and art teachers who work tirelessly to inspire our young learners to see their world and to express who they are in beautiful ways.

The final test of the year for our fourth graders was in early May. Formally known as the New York State Program Evaluation Test in Science (ESPET), it couples multiple choice questions with performance items that ask the children to reflect their science knowledge by completing a series of tasks. Our students were well prepared by our wonderful science team, who ensured that the children were not only ready for the exam, but were relaxed and confident in their abilities as well.

We have welcomed our incoming kindergarten students and their families on May 30 for our final kindergarten orientation event. Our new students was given the opportunity to meet teachers, to see classrooms and to tour the school. And we hope they will join us again in June for our Community Bedtime Stories. This year we will be welcoming a new storyteller, Jane Adams. Many of you may have heard Jane's wonderfully engaging stories at the Bronx Zoo's Holiday Lights celebration or at one of her many events in libraries and other venues throughout our area.

And finally, we are getting ready to say good-bye to our fourth graders. Preparations are underway for their moving up ceremony in June, and activities have been put in place that will ease their transition to the middle school. We are so very proud of all their accomplishments, and we are thrilled to have been able to be by their sides as they have matured into such fine, caring young people.

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Have a wonderful, restful, and playful summer. We look forward to seeing you in the Fall.

MIDDLE SCHOOL

AMS has been busy since the last edition. Read below to see how a few of our talented students shined in recent competitions!

The Science Olympiad Team placed 13th in the state competition at New Paltz. Medals were received by Bettina Cheung and Julie Kim in Don't Bug Me (5th) and Ecology (3rd). Shivrat Chhabra and Audrey Lew placed 2nd in Heredity. Dan Herman and Nica Siegel received the gold medal in meteorology. The final medals were given to Kevin Chen and Audrey Lew in The Solar System. Other team members to be congratulated include Alec Friedman, James Doerhoff, Andy Turell, Adam Leczycki, Ryan Rosenberg and Rohan Pitre.

The Annual Regional French Contest was also a huge success! Alexandra Brinas-4th place; Sydney Newman-5th place; Sanjana Raj and Hank Swerdlhoff-6th place; Dan Herman and Pauline Miller-7th place; and Rachel Wiskind-10th place!

Here are our National Winners from the French Contest: Alexandra Brinas-5th; Sydney Newman-6th; Sanjana Raj and Hank Swerdlhoff-7th; and Dan Herman and Pauline Miller-8th! Merveilleux!

On Friday April 20th, a group of talented 7th and 8th grade students participated in Concord Road's Annual Health Fair. AMS's health teacher, Elise Hattem, and the Student Assistance Counselor, Danielle Satow, chose these students from a long list of volunteers. These thirteen students, armed with hand-made props and lots of enthusiasm, performed eight skits for 3rd and 4th graders at Concord Road. These skits focused on positive decision-making. Student-led discussions followed their skits. The presenters explained that every decision leads to a consequence. Our young audience paid close attention and their participation showed that they were absorbing these great lessons about making healthy choices.

In addition, we have formally welcomed our new Assistant Principal, Mr. Thomas Holland. He joins us from Clarkstown School District. Mr. Holland has already

spent two days shadowing with Ms. Watkins and attended an evening concert. He will return for another visit in June.


Finally, 4th grade students and parents from Concord Road will soon receive a letter inviting them to the June 14th activity night for 4th grade students. During this evening of fun, students will experience the wonders of an activity night while their parents learn about life in the middle school. Also, be on the look out for information regarding the 4th grade orientation. It will give the 4th grade students the opportunity to experience two "real-life" classes of a 5th grade student. We are looking forward to welcoming our new class to the middle school.

HIGH SCHOOL

As another school year draws to a close, it is not too early to reflect upon some of the accomplishments that have made this an outstanding school year at Ardsley High School. Students and staff work very hard each and every day to produce the academic results that continue to distinguish our school as one of the best high schools in Westchester. We take great pride in offering a rich curriculum to students of all ability levels. This year, we added a new Engineering elective course and an Advanced Placement Environmental Science course. This was also the first year that we piloted our co-taught 9th grade core academic courses.

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Notes From The Schools

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This past week, the NY State Education Department released the latest high school Report Card. The Regents exam results have never been better. Instead of being satisfied by passing rates which typically are 95% to 100%, we now focus on how many students are passing at the mastery level, which is represented by a score range of 85-100. Practically all Regents mastery rates are at a three year high. Approximately 60% to 80% of our students are scoring at the mastery level on one or more Regents exams. The increased passing and mastery rates are consistent across all student subgroups and abilities. In addition, more students are qualifying for Advanced Placement courses. Our graduation rate over four years is at 99%. Ninety-eight percent of our students are attending college.

It has also been a year of "firsts" for the high school. In the arts, the first ever "Arts Day" opened in December to rave reviews by everyone in attendance. In April the high school welcomed thousands of music students from all over Westchester County as we hosted the NYSSMA Music Festival for the first time. The English Department held its inaugural 10th grade "Poetry Slam" competition in the auditorium. In extra-curricular activities, our Academic Challenge team qualified for national competition for the first time ever. Our Science Olympiad team placed in the top three teams in Westchester County for the first time and had four students earn gold medals at the state competition. The school newspaper just earned their first Silver Medal in the Columbia Press Association's Competition. The newly formed Ardsley High School Inventeam was

honored as a finalist by MIT for their "curb-climbing" wheelchair invention. In athletics, our football team won its first Bowl game since the program was re-established 15 years ago. This winter, our girl's basketball team was in the Section One Final Four at the County Center for the first time ever.

Most importantly, I am pleased to report that the school climate and student behavior has never been better. It is a credit to the students and staff that there is a true sense of community, civility, and respect for one another. During the school day, students move from class to class in a casual and calm atmosphere. Class time is engaged and focused, while student free time is relaxed and informal. It is a wonderful environment in which to learn.

The high school staff would like to thank the PTA, the Ardsley Education Foundation, the Board of Education, and the community for supporting our programs this past year. We look forward to continuing our success in 2007-2008.

The PTA and editors of this newsletter would like to thank all of the Ardsley staff members who gave of their time and cooperated on bringing forth this issue.

We would also like to thank:

- *PPLT members Jill Gross and Mark Montague.*
- *Mr. Jeff O'Donnell and Mr. Jan Yablow for taking the time to answer our readers questions. Enjoy your retirement.*

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