



**SCARSDALE**  
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

## 'Dale Dispatch: District e-Newsletter

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## From Dr. Thomas Hagerman Superintendent of Schools



Dear Parents, Colleagues, and Community Members,

As many art aficionados know, the Frank Stella Retrospective just closed at the new Whitney Museum last week. Stella, known for his bold, geometric paintings and intricate sculptures, has been called one of America's most important living artists.

Frank Stella has also been called the father of minimalism and, early in his career, he represented a starkly different viewpoint than many of his abstract impressionist peers. As a reminder, impressionists attempt to solicit emotional responses through their artwork; Stella, on the other hand, focuses on the visual images, themselves, without the filter of personal feelings. From my visits to the exhibit, I learned that his paintings, although sophisticated on many levels, focus on somewhat rudimentary principles, namely how line, volume, and color (or lack thereof) occupy and share space. Said another way, Stella is a non-representational painter. He carefully creates images, many of which seem to take on a three-dimensional, optical-illusion quality. This is not some subtle attempt to disguise a bowl of fruit as geometric shapes or to otherwise obfuscate images in another, unrecognizable form; instead, he creates images for the

sake of the image itself. As his work evolved over time, Stella challenged conventional thinking even further: first, breaking the mold of traditional square and rectangular pieces by creating a body of work with polygon, circular, and other non-standard shaped canvases and, second, by creating artwork that literally leapt off the canvas as both small and large, mixed media sculptures.

During my visits to this exhibit, what was conspicuously missing was the typical, near silence of museum-goers. At most other art exhibits I've attended, etiquette prevails, and people are rather passive receptacles of the work. At the Whitney, however, young and old alike were posing questions to one another, wondering aloud about image and material choices, and guessing at the techniques used to achieve various results. The rooms were literally abuzz with interest and curiosity.

The study of art can sometimes focus too heavily on trying to "get it," to understand the artist's intent in creating a piece and perhaps its symbolic, historical, or political message. When asked about the significance of his work once, Stella responded, "what you see is what you see." And, in this simple, clear statement, Frank Stella reiterates his profound contribution to the art world: he creates his work, not for us to understand him better as an artist, nor as a lens for us to view humanity with all of our foibles, but rather as a means for individuals to better understand themselves.

In Scarsdale, we pride ourselves on providing a classical education in a progressive manner, or what is commonly referred to as a constructivist approach to learning. We expect students to actively contribute to their classes by adding insights and ideas to those of their peers and teachers, being receptive to the knowledge and experience of others, and using both acquired information and social exchanges to construct deeper collective understanding.

In order for this to be possible, though, students must have core foundational skills of observation, including a keen understanding of themselves. Stella's reminder of "what you see is what you see" not only validates the value of our students' individual experiences, and, at the same time, creates the necessary room for others' unique and differing perspectives. It is only in this type of environment that we can expect the expansive and open-ended thinking that is critical to 21st century learning.

Another important consideration of Stella's work relative to teaching and learning is that convention and tradition can sometimes be hindrances to unleashing new ideas. For too long, American education has been predicated on a set of facts and skills to be learned and a series of right answers to demonstrate mastery. Stella refused to accept that there is a right answer-not for how to represent images, not for the shape of canvases, and not for a singular formula for painting. Although Stella had centuries of art history and practice to condition his thinking, he did not conform. And, through his use of unorthodox techniques, materials, and shapes, he reminds us that the limits we put on our understanding of something are merely our own. In fact, if we allow ourselves to stray from these misconceptions, there is much more we can achieve as individuals and, indeed, much more we can contribute to the world. This is an important lesson for our students, but also for all of us as adults, parents, and educators.

When I sat down to collect my thoughts and write this article, I was confronted by a blank canvas with no real idea of where I wanted to go. Although I enjoyed the visual exuberance of the Stella exhibit, I certainly didn't walk away with any "aha" moments or key messages to share. Surprisingly, as I began to type, the words fell out of me

effortlessly. I had not realized that his images resonated so deeply with me, or that the connections between his art and our collective work were so apparent and salient.

If one subscribes to the notion that the purpose of art is to create space for deep reflection and self-understanding, Frank Stella's genius illustrates this better than most.

Warmly,

Dr. Thomas Hagerman  
Superintendent



*Middle School's NEST  
(New Educational Studio for  
Technology)*

## Scarsdale Education for Tomorrow 2.0

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

This year, members of our faculty participated in updating A Scarsdale Education for Tomorrow (SET 2.0) at a fall leadership meeting, in school-based discussions, and through a follow-up survey. The results show that the faculty largely agrees with common themes that emerged at our fall meeting: Love of Learning, a Classical Education taught in the Progressive Tradition, attention to the "Whole" Child, Non Sibi, and Global Connections.

Faculty also acknowledged that our work is changing in response to numerous influences, including new research, acceleration of globalization, and the increasing impact of technology. These changes have resulted in increased emphasis on STEAM; Making/Design Thinking; project-based and active learning; and collaboration.

Most of the participants in this work identified "educating the whole child" as our District's highest priority, with the understanding that this means: (1) actionable goals should be integrated into current curriculum and work (not add-ons); (2) curriculum and teaching practice should encourage active and constructivist learning; (3) process should be as important as any product; (4) academic and social goals should focus on diverse learners, multiple intelligences, and democratic citizenry; and (5) in addition to academics, educators should also attend to non-cognitive skills, including resilience and grit as part of a growth mind-set.

At the January 25th Board of Education meeting, we shared examples of student work that models some of these themes, including interdisciplinary projects and opportunities to personalize instruction and

to apply their knowledge. The complete Board of Education presentation may be seen here:

<https://vimeo.com/scarsdaleschoolstv/review/153098658/e817bf1f7d>

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## Personnel Update: The Hiring Process

*By Dr. Bernard Josefsberg, Interim Assistant Superintendent for Human Services and Leadership Development*

I wrote last month of my conversations with Scarsdale teachers on the topic of their forthcoming retirements. These conversations were wistful and reflective - as befits the topic. They also anticipate the discussions associated with hiring new teacher talent into Scarsdale. Rather than wistful, these discussions will be animated by the candidate's effort to impress and the District's need to drill deep below first impressions. We know the "human capital" we are losing through retirement. These losses are offset by the prospective gains accrued through the hiring process.

Current employees are apprised of open positions before these positions are posted externally. Previously, the Sunday New York Times and other print outlets were favorite venues for advertising our open positions. By now, several digital venues have proven to be more cost-effective. University placement offices are also useful: next month, for example, we will be attending the Education Career Fair hosted by Teachers College, Columbia University.

The outside process begins even before a vacancy is advertised, with informal discussion about the ideal candidate. In certain cases, that candidate has already been identified, in which case the hiring process becomes a personalized recruitment process. More than a handful of our teachers were known for the quality of their work elsewhere and induced to continue their careers here.

The "Scarsdale Brand" lures large numbers. Within five days of posting 16 positions on the State's Online Application System for Educators, we received 332 responses. Many, many more applications are in the pipeline. Nonetheless, identifying quality, rather than luring quantity, is the aim of the exercise. Different discussions involving numerous discussants anchor Scarsdale's approach to that exercise. Applications are screened and winnowed collectively. Role-alike groups conduct initial interviews. Still other groups are assembled to meet the most promising candidates. Invariably, a pooled understanding of what Scarsdale requires of its educators fuels these discussions.

My own set of sought-after qualities includes: a command of subject matter; the ability to scaffold student developmental needs; self-awareness, empathy, fairness, and a sense of humor; and, finally, industry and ethics. Any candidate who embodies all of these qualities is likely to be a good teacher, but not necessarily one whom Scarsdale will invite into the community. The mutual embrace between individual teacher and Scarsdale's educational community is, among other things, a long embrace. By and large, Scarsdale teachers enjoy long tenures before choosing to retire. For this reason, the successful candidate - the one who is offered the position - is expected to be more than good in the moment. The expectation is sustained excellence over time.

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## Budget Planning

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



The 2016-17 budget process is now formally underway for our District. Budget discussions and planning, however, have been at the forefront of Board of Education conversations throughout the course of this past year.

The 2016-17 preliminary proposed budget is based on the goals and objectives set forth in the District's Transition Plan. These goals and objectives have been discussed at Board of Education meetings since the start of the school year. Discussions have included in-depth review of important programmatic enhancements in the areas of world language, technology, and special education.

Through this early budget development process, and with guidance from the Board, the District's administration has developed staffing requests for inclusion in the 2016-17 budget that reflect District objectives. At their meeting on February 8th, the Board affirmed these requests for inclusion in the 2016-17 preliminary proposed budget.

Also presented at the Feb 8th meeting were 2016-17 budget proposals for transportation and debt service. The complete 2016-17 budget plan, including the draft budget proposal and projected tax levy, will be presented at the Board meeting on Feb. 24th. In addition, there will be a detailed discussion of the operations and maintenance and plant improvement budgets, along with employee benefits.

Presentations of other departmental budgets will continue in subsequent meetings along with further Board discussion and deliberation. At every meeting there will be opportunities for the community to participate through public comments. A Budget Forum will be held on April 4<sup>th</sup>, before the final proposed budget is approved by the Board at their meeting on April 18<sup>th</sup>. The complete timeline is as follows:

- February 24th - The 2016-17 Budget Plan. Focus Areas: Operations & Maintenance including Plant Improvements and Employee Benefits.
- February 29th - 2016-17 Budget Plan Update. Focus Areas: Instruction, Special Education, Athletics & Technology.
- March 7th - 2016-17 Budget Plan Update. Focus Areas: Revenues & Tax Projections.
- March 21st - Budget Review.
- April 4th- Budget Forum & Review.
- April 18th - Board Adopts Budget.

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## New Faces and New Places

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

The Special Education and Student Services department has some new faces, and will be moving some familiar faces to new places. Two members of our clerical staff are leaving for new adventures: Moira Dahlke, longtime CPSE/CSE secretary, and Jennifer Capaccio, office assistant. We wish them the best in all their endeavors and thank them on behalf of the department, the District, and our students for their service. They will be missed!

With Moira's departure, the Department searched for someone to match her technical knowledge and caring persona. Happily, we have found that person right here in Scarsdale. Renee Franco comes to us from Scarsdale Middle School, but previously she served in Mamaroneck's Special Education department for 12 years. She brings a vast knowledge of the technical side of special education but, more importantly, she shares Moira's caring attitude and love of kids. In the few days she has worked with us she is already proving to be a wonderful asset for both parents and staff. We are in process of hiring a replacement for Jennifer and look forward to bringing on our new team member soon.

In addition, some familiar faces will be stepping into expanded roles starting this summer. Kristina Tivnan, who currently serves as CPSE/ K-1 CSE Chairperson, will also take on the pre-school through 5th grade Chairperson responsibilities. Susan LaSalle, who currently serves in both teaching and CSE Chairperson roles in the High School, will give up teaching responsibilities to take on the Secondary CSE Chairperson role with responsibility for 6th through 12th grade. These changes will allow for better planning and more consistency in our practice. Both Kristina and Susan bring years of experience and a passion for education to their roles. This is an exciting time for the department and we look forward to our parents and teachers meeting and working with our new (or new to position) staff members.

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## The Mind-Body Connection

*By Ray Pappalardi, Director of Physical Education, Health, and Athletics*

The concept of a "sound mind in a sound body" has strongly influenced my thinking about education. My most profound experience in this regard was when I saw the phrase inscribed on an archway, the day I attended orientation for graduate school. Timing is everything.

In subsequent coursework and professional practice, I worked to comprehend the phrase "*mens sana in corpore sano*" and truly understand the mind-body connection as it related to wellness and my work as an educator. Since, I have studied research related to the brain and exercise, athletic participation and academic performance, and physical fitness and academic performance, as well as exercise and stress management. This article will serve as a teaser on these topics. I expect to expand on

each topic in future editions and communications with the Scarsdale community.

### **The Brain and Exercise**

Exercise, especially aerobic exercise, increases oxygen consumption and blood flow throughout the body, including the brain. These increases have been found to have significant positive effects, including brain-neuron connectivity and increased brain volume. Direct benefits are improved memory and increased ability to manage cognitive tasks. Recent research suggests that aerobic exercise also helps to offset cognitive declines as we age.

### **Athletic Participation and Academic Performance**

Research shows that participation in interscholastic athletics is related to improved academic performance. Specifically, athletes have demonstrated higher graduation rates, lower dropout rates, higher average daily attendance, and higher average letter grades than their peers who do not participate. Research also suggests that student-athletes perform better academically during the competitive portion of their sports season.

### **Physical Fitness and Academic Performance**

Physical fitness has also been linked to academic performance. While initial studies looked at overall physical fitness and its relationship to standardized test scores, more recent studies study individual components of fitness and direct relationships to cognitive achievement. For example, aerobic capacity has now been linked to improved memory, as well as higher reading and math scores.

### **Exercise and Stress Reduction**

Many studies are investigating the ways in which physical activity fights depression and anxiety. While the physiological responses to exercise are clear (e.g., endorphin release), researchers are trying to understand the added value of exercise. As a result of promising findings in recent research, practitioners are now prescribing exercise to help manage mental health issues.

### **Suggestions**

Several sources recommend levels of physical activity for adults and children. At a minimum, adults should get at least a half hour of exercise per day or one hour of exercise twice a week. Young people should engage in one hour of moderate to vigorous physical activity daily.



*Board of Ed members try  
Little Bits technology*

## **Creating A New Technology Plan**

*By Jerry Crisci, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation*

This year, we are creating a new Technology Plan that will define our vision and goals for the next three years. The plan is being framed by the District K-12 Technology Committee, and will include input from all District stakeholders. In addition, the plan will be reviewed by colleagues in other school districts, as well as by a nationally recognized technology consultant and author, Will Richardson.

The Technology Plan will include four areas of focus: Instructional Technology, Coding, STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Mathematics), and Digital Literacy. Each of these domains will be integrated into the core technology goals. A series of technology expectations is being developed at each level to define the student experience by grade or by department.

The Technology Plan will incorporate the latest International Society for Technology and Education (ISTE) standards. These standards are currently in draft form, but are expected to be adopted shortly after our Technology Plan is completed.

The new ISTE standards describe a robust vision of learning that focuses on the many roles of students. Examples of these roles include **Empowered learner, Knowledge Constructor, Innovative Designer/Maker,** and **Computational Thinker.** This vision aligns with the work that Scarsdale has been doing to prepare our students for their lives after Scarsdale.

The first draft of the technology plan will be published this spring, and we will encourage the community to provide feedback on this important document.

In addition to our work on the new Technology Plan, our department is also launching a new District Website. Stay tuned for more information about this in the next issue of the 'Dale Dispatch.

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## The Challenge of Supporting Technology with a Lean Organization

*By Rachel Moseley, Director of Information Technology*

The mission for any technology department is clear: supply a reliable and resilient infrastructure, provide state-of-the-art technology solutions, offer highly responsive, or whenever possible proactive, support, all while keeping the cost down. The paradox is evident - quality versus cost!

Until 14 years ago, I worked for a relatively small firm on Wall Street. My technology budget was fifteen times larger than the combined budget of our District's instructional and information technology departments. The core challenge, however, was the same. How do we implement cutting edge solutions and provide quality support while keeping the cost down?

A big difference between my prior position and my current one, is that the



*Google training for staff*

budget provided dedicated resources to focus on support, while other resources focused on systems development and implementation. In a smaller, leaner organization like the Scarsdale Public Schools, everybody gets pulled into supporting our cross-section of end users - teachers, staff, students, and parents. For those who are supposed to work on projects, it can be difficult to focus and make progress. Imagine being an author trying to write a novel, but you keep being interrupted every few minutes by other requests for your time and attention. That novel might not get written!

When I stepped into my new role as Director of Information Technology last summer and discussed this challenge with Lenny Vento, who manages our Technical Services team, we agreed that we had to make it a priority to have support issues reported through our online help desk system. This allows Lenny to balance the allocation of support tickets so that our network specialists get solid blocks of time to work on projects; and it also allows him to analyze the nature of support issues to find proactive solutions, prioritize issues, and ensure that the team follows up on all reported issues. We knew we had to make it easier for issues to be logged, so in the fall we implemented improvements to our help desk system and by November the system was fully operational.

The feedback from the schools is very positive. High priority issues are resolved faster, we don't forget about lower priority issues, and our technical services staff can organize their day or week to have blocks of time for project work and other blocks of time to resolving support tickets. Also, with all issues being reported in a central system and having them cataloged according to a set of standards, we are able to identify and address systemic issues.



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