

# Guilderland

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



## 2022-23 NEWSLETTER

### A Message from the Superintendent

**Dear GCSD School  
Community Members,**

“Empowering all students to succeed in the 21st Century”: it’s an expression we often use in the Guilderland Central School District. You may have seen it on our website, included in printed materials or in the hallways of our school buildings. It’s succinct and to the point; it truly describes what GCSD teachers and staff do. We provide students with the learning, tools and resources to foster the freedom, confidence and capabilities to achieve success – however that may look for them. I believe it’s a powerful statement, with the most important word being “all,” as in each and every student.

Inclusivity is the foundation of a quality education. Every student, no matter their gender, race, learning ability, language, family structure or socioeconomic status, deserves opportunities to learn, grow and flourish as individuals. Finding and igniting that spark in each student, whether it be for science, technology, athletics, music, drama or art is the key to inspiring a lifelong love of learning.

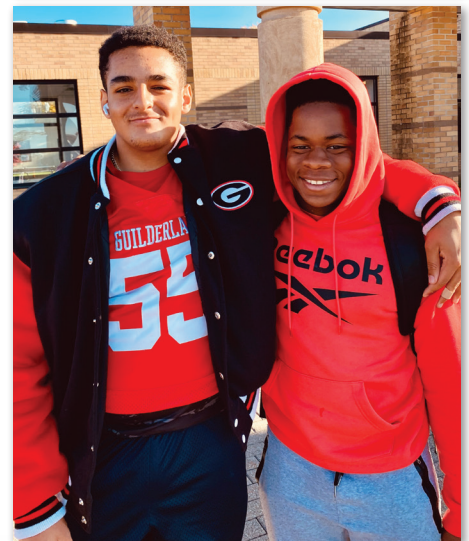
When students feel safe and believe they belong to their school community, it paves the way for successful academic outcomes, robust attendance and healthy emotional and physical well-being.

I’m proud to say GCSD teachers and staff make this a priority through educational experiences, support and extracurricular activities that involve all children. This newsletter gives you a small glimpse into the many ways GCSD schools create positive communities that strive to include all students.

While we take this opportunity to reflect on some of the accomplishments in the district since September, at the same time we are looking ahead to the 2023-24 school year. District leaders have begun the budget development process and are working to refine next year’s spending plan. Please visit the district website for the most current information to help you make an informed decision on budget vote day, May 16. As always, Guilderland residents are welcome to provide their input regarding the school budget at board of education meetings.

I truly believe that we cultivate student success when all GCSD stakeholders – students, teachers, staff, parents and residents – collaborate towards the shared vision of an inclusive school community.

Sincerely,  
Marie Wiles, Ph.D.  
*Superintendent*





## Update: Budget Development for the 2023-24 School Year

Prior to his retirement in December, Assistant Superintendent for Business Neil Sanders made the first in a series of budget presentations to the GCSD Board of Education that highlighted various aspects of the budget development process. In January, newly installed Assistant Superintendent for Business Dr. Andrew Van Alstyne continued the series; topics include Foundation Aid, fund balance and reserves, state aid and tax levy limit. On March 7, Superintendent Dr. Marie Wiles presented the draft budget to the board of education and the Guilderland community. The recordings from these presentations can be viewed on the GHS Media YouTube channel.

### BUDGET PRIORITIES: Your Input Matters

A ThoughtExchange, an anonymous online forum, was launched in November to gather input from the Guilderland school community for the district to consider in the 2023-24 spending plan. Participants expressed several priorities including enhancing safety

and security, and lowering class sizes. The results of the ThoughtExchange were shared at a recent board of education meeting and have been used to help inform spending proposals for next year. Links to view the ThoughtExchange are on the district website.

#### We Asked:

As we plan for the next school year, what are the most important things our district needs to think about in order to support all students?

#### Parents/Guardians and Community Members

**942** participants  
**490** thoughts  
**37,731** ratings

Highly-rated budget-related themes include support for smaller class size as well as a focus on learning resources, technology and safety.

#### GCSD Faculty and Staff

**302** participants  
**128** thoughts  
**7,910** ratings

Highly-rated budget-related themes include keeping smaller class sizes, safety, and support for mental health.

#### GCSD Students

**1,510** participants  
**1,217** thoughts  
**137,239** ratings

Highly-rated budget-related themes include a focus on learning resources, internet access, safety and facilities.

### Key Budget Dates

For the latest budget news, visit the district website, under Budget & Taxes or watch an upcoming board of education meeting on the GHS Media YouTube Channel.

- April 17:** Final date for submission of Board of Education candidate petitions
- May 2:** Public budget hearing, 7 p.m., GHS LGI
- May 16:** Budget vote, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. at each of the five elementary schools. You must vote at the elementary school in the zone where you live. For more information, call the District Clerk at 518-456-6200, ext. 0125.

### Are you registered to vote?

To vote, you must be at least 18 years old, a U.S. citizen and a resident of the Guilderland Central School District for at least 30 days prior to the vote. Voter registration is required in GCSD. If you are not registered with the school district or the county, you must do so before the vote. You can register to vote with the Albany County Board of Elections.



# Giving Students the Advantages of Inclusivity

Inclusive classrooms and programs provide a high quality education and create a sense of belonging in the school community for all students. The following is a small sample of how the Guilderland Central School District works to create a positive school climate.

## New York State Seal of Biliteracy

GCSD will offer a New York State Seal of Biliteracy (NYSSB) program, beginning in the 2023-24 school year. Created by the New York State Education Department (NYSED) to encourage the study of languages, the NYSSB prepares students for the future with essential skills for a global society. A NYSSB distinction recognizes high school graduates who attain a high level of proficiency in listening, speaking, reading and writing in one or more languages, in addition to English. This achievement identifies students to prospective employers and college admissions officials as graduates with multilingual skills. In GCSD, where 53 languages are spoken in homes, the Seal of Biliteracy celebrates these languages and affirms the value of diversity.

## Co-teaching at GCSD

Co-teaching is a collaborative approach to instruction in which general education and special education teachers work together to plan and implement instruction for classes that include students with a range of abilities. GCSD began using this practice to meet the needs of diverse learners in 2017 and now has co-teaching in various sections and subjects, at grade levels across the district. When different learners work together, they see that everyone has their own strengths, allowing students to build confidence in the classroom.

## Capital Improvements Enhance Learning Opportunities

Work continues on the improvements to all seven GCSD buildings; these improvements were budgeted for as part of the two capital projects approved by Guilderland residents in 2019 and 2021.

### Promethean Boards

Installation of Promethean boards in classrooms across GCSD was completed in fall 2022. Featuring large, interactive displays that connect to a computer and project the display onto the surface, Promethean boards give teachers multimedia tools to create engaging learning experiences. They also offer flexible ways to illustrate lesson content and enable active participation for students of all learning abilities.

### Elementary Playgrounds

Once weather allows, installation of new playground equipment will begin at the five GCSD elementary schools. This adaptive equipment will be accessible to elementary students, no matter their mobility needs. Inclusive playgrounds can instill a sense of confidence and independence in all children, as they can try new activities while interacting with peers.

### Outdoor Pavilions

Outdoor learning spaces, in the form of pavilions, will be installed at all seven school buildings in the district, beginning this summer. These additional learning spaces will help connect students and staff with nature, which can improve overall well-being and encourage exploration and creativity.



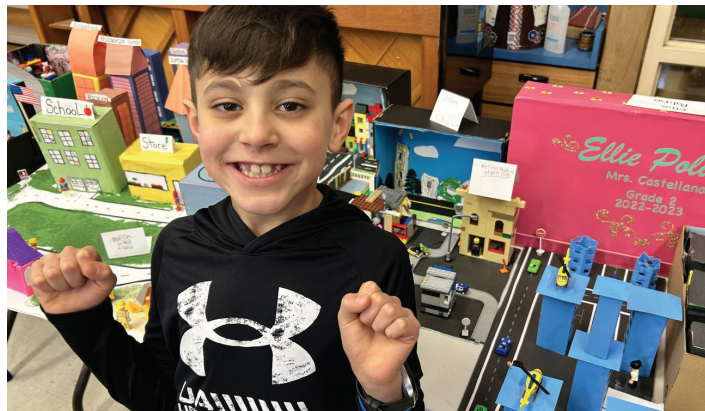


## Growing a Positive Community

For many students, the elementary level is where they first develop a sense of curiosity and a love of learning. In the GCSD elementary schools this happens while simultaneously fostering a strong sense of community, creating an environment that promotes social, emotional and academic growth.

### Dance-A-Thon at Altamont Elementary

Students at Altamont Elementary hit the dance floor for a good cause — the arts at Altamont. The first-ever AES dance-a-thon gave all students in grades K-5 the chance to raise money for field trips, special events and the school musical while moving to the beat, interacting and having a lot of fun!



### Community Museum at Guilderland Elementary

After studying communities, second grade students at Guilderland Elementary were asked to design their own. Choosing all elements of the community, such as type (rural, suburban, urban), facilities, utilities and services, each student created models of their ideal place to live. After students made presentations to their class, the projects were displayed in a museum that families and other GES students were invited to visit.

### Reading Buddies at Pine Bush Elementary

Once a week, fifth and second grade students at Pine Bush Elementary meet for the Reading Buddies program. During this time, student pairs read together, make predictions about what will happen next in a story, and discuss book themes with a focus on Positivity Project character strengths. The Reading Buddies program gives younger students the opportunity to gain a positive role model and older students the chance to develop skills such as patience and empathy. An added benefit is that the program helps build a sense of community in the building, while at the same time promoting reading.





## Positivity Project at Lynnwood Elementary

Lynnwood Elementary isn't merely participating in the Positivity Project, they're fully embracing it. From students to teachers to administrators to the school's dog, Copeland, LES is 100% invested in nurturing a positive school community where everyone belongs and is actively engaged. Students designed "Lynnwood Has Character" t-shirts, which faculty and staff proudly wear. A fourth grade student recognized how the P2 character traits can also be applied to how pets are treated. This student advocated for a bulletin board that offers students a place to post photos of their pets, providing a sense of comfort and connection when the students are at school. By taking an active role in the culture of their school, LES students are empowered to build positive relationships with each other, which results in a positive culture in the school building.



## Fun Run at Westmere Elementary

Westmere Elementary students got a healthy dose of fresh air and physical activity while supporting their school community at the WES fun run. When they weren't completing their runs, students cheered on and encouraged their classmates to give it their all to cross the finish line!







## Creating environments for all students to excel

### Students envision a better world in the Future City Competition

As part of the Future City Club, Farnsworth Middle School students created “Pine Peak” — an environmentally friendly city engineered to mitigate the effects of climate change. Future City is a STEM program for middle school students tasked with building a city that addresses a situation 100 years in the future; this year’s challenge was climate change. Having spent months doing research, the club included items such as living bricks, geo-thermal roads, eco-pod housing and hydrogen eco-systems in the city’s construction. In January, the FMS team competed in the regional competition against nine other schools. They won first place, in addition to six other awards. Students gained valuable lessons from the experience, with club member Darshana S. saying “Future City has really taught me that teamwork and community are really important.” Next, the FMS Future City Club will compete in the national competition in Washington, D.C.

### Eighth graders combine math and community service to help the Guilderland Food Pantry



Cereal box dominos returned to FMS this year, with eighth grade students collecting a record 607 full-size boxes of cereal for the Guilderland Food Pantry. Prior to setting up the dominos, students calculated the surface area of the donated

boxes of cereal, as well as the volume of the bags of cereal. When asked what it means to be able to do this every year, the FMS math teachers spoke passionately about how hunger affects a student’s ability to learn and how this activity not only helps FMS families, but people throughout the Guilderland community. “Students cannot learn unless they have a full belly, so it feels really good that we’re helping our community and our students,” said FMS math teacher Rebecca Been.

### Grant allows GHS to form eSports team



Guilderland High School is launching an eSports team with some help from Best Buy in Albany. The school was the recipient of a \$25,000 technology grant from

the corporation as part of the Intel Retail Edge Program, which included equipment and \$5,000 in cash. At the Jan. 10 board of education meeting, Best Buy sales consultant Matt Pothier explained why they chose to award GHS with the grant, saying “We’re part of Guilderland... We wanted to give them the resources they need to excel at what they really want to do.” The grant will have a significant impact on both technology at GHS and its students, especially those who aren’t part of an athletic team. “Having students who might not typically participate on an athletic team gain the same skill sets that they would through that experience — whether it be communication, problem solving, teamwork — we think it can really grow their skills,” said GHS Principal Mike Piscitelli.

### Support in action: Focus



The GHS Focus program held its annual day of service in November, when students had the option of volunteering at the Schenectady City Mission, the Altamont Food Pantry, the Guilderland YMCA, Westmere Elementary School, FMS or GHS.

Focus students spent the day serving meals, assisting younger students and even held a dance party for special education classes. After spending the morning giving back, the students were treated to a luncheon celebration and time of reflection, held at the Guilderland Center Firehouse. For nearly 50 years, Focus has been a part of GHS and has provided students extra guidance and support with the four A’s: academics, attitude, attendance and actions. Seventy students are currently enrolled in the program.



## Unified sports brings athletes together



A program at GHS since 2014, Unified Sports offers students of all abilities the opportunity to play basketball or to bowl. The unified bowling team has been successful since its inception in 2016, having

earned either first, second or third place in playoffs every year. It's evident students love the program, with some being inspired to pursue a career in special education after their experience. "Every child deserves to play. Unified sports promotes inclusion by bringing students of differing levels of ability together as teammates. It is truly a rewarding and inspiring experience for everyone involved," said GCSD Athletic Director Dave Austin.

## Career & Technical Education provides skills for workplace success



GHS students are expanding their career horizons as part of Capital Region BOCES' Career and Technical Education. This program offers area high schools students with all interests, talents and abilities the opportunity to pursue traditional trades, licensed professions and honors-level and college-level

programs. GHS seniors Kai Smith and Steven Matthews are studying auto mechanics and diesel technology, respectively. Kai originally planned on becoming an auto mechanic, until a presentation by a major airline changed his course. "It's something that not a lot of people do and it's a good opportunity to get a good career and make good money," he said. In the Diesel Tech program, Steven has gained valuable knowledge and experience working on late-model trucks and diesel engines. He intends to use his newfound skill set for a career in the military. "I am going into the military as a diesel mechanic... and my training at BOCES is preparing me well for the diesel side of it," Steven said.

## The garden program is flourishing at GHS



The organic garden at GHS is more than just a garden; it's a place that brings the school community together. Club members team up with students in the school-to-work (STW) program in January to begin planting seeds to prepare for a spring plant sale. Over the summer, students from both the Garden and Key Clubs volunteer to maintain the

garden; they also host extended school year students in the garden once a week during the summer. When school resumes in the fall, the garden is cared for until harvest. STW students then gather, clean and package the produce to sell throughout school as part of their work-based learning jobs.

## Music program hits the right notes



The halls of GHS are alive with music due to the talent of student musicians, some of whom have been selected to perform in prestigious music ensembles. GHS students were selected for the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) Conference All-State Music Ensembles and to perform at the New York State Band Directors Association's (NYSBDA) annual symposium in March. The foundation for students' love and talent for music is established early on at the annual Young People's Concert. This kick-off event for third-grade students is an introduction to music of many styles and to learn about the different instruments and ensemble opportunities available to them as fourth-grade students and beyond.

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CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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2022-2023

## Ensuring opportunities for all students to succeed



## How to Stay Connected



### Get our emails:

Parents and community members can sign up on the district website to receive emails from our messaging platform, SchoolMessenger. You'll learn about school events and meetings, closings and delays, budget information and more.



### Get social:

Search for Guilderland Central School District on Facebook and Twitter @GuilderlandCSD. You can watch streamed and recorded meetings and events on the GHS Media YouTube page.



### Go online:

Visit our website at [www.guilderlandschools.org](http://www.guilderlandschools.org) for the latest news and information.

## Join the GCSD team!

We are seeking to fill positions in transportation, food services and maintenance as well as for teaching assistants, aides and substitutes. These roles are essential to our school community; please consider joining our team! To learn more, visit the Employment page on the district website, under the About Us drop-down menu.