

**Synopsis of
Westfield Board of Education Meeting on September 17, 2019
By Superintendent Margaret Dolan**

On behalf of the entire Board of Education, Board President Peggy Oster presented Westfield High School seniors Ian Gurland, Aidan Kilbourn, Connie Liu, and Julia Tompkins with congratulatory certificates as semifinalists in the 2020 National Merit Scholarship Program.



I provided an update on the start of the 2019-2020 school year as the Westfield Public Schools welcomed over 6,200 students. Our buildings are in good shape thanks to the hard work of our custodial and maintenance staff and we are pleased to have Mary Asfendis and Brian Gechtman at the helm as principals of Westfield High School and Roosevelt Intermediate School, respectively. The first day of school is one of my favorite days as I walk through the hallways of each school and observe the ease at which our students and staff adjust to the new school year. At the board meeting, I outlined the ways in which our new security protocols and procedures were implemented and communicated, including an email sent on August 27 to parents and staff, building-specific instructions provided by principals a few days later, and a “Welcome Back” video reiterating the updated protocols which was emailed to parents and staff on September 4. I am grateful to our principals, administrators, secretaries and all who worked hard over the summer to prepare for these changes. These new security procedures are the district’s effort to find a reasonable approach to an unreasonable reality and we will continue to work to improve and update our safety measures.

I also am grateful for our cooperative relationship with the Westfield Police Department on whose advice we closely depend. Police Chief Christopher Battiloro attended the board meeting and spoke of his deep commitment to the safety and security of Westfield students. He too noted the important relationship with the Westfield Public School District and reiterated that, in addition to the three School Resource Officers (SROs) assigned to Westfield High School and Edison and Roosevelt Intermediate Schools, his police officers had been making unannounced visits twice daily to each elementary school well before an armed man was arrested at Tamaques School in June. These daily security checks, which the chief said often last more than an hour as officers engage with staff and students, are continuing. “The persistent presence of police officers in Westfield schools is a constant and will remain so as long as I remain chief,” Chief Battiloro said. He noted that Westfield police met several times over the summer with school administrators to review security protocols and he called on parents and members of the community to help keep Westfield schools safe by adhering to the new procedures.

Mrs. Oster thanked Chief Battiloro and myself, before recognizing the public for comments. She asked members of the public who attended the meeting, which was held in Cafeteria B at Westfield High School, to respect that there are many opinions regarding the best approach to safety and security. "The one thing that all voices have in common is that we care about the safety of all of our children," she said.

The Board heard from 24 people, the majority of them residents of Westfield, who provided differing opinions on additional security measures, including whether or not an SRO should be assigned to each elementary school. Some residents discussed the Sandy Hook Promise and other training programs available for students and adults that are geared toward the prevention of gun violence. Additional guidance counselors and an emphasis on mental health also was suggested as an alternative to armed SROs, while better communication and due diligence by the district was requested by a few residents. Some expressed support for the steps taken by the district and for common sense measures that do not sacrifice the welcoming culture of the school district. Others asked for a subcommittee to be formed to encourage additional dialogue within the community.

Mrs. Oster thanked the speakers, noting the importance of being respectful and willing to listen in the face of many opinions. She stated that the all-volunteer board and the district administrative staff has consistently conducted due diligence by researching, asking questions of county, state and national security experts, attending training, examining best practices, and bringing back the best ideas to enact in our district.

Mrs. Oster and I pointed to the district website as a good resource of factual information and noted that, over the years, we have shared much information at board meetings, in my synopsis of those meetings, on the website and social media, and through other means of communication. I mentioned that young families who are new to the district may not be aware of what has been done in the past and I promised to provide additional information and context in the coming weeks.

CLASS OF 2018 GRADUATION REPORT

We are very proud of our Westfield High School Class of 2019 and we wish them the best. I presented the following information on graduation and post-graduation plans:

- 99.3% of seniors graduated
- 446 seniors received diplomas
- 94% continuing their education
- 88% attending 4 year colleges and universities
- 5.6% attending 2 year colleges
- 0.4% enrolled in vocational, business, and other post high school institutions
- 0.8% joined the military
- 0.2% moving out of country to continue education
- 5.0% did not report their future plans
- 148 colleges and universities in 33 states, plus 2 in other countries
- Most popular: Universities of Delaware, Colorado, Maryland, Pittsburgh, South Carolina, Wisconsin, The College of New Jersey, Bucknell, Kean, Lehigh, Miami, NYU, Ohio State, Penn State, Rutgers, Tulane, and Villanova.
- 6 out of the 8 Ivy League schools are represented: Brown, Columbia, Cornell, Princeton, University of Pennsylvania, and Yale.

PERSONNEL

The Board accepted with regret the retirement of Supervisor of Buildings and Grounds Michael Morris, effective December 31, 2019, who began his career in the Westfield Public Schools as a custodian and skilled maintenance staff before assuming the supervisory role 14 years ago. Mr. Morris is a loyal and dedicated employee and we will certainly miss him.

The Board also approved with regret the retirement, effective June 30, 2020, of Tamaques School secretary Lucy Arbes who has been a welcoming presence for students, parents, and teachers for the past 25 years. Also retired as of July 31, 2019, is Wilson School second grade teacher Mary Dura who is well known at Wilson for more than 20 years where her literacy expertise created proud readers of her students. We wish Ms. Arbes and Mrs. Dura well in their retirement.

Board member Robert Garrison expressed his gratitude to Mrs. Dura for her years of service and dedication.

FACILITIES

Facilities Committee Chair Gretchan Ohlig reported that, at its last meeting, the committee brainstormed possible ways to honor the late Dr. Derrick Nelson from a facilities perspective and received an update on the status of summer projects from Business Administrator Dana Sullivan. Committee members also discussed the possible installation of security vestibules at each school, according to Ms. Ohlig who added that additional information was needed before a full presentation could be made to the public.

Ms. Ohlig encouraged community members to attend a rededication ceremony for Gary Kehler Stadium during half-time at the Blue Devil football game on September 21.

Mrs. Sullivan provided a brief update on the status of major facilities projects with renovations to Kehler Stadium, bathrooms at the high school and intermediate schools, and auditorium lobbies at the intermediate schools basically completed. A significant number of new doors have been installed at the high school, Mrs. Sullivan said, as contractors continue to work after school hours to install additional doors that will automatically lock when a lockdown is called. Security gates in the high school are installed and will be connected to the security system as well. The district will go out to bid soon on new doors for the elementary schools, she said. Mrs. Sullivan also noted that the district hopes that installation of the new gymnasium floor at McKinley School will be completed by the end of October.

POLICIES

I provided an overview of three key District Goals for the 2019-2020 school year, developed to coincide with the district's strategic plan:

1. Improve clear and timely communication with parents and other community stakeholders, using various means of communication including the district website and social media, PTO newsletters, Parent Teacher Council (PTC) meetings, and a new newsletter that addresses current issues affecting the Westfield Public School District.
2. Provide increased awareness of security and safety protocols to ensure that all members of the school community understand the policies and procedures in place in the event of a crisis. This includes reviewing the district's Crisis Communication Plan -- which is posted on the district website -- with the community through various means and

update the plan to include one-page visuals to help community stakeholders better understand the district's investment in keeping students and staff safe. Also, the district staff will continue to receive training on security protocols.

3. Clearly communicate the information necessary for Westfield community members to understand the options and challenges relative to implementing full-day kindergarten in the Westfield Public School District. Steps taken will include creating a communication plan, providing community engagement opportunities, and establishing a web page with the background and specific details surrounding the years-long debate over full day kindergarten.

CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION AND PROGRAMS

The Board approved district field trips correlated with curriculum.

The Board also approved student teacher/intern candidates for 2019-2020.

FINANCE

The Board accepted with gratitude gifts from the "Get Better" Basketball Camp, run by Mr. and Mrs. James Lane, to be used as follows:

- o \$300 to help fund any social emotional resources at Roosevelt Intermediate School
- o \$300 to help fund any social emotional resources at Edison Intermediate School

TECHNOLOGY

Technology Committee Chair Michael Bielen stated that a review of summer technology projects and a look at what's upcoming for 2019-2020 will be discussed at the committee's next meeting.

LIAISON REPORTS

Board Vice President Amy Root reported on a meeting of the Franklin School PTO Executive Board, with Franklin principal Dr. Eileen Cambria and PTO board members providing positive feedback on the new security measures. Franklin's Movie Night was declared a great success and the new playground equipment in place is being heralded as well. Mrs. Root encouraged attendance at the school's upcoming Pumpkin Fair from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. on Saturday, October 19. And she praised the various conservation initiatives of Westfield's Green Team including toy repurposing, a used backpack drive, and a medallion program to encourage shop owners to consider sustainable alternatives to plastic.

Board member Kent Diamond reported on a recent meeting of the Tamaques School PTO at which much of the talk focused on security. Mr. Diamond stated that he reviewed the new security measures outlined at the August 27 board meeting which was well received by those in attendance.

Mrs. Oster noted that she attended a meeting of the Town Council and reminded us that the Town of Westfield turns 300 next year and will be putting together a yearlong celebration.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

HIGH SCHOOL

Congratulations to the following Westfield High School students who achieved perfect scores on ACT and/or SAT subject areas over the summer:

June 2019 SAT:

- Math 2: Matthew Arndt, Ryan Billings, Grace Endy, Samuel Ertman, Zachary Fischer, Thomas Lupicki, Mira Mehta, Henry Meiselman, Spencer Rothfleisch, Alan Solovey, Max Tennant, Sivaji Turimella.
- Biology- M: Abbey Zidel
- Chemistry: Samuel Ertman, Aidan Kilbourn
- Physics: Kurt Hu

June 2019 ACT:

- Alexis Hammer (English)
- Katherine Martinson (Science, STEM, English)
- Elisa Saint Denis (English)
- Tara Sullivan (Science)

July 2019 ACT:

- Clea Demuynck (Math and Reading)
- Alexis Hammer (Math)
- Brad Hornbeck (Math)

August 2019 SAT

- Grace Endy (Math)
- Sivaji Turimella (Math)
- Kailey Zhao (Math)

Congratulations to Freshman Field Hockey Coach Corinne Varhley who celebrated her 100th win with a victory over Randolph on September 9.

Twenty WHS students have been recognized for their exceptional academic promise as Commended Students in the 2020 National Merit Scholarship Competition: Matthew Arndt, Logan Calder, Valerie Chang, Clea Demuynck, Eric Elizes, Mark Falletta, Spencer Feinstein, Zachary Fischer, Daniel Fox, Julia Horne, Kurt Hu, Grace Hutchinson, Jeremy Kronheimer, Thomas Lupicki, Stephen Park, Sandrine Perez, Jonathan Sherman, Elijah Soh, Max Tennant, and MacLean Zeller.

WHS Hi's Eye received a Gold Medal for 2018-2019 from the Columbia Scholastic Press Association, which provided an in-depth critique of hundreds of student newspapers across the U.S. and awarded Gold, Silver, and Bronze medals based on a numeric score on essentials, verbal and visual categories. Congratulations to our student journalists and advisers Shawn McDonald and Gail O'Connor on this prestigious recognition.

Westfield High School juniors Aishik Palit and Zaria Katz have been accepted into the American Choral Directors Association All-Eastern Choir. They will attend a conference and perform with the All-Eastern Choir in Rochester, New York next March. Congratulations to Aishik and Zaria on this tremendous achievement.

DISTRICT

An information session will be held on Wednesday, September 25 for parents and students interested in learning more about Odyssey of the Mind, an international creative problem-solving competition for students. The information session will begin at 7 p.m. at Edison Intermediate

School. If you have any questions prior to the information session, please email Donna Kenney at donnakenney@gmail.com.

Established in 1957, the PTC Scholarship Fund benefits graduating Westfield High School seniors who demonstrate financial need, academic perseverance and community involvement. For information on how to contribute to the 2020 PTC Scholarship Fund, look for "PTO Initiatives" in the [Community Flyers](#) section of the district website.

The [Parent Teacher Council \(PTC\)](#) is the umbrella organization for all ten of the Westfield Public School District's PTOs. General meetings are held once a month and all parents are welcome and encouraged to attend. At these monthly meetings, the PTO presidents meet with the PTC Board, the Superintendent, and a member of the Board of Education. The first meeting of the PTC will be held on Wednesday, September 25 at 10:15 a.m. at 302 Elm Street. A full meeting schedule can be found on the district website at www.westfieldnj12.org under the Family Resources tab.

SPECIAL EDUCATION ROUNDTABLE

The Special Education Committee of the Parent-Teacher Council, in partnership with the district's Department of Special Services, will hold an introductory discussion for parents on October 2 beginning at 7:30 p.m. at Edison Intermediate School. Assistant Superintendent Dr. Michael Weissman, along with members of the Child Study Team, will provide updates on the latest developments and events that are important to the Special Education community.

COMMUNITY

Calling all middle and high school artists. Create a Charles Addams-inspired cartoon for AddamsFest this fall. All drawings must be no larger than 11" x 8" and must include name, school, grade, email and phone number on the back. Mail or drop off in person to: Addams Cartoon Contest, c/o Department of Recreation, Town of Westfield, 425 East Broad Street in Westfield. The top 25 cartoons will be featured alongside original Charles Addams artwork at the James Ward Mansion from October 15-23. The deadline to submit cartoons is Friday, September 27. For a complete list of contest rules, along with information on where to submit the artwork, visit www.Addamsfest.com.

A representative of the Rutgers Cooperative Extension will present a [Backyard Composting Workshop](#) on Thursday, October 3 at 7 p.m. in the Municipal Building Community Room at 425 East Broad Street, hosted by the Westfield Green Team. Registration for this free event is via the Westfield Recreation Department at (908) 789-4086. All participants will be entered into a raffle to win a free backyard compost bin.

NO SCHOOL

Westfield Public Schools will be closed on Monday, September 30 and Tuesday, October 1, in observance of Rosh Hashanah, and on Wednesday, October 9, in observance of Yom Kippur. Schools also will be closed on Monday, October 14 for Columbus Day.

NEXT BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETING

The next meeting of the Westfield Board of Education will be held on Tuesday, October 15 at 7:30 p.m. at 302 Elm Street. The complete agenda will be available on Friday, October 11 on the Board section of the district website.

Margaret Dolan, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools

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