

Update

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to the Community

The South Orangetown Central School District Newsletter



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Update

to the Community

Elevate.
Engage.
Inspire.



ON THE COVER:

"It's pretty fun. I didn't know about Brazil, which we did

last time. It's fun learning about Italy because I can help the teacher," says **Luca**—a fluent Italian language speaker and member of the WOS Passport Club—during a meeting focused on Italy. The afterschool enrichment, led by WOS Grade 2 teacher **Jaclyn Nandlal**, studies a new country at each meeting.

Message from the Superintendent

BRIAN CULOT, Ed.D.



Dear South Orangetown Community,

This fall, we have celebrated the academic, artistic and athletic achievements of many of our Tappan Zee High School students. From National Merit Scholarship Commended Students to AP Scholars, NYSSMA All-State and Area-All State musicians to Section 1 champions, it is an exciting time in South Orangetown! Honor society inductions have begun and we have launched several new enrichment programs, as well as our Boys Varsity Volleyball team. By the time you read this, the TZ Players will have presented their fall play and winter concert season will be underway.

As I visit our schools, observing and interacting with so many students, staff and parents, I am impressed by the quality of instruction, number of programs and the breadth of opportunities outside of the school day. Every student is encouraged to explore their interests through enrichments, clubs, sports and/or performing arts as we continue to work to achieve 100 percent participation. Families are engaged, too! We've had record attendance at our curriculum nights, Food Truck & Trunk or Treat and athletic events.

We are preparing to break ground on our Capital Improvements Project in Summer 2024, with Phase 1 construction beginning at William O. Schaefer Elementary School and Cottage Lane Elementary School. This work, which will be scheduled over two years, will include classroom renovations, HVAC upgrades and a redesign of the CLE main entrance. Plans for Phase 2 construction at TZHS were submitted in late September for New York State Education Department review. Phase 3 planning for renovations at South Orangetown Middle School are in progress.

In January, SOCS D will administer a School Community Survey for students, parents, staff and community members. The web-based survey is designed to gather input about how we are doing as a District in many areas at various grade levels. We want to hear from you.

I wish you all a happy, healthy and safe holiday season!

Administrative Appointments



Lillian Rinchiera, Ed.D.
Director of Financial
Services



Melissa Luciano
Principal
TZHS



Paul Frisch
Assistant Principal
TZHS

SOCSD in Action: Preparing Active Citizens



Student voice is cultivated from the early grades in SOCSD. Both elementary schools have active student councils, composed of representatives elected by their peers, which work to enhance their school communities—just as they do at the secondary level.

Through Social Studies, ELA and Character Education programming across all grades, students develop and practice critical thinking, collaboration and communication skills through lessons that draw from real world situations. They are also provided with a variety of opportunities to contribute to their school communities through service-oriented activities and extracurriculars and, for grades K-8, involvement with school-based recycling and composting programs.



Middle and high school students also have a say in building and district-level decision making by serving on advisory groups and interview committees for school administrator positions.



New Credential for Grads!



TZHS students now have the opportunity to earn the New York State Seal of Civic Readiness distinction on their high school transcript and diploma. The Seal was developed as a component of the Board of Regents Civic Readiness Initiative, which aims to further strengthen civics education statewide and empower students to become engaged citizens.

To obtain the Seal of Civic Readiness, a student must complete all requirements for a New York State local or Regents diploma and earn a total of six points, with at least two points in Civic Knowledge and at least two points in Civic Participation. Students may also earn points by completing a Capstone project.

SOMS Earns School of Distinction Designation



Last month, SOMS Principal **Chad Corey, Ed.D.**, Assistant Principal **Danielle Rodriguez Ed.D.** and Math teacher **Allyn Flaherty** presented on using data to transform math support at the Association for Middle Level Education's Annual Conference in National Harbor, MD. The middle school was one of just 11 schools nationwide to be named a 2023 AMLE School of Distinction.

The Schools of Distinction program recognizes exemplary schools while supporting them through a process of strategic vision setting to help foster ongoing growth and success. Last year, SOMS completed a rigorous review process that measured implementation of middle grades best practices and continuous improvement plans. AMLE highlighted SOMS' strengths, including the structure and work of the School Support Team and efforts to incorporate student voice into the school culture and foster a welcoming, inclusive and affirmative environment.

"In our continued pursuit of excellence, we seek opportunities to evaluate ourselves through research-based best practices," reported Corey.

"This recognition reaffirms the value of our work and challenges us to further expand and sustain our efforts."

Why invest in extracurriculars?

1. Enable students to discover and develop interests
2. Build community
3. Create equitable opportunities for enrichment and social connection

Expanding Extracurriculars Helps Drive Engagement

Over the past decade, SOCSO has invested in hands-on, project-based learning, flexible learning environments, high-interest electives and compelling academic enrichment—from author visits to field trips—to provide exciting, exceptional educational experiences for our students.

These efforts also extend beyond the school day. Understanding that student participation in extracurriculars is linked positively to academic performance, attendance, behavior and a sense of belonging, SOCSO has expanded its offerings to tap into students' curiosity, diverse interests and, in some cases, career aspirations.

Last year, 60 percent of students in grades K-5 and 75 percent of those in grades 6-12 enrolled in at least one extracurricular or sport. Administrators are working to further boost engagement by identifying and addressing barriers that may keep some students from participating. All schools are creating unique events within the school day to ensure that all students are able to engage in these signature SOCSO experiences.



For our youngest students, enrichment programs offer a fun environment for learning and practicing new skills, such as teamwork and public speaking.

WOS' Earth Activists clean up their school grounds, use an app to photograph and identify the litter they find and develop school-wide campaigns to promote responsible environmental stewardship.

"I want to help animals by picking up trash. I like being with other kids who care about that, too."

— Milan

WOS Earth Activists Club



"I know someone who crochets and he really inspires me, so I wanted to try it."

— Rejuana

CLE Creative Crocheting Club

From Creative Crocheting to Lego Master Builders to Running Club, CLE hosts more than 20 enrichment programs throughout the school year. Six new clubs were launched in 2023-24 alone, with the goal of having every student participate in at least one.

Extracurriculars can also give students the opportunity to extend classroom learning in areas that they are passionate about.

This year, the long-standing SOMS Debate Club is using podcasting to help members prepare for debates.

"It's really cool to be able to debate outside of Research & Debate class. I like the structured format for having an argument; it has taught me how to speak my mind in a reasonable way."

— Valentina

SOMS Debate-Podcasting Club





"We needed this program. It's a brotherhood out here and the way our coaches make us feel is just on top of the world."

— Jordan

TZ Boys Varsity Volleyball

Boys Volleyball is the most recent sport to be added to TZ Athletics' roster. Since 2019, the program has expanded—based on student demand—to include Girls Golf and Flag Football, too. Creating new teams generates additional opportunities for students to make friends, be physically active and learn to work together toward a common goal.



"I get to use my random trivia knowledge and have fun with my friends. I've learned a lot of new things about science, art, culture and the world in general."

I've always been a quick thinker, but I've definitely noticed an improvement in my ability to rattle off information quickly, which is helpful in getting my point across in other situations."

— Sam

TZHS Academic League

Academic League is one of several clubs which offers the excitement of fast-paced, team competition rooted in academics and/or technical skills.

SOMS Prevention Counselor
Bobbie-Angela Wong, LMSW

ASK an expert



On October 23, the SOCS D Family Engagement Center hosted its first Parent University, a collection of mini-workshops to help families navigate everything from accessing academic resources to vaping prevention. SOMS Prevention Counselor **Bobbie-Angela Wong, LMSW** led a session on kids' mental health and answered questions parents frequently ask.

WHEN SHOULD I BE CONCERNED?

Two guiding questions can help when you are noticing a change in your child's behavior, mood or interests: What is the intention behind the change? Is the change interfering with their ability to function?

It is important to look at the extremes. Attention is generally given to students who are failing in some way. However, we do not always pay enough attention to those who seem "perfect." A healthy balance is important for mental health.

HOW DO I HELP MY CHILD FIND BALANCE?

- Create a structured routine that includes time to engage in fun activities that do not have any pressure associated with them.
- Role model how to be a flexible problem solver when things do not go according to plan.
- Monitor and establish guidelines for technology and social media use. Communicate openly that the intent of these limits is for your child to use their time to pursue other things they enjoy doing.

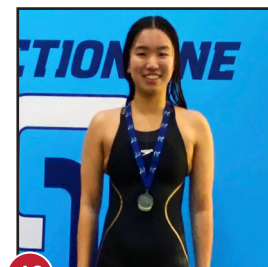
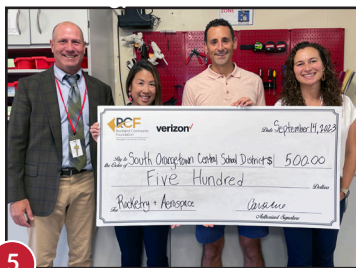
HOW DO I TALK WITH MY CHILD ABOUT MY CONCERNS?

"Hey, I'm concerned. I'm noticing..." is a good place to start.

Open communication does not plant a seed in your child's mind. When you ask about mental health, you let your child know that you're there for them. It is important to use "I" statements; "I'm noticing" comes from a place of love and care.

Our School Support teams are here to help! **PLEASE REACH OUT.**

Achievements and Accolades



TZ HS seniors **Jake Ciorra**, **Kierra Kim**, **Morimichi Kawasaki** and **Jake Preble** (1) have been recognized as 2024 National Merit Scholarship Commended Students for their performances on the Fall 2022 Preliminary SAT/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test.

Ninety TZHS students (2) earned 2023 AP Scholar Awards for outstanding college-level achievement through their performance on multiple AP Exams over the course of their high school careers.

TZ HS juniors **Aaron Pakola** (violin) and **Nate Prisco** (French horn) were selected by the New York State School Music Association to perform at the 2023 All-State Music Festival in Rochester; seniors **Angelique Cerbolles** (vocal) and **Kierra Kim** (cello) were chosen as alternates (3). In addition, 22 musicians were chosen to perform in the Area All-State Music Festival (4): Band - **Mia Petrouniak**, **Isabella Popescu** (alternate), **Thomas Previte**, **Nate Prisco** and **Delia Spiegelman**

Chorus - **Angelique Cerbolles**, **Emma Chen**, **Carol Daquilema**, **Helena Farber** and **Jane Greenway**

Orchestra - **Sean Han**, **Griffin Heatley**,

Esther Hwang, **Kierra Kim**, **Adam Lerner**, **Neal Oza**, **Aaron Pakola**, **Annabelle Simboli**, **Calum Tjon**, **Myla Vijayan**, **Lukas Witek** and **Daniel Yoo**

TZ HS Engineering Team leader and Technology Education teacher **Nick Desantis** (5) and SOMS Technology Education teacher **Louis Chugranis** and Art teacher **Tatiana DiPierno** (6) were named winners of the Rockland Community Foundation's 2023 Innovative Teaching Grants. Desantis applied for a grant to support a rocketry and aerospace project; Chugranis and DiPierno submitted a collaborative art and design habitat installation project.

Twenty-four educators were celebrated at the 2023 Tenure Recognition Ceremony on November 16 (7): **Glenda Almeida-Rivera**, **Rudy Arietta**, **Robert Bennett**, **Catherine Bishop**, **Meghan Byrne**, **Jeanne Corcoran**, **Chad Corey**, **Ed.D.**, **Tiffany DiVenere**, **Christina Durcan**, **Soleidy Estevez**, **Christopher Haggarty**, **Eileen Hayes**, **Bradley Hercman**, **KathyAnne Kopac-Cook**, **Joseph Lloyd**, **Ph.D.**, **Richard Lozada**, **Melissa Luciano**, **Kathryn Marks**, **Bill Pilla**, **Jessica Sky**, **Karen Tesik**, **Ed.D.**, **Alexandros Tsironis**, **Marguerite**

Wegielski and Bobbie-Angela Wong.

TZHS was named a 2022-2023 New York State Public High School Athletic Association School of Distinction for having 100 percent of its varsity teams earn Scholar-Athlete Team Award status.

TZ Athletics hosted a National Signing Day ceremony for five TZHS seniors (8) who committed to play Division 1 sports in college: **Sofia Fenton**, Columbia University (Track & Field); **Ben Fishel**, Columbia University (Baseball); **Jack Kryger**, US Military Academy at West Point (Soccer); **Tara McHugh**, Youngstown State University (Lacrosse); and, **Daniela Parisi**, Albany University (Lacrosse).

TZ Girls Cross Country are the 2023 Section 1 Class B and Rockland County champions (9)!

TZ Boys Soccer and **TZ** Girls Soccer are 2023 League champions.

Bridget Dunn, TZ Girls Cross Country, is the Rockland County champion.

Lani Bao, TZ Girls Swimming, is a State qualifier and placed second at Sections for 50 Freestyle and 100 Backstroke (10).

picture
this!

TZ Varsity Football jersey #75 was retired at the end of the 2023 season in honor of alumnus and former captain Blaise Winter (TZHS Class of '80).

"We were thrilled to have 2010 TZ Athletics Hall of Fame inductee and 11-year NFL veteran **Blaise Winter** come back to spend the week in his hometown," said Director of Physical Education, Health and Athletics **Bill Pilla**. "To honor him at our game and for him to do the coin toss on Senior Night was a treat. His story is a testament to the fact that, with hard work and determination, anything is possible."

The pre-game ceremony on October 13 marked the culmination of a series of assemblies, talks and visits featuring the former NFL defensive lineman at SOMS and TZHS. During his return to South Orangetown, Winter spoke with students, coaches and teams about his journey from childhood to playing for the Indianapolis Colts, San Diego Chargers and Green Bay Packers.

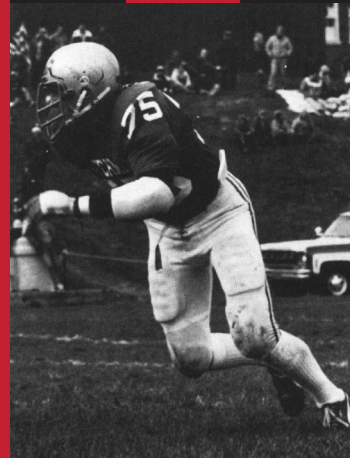
Spanish



Top: Winter (center) with Director of Physical Education, Health and Athletics Bill Pilla and TZ Varsity Football Head Coach Ralph Iannucci.

Bottom: Winter pictured in the TZHS 1980 Half-moon yearbook.

Spanish



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