



SCARSDALE  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## 'Dale Dispatch: District e-Newsletter

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From Dr. Thomas Hagerman

Superintendent of Schools



### On Registration and Residency

Although chronologically we are still in early spring, we are already in the throes of planning for the next school year. One of the major projects that has been underway for the past couple of years is a centralized, online registration process that is more family-friendly and will streamline this process for all involved.

After many hours of hard work by our project team, I am happy to report that we are fully "live" with central registration. In fact, so far, we have received 430 online applications; 122 of them have been approved/posted. There are an additional 95 applications that have been started, but not yet submitted. These numbers include applications from families who registered students since mid-December for this year or next year, for public school attendance, for preschool special education services, for private school transportation, and for 2017-18 Kindergarten.

We are extremely grateful to our Data Services department, principal secretaries, and District Registrar for their collective and collaborative work on this project to date, and for its continuing development. This initiative has also included a partnership with our PTC/PTAs as we continue to seek out seamless ways for sharing access and information with our supporting

parent groups. It is a true community effort.

Another aspect of this centralization of registration that has gotten some attention from the community is the verification of residency that is required when families move, have outdated leases or other paperwork, or have disruptions in family life such as divorce or separation. Although many people believe that owning or renting a property in Scarsdale is sufficient for school attendance, New York law dictates that physical residency is actually the standard, so this does need to be confirmed, sometimes along with custodial arrangements. While we understand this can seem intrusive, particularly to families in transition, we do have an obligation both legally and to our taxpayers, to ensure that students in our schools live in Scarsdale.

Generally speaking, families are very responsive to requests from our registrar, Maria Miraglia, for updated information; they provide it in a timely manner, and resolve the issue. Occasionally, however, this does not happen, or there are extenuating circumstances that make the process a little more difficult. Some of the most prevalent that we encountered over the past year include:

- Families who permanently move out of District, but do not inform us.
- Families who temporarily move out of District -- for a period of weeks, months, or years -- but do not inform us.
- Changes in custodial arrangements that are not shared with the District (often with one parent living in the District while the other does not).
- Family members living with other family members, along with their school-age children. In this case, a residency affidavit is required, and the living situation must be verified.
- Families living with other families, along with their school-age children. Again, a residency affidavit is required, and the living situation must be verified.
- Expired or fraudulent leases.
- Using a Scarsdale address (of a friend or family member) to access District Transportation or other services, while sending children to other schools/districts.

Unfortunately, there are more nonconforming residency situations than most people realize, representing thousands of dollars of cost to the families and taxpayers of Scarsdale. In part, the centralization of registration has allowed us to help families through some difficult transitional periods, often providing much needed stability to their children, but in ways that are also cost neutral to the District through the payment of tuition.

A small number of cases represent outright fraud (i.e. fake leases or affidavits), and the community should be confident that we will pursue these to the maximum extent of the law.

It has also been noted that there are some concerns about how students are affected by this process. From the District's standpoint, we treat matters of residency with complete confidentiality, as we do other student and family matters. We view these as adult issues and work directly with parents. District personnel do not discuss residency status with students.

As we continue our due diligence in this area, we ask families to partner with us in this work. Know that we are committed to helping our families through transitions both into and out of the District, as personal and life circumstances dictate. Toward that end, we do ask that you proactively notify us with changes in residency or family status, or with any questions you might have. Please know that our District Registrar is available to assist with any residential queries ([mmiraglia@scarsdaleschools.org](mailto:mmiraglia@scarsdaleschools.org)). We also ask for your patience as we finalize our own transition from building-based to centralized registration. A major part of the work this year has been updating our records to reflect current realities. While we are not quite done with this work, the bulk of it is now behind us. Again, we appreciate everyone who worked with us to make this a relatively painless transition.

Warm regards,  
Dr. Thomas Hagerman



# Does Homework Support Student Learning?

*By Lynne Shain, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction*

Many questions have been raised in recent years by teachers, parents, and researchers on the value of homework in student learning.

The research is mixed, as reflected in the articles linked below:

- [What research says about the value of homework: Research review](#)
- [Research Trends: Why Homework Should Be Balanced](#)

Adults often have strong opinions about the value of homework. Some parents and teachers think there is too much while others think there is too little.

Opinions also differ depending on the grade level of the student. There are research studies that especially challenge the effectiveness of homework in elementary schools. Some elementary schools have eliminated homework entirely. For example, the [American School in London](#), with demographics similar to Scarsdale, changed its stance on homework in Grades K-4 as explained in this [letter](#) from the Principal of the Lower School. The [Orchard School in South Burlington, VT](#) recently published their [No Homework policy](#).

A [meta-analysis](#) of research on the subject, published in 2006 by researcher Harris Cooper and colleagues, is often cited. It found that homework in elementary school does not contribute to academic achievement and has only a modest effect on secondary school students in terms of improving academic performance.

However, many educational leaders advise that the question isn't about homework vs. no homework; instead, we should be asking ourselves, "How can we transform homework so that it's engaging, relevant, and supports learning?"

At Scarsdale's elementary schools conversations have begun about alternate approaches to homework in light of current research.

The Middle School has used its team structure to review homework policies and demands placed on students. This has led to broad initiatives to reduce the homework load and for staff to be mindful of only assigning homework that adds value. As a result, most teams are reporting a significant reduction in homework demands, yet students continue to master material and perform well on assessments. Some teachers have moved to a no-homework policy, but give review sheets for students to practice problems at their own discretion. In addition there are several interesting programs underway, such as Passion with a Purpose, in which some seventh grade students work on a project that builds engagement and meaning by having Wednesday homework time replaced with pursuit of an individual project of interest.

At Scarsdale High School, Principal Ken Bonamo has reported, "A faculty team is leading a focus on homework this year. Data from the Challenge Success survey last year indicated that

our students' average homework load was 3.5 hours per night, higher than that of our peer schools in the research group. Our long term goal is to get that closer to the recommended two hours per night, and we are taking steps to get us there over time. This year, the faculty is working on the following items:

1. Making school vacations free of homework with no exams or assignments due during the first two days upon return. This applies to the breaks in December, February, and April, as well as Memorial Day.
2. Calibrating homework; that is, asking students to do a segment of homework in class, to see how long it takes both for teachers (to inform how long assignment should be) and for students (to demonstrate how long assignments take without distractions or assistance)."

Members of the High School faculty are trying alternative approaches to homework, such as asking students to create questions, rather than answer them. We know, for example, that certain classes do and should have more work required of students, and that each student completes work at his or her own pace. SHS teachers are committed to the deeper work of identifying the quality of assignments, beyond the simple metric of quantity, and note that both are important.

The Scarsdale Public Schools Homework Policy [4730](#) and the Homework Regulation [\(4750 - R\)](#) were written in the 1990's. Given the recent research on homework and the District's goal of Wellness, Scarsdale's educators continue to explore homework's role in supporting student learning.

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## Recruitment Season

*By Drew Patrick, Assistant Superintendent  
for Human Services and Leadership Development*



Even as we move closer to the selection of a new principal for Scarsdale Middle School, our attention now turns toward the more than [twenty teaching vacancies](#) anticipated for the 2017-18 school year. The result of a combination of retirements and proposed additions, recruiting for this number of positions requires coordination, collaboration, and stamina. As my predecessor wrote in this space a year ago, our school district has no problem attracting an immense quantity of applicants. Rather, our challenge is to continue to hone and refine our screening, interviewing, and selection processes to ensure that we identify the very best from among those numbers.

So how do we identify quality talent? A framework I have found helpful in organizing the information we uncover during the hiring process was developed in the early 1970's by the [Gallup Organization](#). After engaging in an in-depth examination of the qualities and characteristics of exceptional teachers, Gallup generated what has become one of the most frequently used interview questionnaires, the *Teacher Perceiver Instrument*. While this assessment tool is not something we use in Scarsdale, concepts identified in the underlying research endure, and are useful for understanding what characteristics predict quality teachers.

The Gallup work organizes twelve themes across three categories -- intrapersonal, interpersonal,

and extrapersonal Themes such as *mission, investment, and focus* characterize the intrapersonal category. A candidate exhibiting strengths in this area demonstrates a belief that all students can learn and grow, sees their professional goal as making meaningful contributions to this growth, and derives satisfaction from this kind of achievement. However, with the increasing emphasis on the importance of collaboration as a vehicle to problem-solving, strengths in the interpersonal domain are also critical. Gallup characterizes the themes of *empathy, rapport drive, and listening* as critical interpersonal attributes. Thus, we look for evidence of a candidate's ability to accept and incorporate the state of mind of others in their work, and connect with each student on an individual level. Finally, extrapersonal themes such as *innovation, input drive, and individualized perception* describe the importance of creativity and risk-taking in generating a learning environment that challenges all students, and a commitment to constantly searching for new ideas to make learning an individual experience for each student.

High-level talent and high-level potential educators are our most valuable resource when it comes to student learning. As a result, we take the responsibility of recruiting seriously, and approach it with as much thought and consideration as we can. In addition to excellent training and appropriate certifications, teachers who are "Scarsdale material" will demonstrate strength in the important intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal themes. We look forward to introducing the recruitment class of 2017 to the community later this spring.



## Inclusiveness: A Divergent Road Ahead?

*By Eric Rauschenbach, Director of Special Education and Student Services*

The conversation about education at the federal level has certainly changed over the past two months! This is especially true in the areas of special education and student services. Recently, the new Education Secretary made several statements: first, that she supports disability rights being developed by the states rather than the federal government; then, later in the same hearing, that she supports finding ways to bring federal special education funding closer to the original promise of 40% funding nationwide when the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was enacted. Right now it is closer to 8%. Even later in the same hearing she did not commit to making schools that accept vouchers comply with IDEA. So, what do we know about where federal policy on Special Education is going? Not much.

The Secretary has been a vocal supporter of vouchers, and has even asserted that historically black colleges and universities were forerunners of the school choice movement. Additionally, the Office of Civil Rights and Department of Education have been directed to withdraw their guidance about Title IX and transgender students. On a larger policy note, the White House website no longer lists Americans with disabilities as a core issue. On the other hand, Karen Pence (the Second Lady) is an elementary school teacher who has declared her support of art therapy programs for children with autism.

Needless to say, many of the statements coming from Washington D.C. are cause for anxiety, both for educators and for families of special needs students. Increasingly, the public discourse includes assertions that schools have become "too soft" in protecting children's feelings through anti-bullying education, character education or transgender/LGBTQ inclusion. It's not surprising, as the type of talk that we heard during the campaign applies not just to schools but to society in

general. My personal analysis (and biases) leads me to believe that we are about to see a period of reduced inclusivity with regard to federal policy, which will in turn allow some institutions to move backwards.

However, let us remember that the hallmark of public education is inclusivity: all children have the right to and deserve an education in a school where they feel safe and accepted. Scarsdale has a long history of forging its own path. From state tests to AP/AT, we have always considered what makes sense for our students rather than asking what the State has told us to do.

What is the best approach for Scarsdale students? Inclusion, and services which allow students to grow, be accepted, and feel safe.

As educators and parents it has never been more important for us to be engaged in the democratic process. I would encourage us all to stay up to date on the education proposals brought to Congress, and policy directives enacted by the Department of Education. When there are issues that resonate we need to communicate with our lawmakers. However, it is also important to take care of ourselves by not letting the national rhetoric get us so anxious or angry that we forget to celebrate the good things that are happening in our lives and in the lives of our children. Here in Scarsdale, as always, we will continue to value all of our students and make sure they are at the forefront of all our decisions.

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## Construction Update

*By Stuart Matthey,  
Assistant Superintendent for Business and Facilities*



Construction related to the December 2014 Bond Authorization is continuing at both the Middle School and the High School.

At the Middle School, the addition for the new orchestra room is beginning to take shape as contractors are now completing the framework for footings and the foundation walls. Although the recent snowy weather has impeded progress, we still anticipate this new space to be completed on time and be ready for the 2017-18 school year.

At the High School, new piping is being installed in the boiler room along with concrete pads for equipment that will provide heating for the newly renovated areas throughout the school.

In the area that is being transformed into the Learning Commons, footings for the new mezzanine have been completed. Interior demolition work is continuing after school hours, which has taken longer than anticipated to complete due to existing structural steel configurations and encountering additional abatement work. Meanwhile, existing floor patching/infill, electrical roughing work, and ductwork installation are ongoing. Installation of the wall that will separate the Learning Commons and Gym A has also begun, and the new climbing wall for Gym A is being ordered.

At the site of the new High School Fitness Center, electrical roughing for new power, data, and lighting is substantially complete. Ductwork is scheduled to begin soon and a new HVAC unit is scheduled for delivery in April.

Looking to the future, the District's new architects, BBS, are busy familiarizing themselves with all of our facilities. They are currently in the process of meeting with each building's leadership teams to become acquainted with the intricacies of building operations, space utilization, and programs. In addition, BBS's engineers are touring each building to confirm and/or adjust spatial measurements and to identify the current status of building infrastructure and systems.

Please remember that, for safety reasons, all construction areas are off limits. If you have any questions regarding any of these projects please contact me at [smatthey@scarsdaleschools.org](mailto:smatthey@scarsdaleschools.org)

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## Online Registration System Update

*By Rachel Moseley, Director of Information Technology*

As noted in Dr. Hagerman's article, the District launched a registration system this year which allows parents/guardians to enter student information online. The system enables families who already have a child enrolled in the Scarsdale Public Schools or who have received private school transportation through the District, to access Online Registration via the Parent Portal, so they don't have to re-enter household information that the District already has on file.

While the official Kindergarten registration window closed on March 15, the registration system will remain open for new families, as well as for those who missed the deadline. If you missed the registration window and either did not receive or cannot locate the email from your elementary school with instructions, please contact your elementary school secretary. If you have already submitted your registration but haven't heard back from our District registrar, please allow until the end of the month, as we are working our way through a few hundred registrations.

We launched the pilot program for the Online Student Registration system and Central Registration in December 2016 and have already received hundreds of online registrations for incoming Kindergarten students, transportation requests for families of private and parochial school children, and registrations from families newly moved into the District. For more information about registration, click [here](#).

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## Student-Athletes

*By Ray Pappalardi,*

*Director of Physical Education, Health, and Athletics*



Are you a student-athlete? If so, your experiences provide you with the opportunity to develop qualities that are highly prized by institutions of higher education and employers. While there are other activities that may offer similar experiences, your ability to manage academic rigor and the demands of interscholastic athletic participation help you to stand out among your peers.

Here are some qualities that may describe you:

- You have self-confidence. You can perform under pressure. Being asked to improve each day and perform in front of your peers, family and community members, forces you to take risks and be responsible for your achievements.
- You are resilient. You are mentally tough and determined. Even in the midst of failure, you learn from your mistakes and overcome them. You know that you would never have taken your first step had you not fallen all of those times before. You never give up.
- You are a strong communicator. From giving and taking direction, you know how to handle difficult conversations.
- You manage time well. In addition to meeting rigorous academic demands, you are able to balance the ever-changing athletic practice and game schedule.
- You have a strong work ethic. You are goal and achievement oriented. In athletics, you know that you prepare to fail if you fail to prepare. Your performance is a direct result of the time and effort that you have invested.
- You work well with others. You are team oriented. Having to cooperate for a specific purpose with people of varying personalities gives you insight into the perspectives of others.
- You understand the law of diminishing returns. Once fatigued, your performance drops. As a result, you know when you need to make adjustments or take a break and call for a sub.
- You have the potential to demonstrate agile leadership. As a student-athlete, you represent your school and your community; you're a leader whether you like it or not because you have been placed in a position to lead. More importantly, you have the opportunity to lead by example from what you have learned. The variability of the situations to which you have been exposed and in which you are expected to excel allow you to successfully process information from a variety of perspectives. Naturally, your solutions are well thought out and inclusive.

We want you to know that your school community is proud of your achievements, appreciates your dedication, and values the qualities that you bring to Scarsdale.

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## Investing in Technology: The Budget Process

*By Jerry Crisci,*

*Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation*

The District's instructional technology budget is guided by the goals in the District Transition Plan as well as the Technology Plan adopted by the Board in May, and approved by the New York State Education Department last summer.

Scarsdale's plan presents a three-year hardware purchasing schedule based on the technology goals outlined in the document. These goals are designed to respond to the ever-changing technology environment.

Planning for technology involves an increasing amount of uncertainty. In fact, some of the

technology (hardware and software/online services) that we need to purchase is not even available yet. Another challenge is that the purchase of large quantities of mobile devices can be impacted by relatively small pricing changes. For example, we are purchasing 400 Chromebooks for our 1:1 program in grades 3-5, so a unit price increase for these devices is multiplied by 400, and therefore affects the overall technology budget.

In addition, the increasing use of online services requires an ongoing funding commitment rather than a one-time purchase. Instead of purchasing software packages that provide perpetual licenses (and allow us to defer purchasing upgrades), we must now rely on online software subscriptions that require an annual payment.

Computer teachers continue to study the latest technology trends; we use external tools, like the New Media Consortium's K-12 Horizon Report, to validate our thinking and our purchases. We have an excellent track record of making good purchasing decisions and accurately predicting future trends. Our goal is to use our technology budget to provide students and teachers with the tools they need to enhance and transform teaching and learning -- today and tomorrow.



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