

# Value Education

November 2011

## Superintendent's Notebook By Dr. Peter J. Mustich

The new school year is off to a great start with our staff and student population – now at a historic enrollment high – excited about new opportunities.

I believe Rye Neck is still just the right size for us to maintain our very personal approach, while providing students with a breadth of leading edge opportunities that first-rate public school districts ought to be providing to young people. An example of this is the engineering course that we piloted last year in the HS. It has become so popular that we had to add a second section. More importantly, we have had a number of students decide on engineering as a major in college as a result of this exposure. This is just one example of the many unique and potentially life changing opportunities we offer our students.

Technology is now an integral part of our operations. As part of our goal to enhance our parent-school partnership, we have put in place a **new parent portal**, which allows parents to monitor student progress anytime and anywhere they have access to the web. It provides the information parents need to have meaningful and timely discussions with their children. A new feature we added this year provides individual student access, which better allows students to manage their own progress on a regular basis and make adjustments as necessary.

As a result of our video conferencing capability, technology allows our students to regularly connect to schools and students, scientists and experts around the world. This opportunity allows us to bring the world right to the classroom and create a global learning experience for every student. In this issue of *Value Ed* you can see some exciting examples of what

is happening in our schools today in the area of technology and what will be happening over the next few years.

This year we have expanded our online book purchases, allowing students to access their texts on the web. Not only is this a greener alternative to conventional textbooks, but it allows students to access the materials they need regardless of where they are. We are investigating similar opportunities to increase the school/student connection.

After nearly two years of work, we are ready to move forward with the **734 Project**. The Board of Education will be approving a resolution in December to remove the old house and barn at 734 Boston Post Road East, along with clearing the land. All of the information concerning this project is on our website, including the archeological studies and state approvals. We have worked to keep tenants in the buildings to offset the costs, but with our most recent tenants leaving, the buildings have outlived their usefulness to the school district and are now a financial drain. Although the buildings are not historically significant, they are part of our school district's history and, as such, we have photographed them for our records.

One of this year's operational challenges is the implementation of the new **APPR (Annual Professional Performance Review)** plan now mandated by the State Education Department. This new ratings system is now in place for our 4th through 8th grade ELA and math staff and will be in place for everyone else next year. As a consistently high-performing district with a strong professional staff and hard-working, well-prepared students, we consistently



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## Notebook *(continued from page 1)*

exceed the state standards. Therefore, we are looking at this latest mandate as an opportunity for us to review our practices and make adjustments as necessary. We are using a thoughtful, data-driven program that combines professional development for the staff with practical strategies to be used in classrooms each day.

The **Tax Cap** that has been imposed on municipalities and school districts throughout the state is a major concern for us as we move forward. It forces districts to live within an arbitrary cap and ignores the particulars that make our district and our community special unless an undemocratic ‘supermajority’ of voters say ‘yes’ to a higher level of taxation. We believe this may dramatically change what we can offer students as well as negatively impact our property values. As a result, we continue to analyze the data we are receiving from the state and are actively encouraging our legislators and governor to provide the mandate relief they promised when they imposed the tax cap.

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Districts like ours have a proven record for solid fiscal management with outstanding results, and our present and past Boards of Education have been excellent stewards for our district. This year we have put together a citizens’ committee to discuss the implications of the tax cap for our district and to discuss revenue alternatives. You will be hearing more about this important issue as we learn more from the state and our Board of Education decides what it needs to do for the 2012-13 school budget.

As you will see in this issue of **Value Education**, our students continue to make us proud from their work in the classrooms to special projects, clubs, and teams. This is a defining moment for public education, but for Rye Neck it is an opportunity for us to move forward and become a leader in the county and the state. It is an opportunity for us to celebrate our academic achievements and for our community to better understand and participate in our decision making process. Now is the time for everyone to step up and participate in local control – it is a time to have your voice heard. Thank you for your continued support.

## Harvard-Yale-Brown Debate

On Friday, November 4, twelve Rye Neck Middle and High School students attended the annual Harvard-Yale-Brown Student Debate, which was held this year at the German School in White Plains. The evening started with students from the Harvard, Yale, and Brown teams debating whether, and to what extent, colleges should have distribution requirements. This spirited debate by the six Ivy League debaters provided a wonderful opportunity for our students to see debate at its highest level.

In the second part of the evening, pairs of students from six high schools were each teamed with a mentor from one of the Ivy League teams. Seniors Brian Pegno and Lya Ferreyra, leading members of the Rye Neck High School Mock Trial Team, were paired with a student from

Harvard, who helped them prepare for their debate on the issue of raising taxes on millionaires to pay for the jobs bill.

The debate was judged on presentation, structure of the argument, and rebuttal. Brian and Lya won their debate against Rye High School’s debaters and then were selected, by unanimous decision of the judges, as the overall winners of the high school debate.

The students were accompanied by Mock Trial coach, Kristine Pegno, who noted, “It is an exciting opportunity for our young people to experience public speaking skills presented in such an exceptional manner. We hope they will be inspired to use these skills in school and throughout their lives.”

Rye Neck High School will host the 2012 debate which is scheduled for November 2nd.



## Technology in Action

High School Students in the Independent Learner Program (ILP) have been reading *Drive* by Daniel Pink. Students raised questions concerning the author's perspective and contacted him by email and presented their questions to him. He responded immediately and was excited to learn that high school students were interested in his research. He invited them to join him in a "Skype" conversation.

On Friday, October 28<sup>th</sup>, NYT bestselling author, Daniel Pink, four Rye Neck High School students, and their teacher, Dr. Feit, engaged in a personal discussion about *Drive* and its impact in the workplace.



Through dynamic software such as Geometer's Sketchpad and the use of netbooks, math students are able to manipulate shapes and solids to discover properties and perform constructions. Similarly, students are using ipads and interactive textbooks to solve problems.

As we continue to phase in Common Core Learning Standards, the math department is also using electronic textbooks in many of their classes. This allows students to take quizzes and tests online, promoting a self-monitoring system where students and teachers can focus on direct need per student.

Finally, the influx of the TI-Nspire calculator has revolutionized the learning environment. Students are able to use word processing and spreadsheets as well as dynamic geometric software and the graphing calculator in one device to lead instruction in the class room. Likewise, we are able to test, quiz, and give notes through the calculator system.

In the middle school, Dr. Feit's DoRight Leadership Corps virtually attended an international conference with other DoRight groups from around the country and the world. They exchanged real time information about sustainable practices.

Dr. Kurtz' 6<sup>th</sup> grade technology class connected with classmate Carly Sonenclar while she was on site on Broadway last year. The class was able to get a sense of her experience and it gave Carly an opportunity to connect with her classmates.

At Bellows, students use videoconferencing and skyping often. During Latin America Immersion Week, the fifth grades skyped with Peru, Venezuela, and California. Last year, the third grade video conferenced with schools to share book reviews. The fourth grade video conferenced with a school in upstate NY about wind farms and Kathie Offner's class held a video conference with a school in Tennessee that is collecting 11 million paper clips to commemorate the people who perished during the Holocaust.

Bellows students have also been part of the Music Across Canada video conference in which almost every school in Canada and several hundred in the US connect at the same on the same day to sing the same song.



During their sea creature studies, second graders connected to the scientists at the Seacoast Science Center in Rye, New Hampshire to see examples of the adaptations that various sea creatures make to survive.

First graders have the opportunity to develop an even deeper understanding of insects by examining insect specimens that they have collected under the University of Illinois Beekman Institute's electron microscope, also known as the Bugscope. Kindergarteners studying endangered wildlife and the plight of pandas had the opportunity to talk with the panda handlers at the San Diego Zoo.

## ***Tools for Change at RNHS***

On a recent afternoon, Luke Murphy, grade 10, and Sage Reisner, grade 12, were intensely debating whether language in a survey question was biased. Frustrated, Luke asked Brian Kerr, grade 11, for his opinion.

These students are among fifteen Rye Neck High School students who are participating in a collaborative, action-research project called, *Tools for Change. Tools*, taught by William Tobin, a sociologist from Duke University, is a college-level course modeled on the Sociology Honors seminar he developed at Duke.

*Tools for Change* reflects Tobin's deep commitment to teaching high school students how to use authentic research design and methods, derived from social science disciplines, to identify and find solutions to civic issues. Here the



challenge is not to work in the soup kitchen but to systematically understand why soup kitchens exist and what might be done to make them unnecessary.

Now in its third year, the students have consulted with the Rye Town Council, the president of Building Community Bridges, a multi-racial publicly-funded community organization and the president of the League of Women Voters in Rye to learn about community concerns. Based on feedback from these community leaders, the *Tools for Change* students are investigating the relationship between social media and democracy in Rye Town. In April 2012, they will present their findings and make policy recommendations at a Rye Town Council meeting.

*Tools for Change* is part of the RNHS Independent Learner Program (ILP) mentored by Dr. Valerie Feit.

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## **Latin American Immersion Week at Bellows**

The fifth grade classes at Bellows recently completed their "Latin America Immersion Week," an investigation into how communication, technology, and culture connect us in a global world. Students were totally immersed in an in-depth study based on recommendations from the Partnership for 21st Century Skills.

During the week, they teleconferenced with Professor John Gitlitz, an expert on Latin American and professor at Purchase College who is on sabbatical in Bajamarca, Peru. Dr. Gitlitz presented a slide show of pictures he had just taken and students were able to have a give and take discussion with him in real time. The students also

teleconferenced with the One World organization based in California that assists Latin American artisans with bringing their crafts to other countries, thereby lifting indigenous people out of poverty. Following that teleconference, students had an experiential opportunity to understand child labor as it exists in underdeveloped countries throughout the world by making friendship bracelets.



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## Latin America Week *(continued from previous page)*

Bellows and the RNHS Foreign Language Department collaborated on two activities during the week. A Rye Neck High School student, who attended school in Venezuela, spoke to the fifth graders about her experiences as an American attending school in Venezuela and the similarities and differences of the educational systems between the United States and Venezuela. Five advanced Spanish students conducted a lesson in Spanish in each of the fifth grade classrooms to give students the experience of what it feels like not to speak the language and yet still be expected to do the work.

In art class, students studied Alfredo Volpi, a Brazilian artist, and created a 'banderhina' stencil, the trademark design of Volpi. Each student's 'banderhina' was incorporated into the class' Volpi-like panel and the panels will be on display in the elementary art show in the spring. After learning about Latin American geography, important buildings, governments and natural resources students created mini-Monopoly Boards in library.

The week culminated with the fifth grade classes going down to the Village of Mamaroneck and being warmly welcomed at five restaurants with Latin chefs to sample authentic Latin American



cuisine. When they returned to school, the PTSA Cultural Arts Committee had arranged for a special musical program, Music with a Latin Beat, which taught students interactive games and songs in Spanish based on the musical styles of different Latin American countries.

Through written reflections and classroom discussions, it was clearly evident that students internalized this Latin American experience.

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## Veterans' Day Community Concert

The fog lifted and the sun began to shine as over 500 students, parents and veterans gathered on the Daniel Warren field to celebrate and honor Veterans' Day through music, song, and dance. Special guests and honorees included Mr. Louis Santoro, Village of Mamaroneck Deputy Mayor, Gold Card members, honored veterans, and Daniel



Warren parents. Highlights of the program included surprise special recognition awards bestowed upon two of our beloved veterans, Tony Mauro, Daniel Warren crossing guard, and Lloyd Lybrand, Daniel Warren custodian. Both men served their country as mechanics.

"The Volunteers," the premier show touring band of the United States Army, began the concert with the National Anthem followed by two second graders, Shae Cunningham and Luke Losito, who led the audience in the Pledge of Allegiance. The concert consisted of a wonderful mixture of modern rock tunes and patriotic standards. After the concert the Daniel Warren staff treated "The Volunteers" to a delicious lunch, including home baked treats.

This was an especially meaningful day for our student body as they actively showed their appreciation of the veterans by collecting over 450

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## **Veteran Day** *(continued from previous page)*

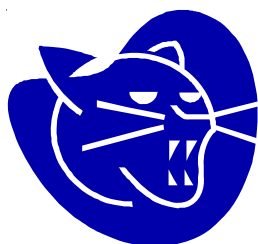
pounds of their Halloween candy to send to veterans, wrote letters and poems of appreciation to the soldiers, and decorated the hallways and grounds with patriotic emblems. It was the students' and staffs' way of honoring and celebrating our Armed Forces.

“The Volunteers” expressed their sincerest gratitude for such a warm reception and wrote “We have performed in nearly 800 cities in all the lower 48 states and in our experience we have never felt such a positive vibe both from students and staff. Thanks for an extra special event.”



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## **Go Panthers! News from the Athletic Department**



Once again, the Rye Neck athletic teams provided us with an exciting season. Teams on all levels experienced victories, hard fought battles and collective growth from pre-season in

August through their season's conclusion.

We are pleased to announce two of our varsity teams won their regular season League Championship. Congratulations to the Varsity Boys Cross Country Team and Coach Wurtz, as well as the Varsity Volleyball Team and Coaches Desio and Reynolds.

Other impressive highlights coming out of the fall season:

- Volleyball earned the #1 seed and advanced to the sectional final for the first time in program history.
- Field Hockey earned the #2 seed and advanced to the sectional final for the first time in 13 years.

- Junior Cross Country runner Natalie Tanner placed 3<sup>rd</sup> in sectionals and qualified for the New York State Cross Country Championships in Verona, NY on November 12<sup>th</sup>.
- Boys Cross Country won the league championship for the 3<sup>rd</sup> consecutive season.
- Volleyball won their second league championship in as many years and earned the #1 seed in the Class C Volleyball Sectional Tournament
- Varsity Girls Tennis teammates, Ekim Buyuk and Diana King, won the Conference 3 Doubles Championship.
- Girls Soccer qualified for the sectional playoffs.
- Varsity football finished the season with a convincing win in the first ever “Snow Bowl” on October 29<sup>th</sup> here at Rye Neck.

Winter sports are already upon us and we look forward to seeing you at our events. Thank you for your continued support of our student athletes and coaches.

## Booster Club News

The Booster Club had many activities to celebrate Rye Neck's Homecoming. On Thursday, they hosted their annual fall athletes' pasta dinner and served over 365 student athletes. On display over the weekend were the senior athletes' t-shirts as well as the team posters that were decorated by the students of Daniel Warren and Bellows. Congratulations to all of our fall teams!

The next Booster event is the Boys Basketball Tournament which will take place the weekend of December 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup>. Please come out and support our team!

Keep an eye out for the Rye Neck clothing flyer featuring great holiday gifts for your family! **Orders must be received by December 16<sup>th</sup> to ensure delivery.**

The next Booster Club meeting is Monday, November 21 at 7:00 p.m. It will be a joint meeting with the ADAC committee to share our ideas and discuss upcoming events. We hope to see you then.



**The Rye Neck Panthers Play their first "Snow Bowl!"**

## PTSA News

**By Patty Nashelsky, PTSA President**

**THANK YOU!** Thank you Rye Neck community for your support of the PTSA's annual Dinner Dance & Auction which took place on November 4<sup>th</sup> at Hampshire Country Club. This event is the PTSA's biggest fundraiser of the year and without the continued success of this event, PTSA programs such as the curriculum enrichment programs, author visits, the Rye Y recess programs, and the health and wellness programming could not be provided by the PTSA.



The Rye Neck community as a whole is responsible for this event's success, and it was truly a joint effort by many members of the community. Many local businesses made donations of services and merchandise and purchased ads in the auction journal. Parents and friends also made donations and purchased raffle tickets and tickets to the event.

Thank you to New York State Assemblyman George Latimer for his auctioneer services. Finally, a big thank you to auction chairpersons, Grace DiPalermo and Kim Treacy, and their committee for an extraordinary job in organizing the event. It was superb in every way!

If you would like to contact the PTSA, please email us at [news@ryeneckpta.org](mailto:news@ryeneckpta.org). We encourage everyone to participate and get involved!

Rye Neck Public Schools  
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**Administration 777-5252**

Dr. Peter J. Mustich, Superintendent  
Dr. Kimberly Bucci, Assistant Superintendent for  
Business

*Best Wishes to the Rye Neck Community*

*For a Very Happy Thanksgiving*

