



DOLLARS AND SENSE

Students To Graduate Financially Literate

Many people never learn about credit-card debt, college-loan obligations, checking, savings and investment accounts or planning for retirement until they are confronted with the topics in adulthood — sometimes in stressful circumstances.

Beginning with the 2024-25 school year, Commack High School students will graduate with financial literacy that will serve them for the rest of their lives.

Building on the district’s emphasis on practical learning, superintendent Dr. Jordan Cox and the Board of Education have unveiled plans to open a finance lab at the high school this September that will resemble the New York Stock Exchange trading floor — down to a stock ticker streaming across the walls.

Beginning with the Class of 2025, all seniors will be required to study financial literacy in the lab. The coursework will be embedded into the students’ existing economics/social studies classes, so that the practical learning won’t come at the expense of the freedom to choose electives.

The high school’s staff is beginning to train on state-of-the-art Bloomberg terminals that will be installed in the lab. The terminals are the same technology used at professional financial institutions, and contain modules for teaching subjects ranging from financial fundamentals to complex topics such as market concepts.

The district has initiated a search for a financial literacy teacher.

“This is so critically important,” Dr.

Cox said. “It is our vision to ensure that every senior who graduates from Commack is financially literate, and that they understand how money works in the world and how they run their lives financially.”

The schools are set to be introduced for the 2025-26 academic year.

Students will be presented with clusters of elective courses that will begin to prepare them for careers in those fields.



ARTIST RENDERING OF FINANCIAL LAB SET TO DEBUT AT CHS FOR THE 2024-25 SCHOOL YEAR

Commack High School is transforming the traditional educational experience with real-life spaces, such as a mock courtroom that debuted this past September.

The stock floor, courtroom and associated curriculum are part of a larger plan by Dr. Cox and the Board of Education to expose students to career pathways while still in high school.

During the March board meeting, Dr. Cox announced that the district plans to implement specialized schools within Commack High School, including schools of Business, Education, Engineering & Applied Sciences, Fine Arts, Liberal Studies, Medicine and, soon thereafter, a School of Law.

No specific courses will be mandated within a particular school. Students may take as many or as few of the elective courses as they want — while also receiving invitations to attend presentations from guest speakers in that field, college admissions advisors and other programming. Students may freely sample courses from other schools within Commack High School.

The School of Liberal Studies is intended to expose students to a wide range of courses and professions.

“This is an opportunity to ensure that all students graduate prepared to make the best decision for their college and/or career journey,” Dr. Cox said.

HOMETOWN HERO: Wood Park school monitor Francesca Augello saved a life. Augello, who has three of her own children in the district, performed the Heimlich maneuver upon spotting second grader Grayson choking on pizza. “This makes you feel good that you live in a district like the Commack School District,” said his father, Paul Molina.

BUDGET HEARING

MAY 9
8 p.m. @Hubbs

BUDGET VOTE

MAY 21

UNIVERSAL PRE-K LOTTERY: If your child lives within the Commack School District and will be 4 years old by Dec. 1, 2024, you are eligible to be included in the UPK lottery. The deadline to register for the lottery is May 1. Scan the QR code for the form.



STARGAZING

The Commack Star is awarded to district employees who demonstrate exemplary achievement, contribution and performance in their roles. Here are our most recent recipients:



MICHELE CONDELLO: The January recipient, Condello is the Computer TA at Rolling Hills. She always comes from a place of “yes.” Condello takes on many tasks to help make Rolling Hills a fun place for students and staff. She assists with the yearbook, runs Hills Helper (a second grade “club” showing students how wonderful it is to be a helper and to be kind) and assists with technology initiatives.



BRENDA LENTSCH: After more than two decades of dedicated service, Lentsch — February’s Star — retired as public relations director at the end of that month. Lentsch had been the pillar of our communication efforts, demonstrating an unmatched level of trustworthiness and dependability. She has supported our mission 24/7, 365 days a year. Her devotion to her role is a testament to her unparalleled work ethic.



BETH CONSIDINE: March’s winner, Considine is a leader in the special education department. She is innovative and creates meaningful project-based learning tasks that keep the students engaged and teach them skills for real-life situations. Considine works to differentiate lessons to ensure all of her students can access learning. She understands all children can learn, just not in the same way.

TEACHING TOLERANCE

Holocaust survivor Meir Usherovitz visit, ‘From the Fires’ production among lessons

More than eight decades separated the ages of Holocaust survivor Meir Usherovitz and the 10th graders who attentively listened to him speak in the CHS auditorium. Yet Usherovitz’s message clearly resonated with the students as the 97-year-old St. James resident spoke about losing his parents and brothers during the Holocaust as well as his experiences at the Auschwitz and Ebsensee concentration camps.

The visit was part of a week of lessons on anti-Semitism, racism and bullying in conjunction with the Glen Cove-based Holocaust Memorial and Tolerance Center.

“I do this talk because I want teenagers and grownups to know what people can do to each other,” Usherovitz told the students.

CMS eighth graders watched the powerful theater production, “From the Fires: Voices of the Holocaust.” The play traces the life of Rachel Gold, a Berlin teenager, and her experiences from 1937 through 1945.

The play follows her from the inception of the Nuremberg Laws, through deportation to Auschwitz, and finally the death march to Mauthausen. The com-



ABOVE: 97-YEAR-OLD HOLOCAUST SURVIVOR MEIR USHEROVITZ OF ST. JAMES SPEAKS AT CHS; AT RIGHT: THEATRE THREE PERFORMS “FROM THE FIRES: VOICES OF THE HOLOCAUST” AT CMS

pany from Port Jefferson-based Theatre Three has visited CMS for more than 20 years to spread the play’s important message. “It’s still as powerful today as it was then,” CMS assistant principal Frank Agovino told the students.



CAPITOL LOBBYISTS

Student Leaders Visit Albany to Tout Programs ... And State Officials Are Listening

Commack High School student leaders impressed their state representatives and Education Department administrators with their command of issues affecting students and the district during a visit to the State Capitol in late March.

Twenty-two CHS students from the Legislative Advocacy Committee accompanied superintendent Dr. Jordan Cox and his cabinet as well as Board of Education vice president Steven Hartman and committee co-chairs Eric Biagi and Dr. Jennifer Santorello on the advocacy trip to Albany.

The group met with state senator Mario Mattera and assemblymen Keith Brown and Michael Fitzpatrick. The students then crossed Washington Avenue to meet with New York State Education Department deputy commissioners Angelique Johnson-Dingle and Jason Harmon as well as a dozen senior staff members from throughout the department.

The politicians and education officials uniformly praised the students' effective lobbying on behalf of the Commack School District and their substantive requests with respect to policies and funding.

"We love the fact you're becoming young advocates," Assemblyman Brown told the students. "It keeps our finger on the pulse."

Said Harmon, the Education Department's P-12 operational support deputy commissioner: "This is critical for our work being able to hear from all of you."

The students' presentations focused on six topics: school funding, environmental sustainability, safety, mental health, local governance and technology.

The specific proposals included requesting funding for wellness rooms for mental health breaks, the expansion of security badges to younger students in the district to improve safety, and assistance developing educational



ABOVE: STUDENTS DISCUSS ISSUES WITH STATE EDUCATION DEPARTMENT OFFICIALS, INCLUDING ANGELIQUE JOHNSON-DINGLE (TAKING NOTES IN FOREGROUND); AT RIGHT: ASSEMBLYMAN KEITH BROWN, STATE SENATOR MARIO MATTERA AND ASSEMBLYMAN MICHAEL FITZPATRICK MEET WITH STUDENTS AT THE STATE CAPITOL.



opportunities at Marion Carll Farm — the six-acre farm that had been bequeathed to the district. The students also advocated for increased practical learning opportunities such as state-sponsored financial literacy coursework and the freedom to do internships as part of the academic coursework.

Students from the district annually have traveled to Albany for nearly a decade to meet their representatives as well as Education Department officials. In fact, current social studies teacher Crystal Curcio — one of the chaperones for this year's trip — had visited Albany as a CHS student leader several years ago.

The officials clearly listened.

Johnson-Dingle and Harmon took copious notes and pledged that they and other New York State Education Department officials would stay in touch with the students to solicit further feedback as the state looks to re-examine how students "experience school."

CEDAR ROAD REVIVAL

With 'Ninth School,' Board of Education Fulfills Goal to Keep Students in District

The Commack School District values having the resources and infrastructure in place so that all students who live within the district's boundaries have the ability to attend school here.

So it was with great pride that superintendent Dr. Jordan Cox announced that Cedar Road Alternative School will become the district's ninth "official school" beginning with the 2024-25 academic year.

Cedar Road, which has housed the district's special education administration offices for the past several years, offers programs to assist students who are struggling with school avoidance, trauma and who present with social-emotional needs.

The school has operated pilot programs offering those services this academic year.

Many districts place students with such needs in neighboring districts that have the resources in place to support those students.

"One of the things that we pride ourselves on here in Commack is keeping our students home," Dr. Cox said.

With the support of the Board of Education, the district has invested during the past six years in making Cedar Road an ideal home for students in need. That investment included roof and window replacement, installation of new blinds, new gym flooring, and interior upgrades to ceilings and flooring. Many of the spaces, including the Counseling Center, have a soothing, modern design rather than a traditional classroom feel.

Dr. Cox noted that students who have

attended Cedar Road sing its praises. He pointed to the success story of a student who had avoided school for nearly two years, and who now embraces attending school and who serves as an ambassador for the program.

"The special ed department has done a fantastic job," Dr. Cox said.

Cedar Road originally served as an elementary school from 1960 through the late 1980s.



BOE TRUSTEE GUS HUEBER RECEIVES SCOPE AWARD



Board of Education trustee Gus Hueber's knowledge of school-based mental health resources proved invaluable in the rebirth of Cedar Road to serve as a hub for students in need.

And Hueber's efforts on behalf of the Board of Education were recognized at the 23rd annual SCOPE School District Awards in March. Hueber received a School Board Service Award

during the event in Holbrook.

The organizers praised Hueber for his commitment to fiscal responsibility as well as for his advocacy of initiatives supporting mental health and wellness.

Hueber has served on Commack's Board of Education for the past three years.

A SCHOOL YEAR WORTH NOTING ...

Dear Commack Community,

As we reflect on the 2023-24 school year, I am filled with gratitude for the incredible journey we have shared as a school community. It has been a year marked by progress and innovation, fueled by our passion to make a difference in the lives of our students. This dedication is evident in our commitment to placing students at the heart of every decision we make. I would like to take this opportunity to share a few enhancements to our schools this year:



- The completion of brand-new playgrounds at all our primary schools, providing safe and stimulating environments for our youngest learners to explore and play.

- The expansion of our IB Career-related Programme. These pathways enrich our curriculum and empower our students to pursue their passions and thrive in their chosen fields.

- Inclusivity has been a key focus, with the addition of an extra unified sports team in bowling, allowing students of all abilities to come together, compete and form lasting friendships.

- The introduction of a new Section XI sport – girls flag football, which provides more opportunities for our students to engage in athletic pursuits.

- The enhancement of our facilities continues with the installation of new pickleball courts at Commack High School, providing our students and the community with additional recreational opportunities.

- This year, we have implemented new security measures such as door-ajar sensors in our secondary schools and the addition of a patrol car at every elementary school.

- The opening of a mock trial courtroom allows our students to engage in authentic, real-life learning experiences. This innovative addition has further enriched our curriculum and is preparing our students for success beyond the classroom.

These measures are a testament to our commitment to providing a safe and nurturing learning environment for all.

As we look ahead to the future, let us continue to work together to inspire, empower and educate the next generation of leaders.

Thank you for your continued support and partnership in making Commack Schools a beacon of excellence in education.

Warm regards,

A large, stylized handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'J. Cox'.

Dr. Jordan Cox
Superintendent of Schools



PRESIDENTIAL SCHOLARS PROGRAM CANDIDATE: Alyssa Pascale (center) scored a perfect 1600 on the SAT and has been accepted to MIT. She recently was selected a U.S. Presidential Scholar candidate. The award recognizes the accomplishments of some of our nation's most distinguished graduating seniors. Up to 161 U.S. Presidential Scholars are chosen annually. U.S. Presidential Scholars are honored for their accomplishments during the National Recognition Program each June. To commemorate their achievement, the Scholars are also awarded the Presidential Scholars Medallion.



NATIONAL MERIT FINALISTS: Sofia Ahmed, Jack Damato, Eunice Jeon, Alyssa Pascale and Jonathan Zhang have been selected National Merit finalists. More than 1.3 million juniors entered the 2024 National Merit Scholarship Program. The nationwide pool of semifinalists, representing less than one percent of U.S. high school seniors, included the highest-scoring entrants in each state. To become a finalist, the semifinalist and school applied with information about the semifinalist's academic record, participation in school and community activities, demonstrated leadership abilities, employment, and honors and awards received.

THE ARTS



MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS PERFORMED 'THE LITTLE MERMAID' TO RESOUNDING CHEERS



'MAMMA MIA'

High school students performed three shows to packed houses, including a complimentary matinee for local senior citizens. The seniors then enjoyed a dinner in CHS' cafeteria



STRINGS NIGHT

The first of the district-wide Nights of Music involved string instruments. Be sure to join us at the middle school on May 7 at 7 p.m. for the final performance, featuring bands from throughout the district



NORTH RIDGE STARS

North Ridge second graders treated their families to a choral concert — a performance capped by the students singing the school song

COUGAR ATHLETICS



WINTER COACH OF THE YEAR

DAVID MORAN
Girls Basketball



ATHLETE OF THE SEASON

SOFIA VASSELMAN
Girls Basketball



ATHLETE OF THE SEASON

NICHOLAS WANGA
Boys Basketball

CELEBRATING A BANNER WINTER SEASON



Athletic director Patrick Friel marveled at the accomplishments of Commack High School's winter varsity student-athletes while emceeding the Varsity Winter Awards inside the high school's auditorium.

• Ten of the squads were named Scholar-Athlete teams by the New York State Public High School Athletic Association for having at least three-quarters of their student-athletes produce semester GPAs of at least 90 percent.

• The boys bowling team went from wild-card qualifier to county champion and ultimately placed third in the state.

• Girls fencing, girls bowling and girls basketball won league titles.

More so, though, Friel expressed pride in how the student-athletes represented their teams, high school and community. Their service included participating in Wellness Day at Sawmill Intermediate as well as multiple community youth clinics and a fundraiser to combat cancer.

"That's the reason why we have such a strong culture," Friel told attendees at the Varsity Winter Awards. "... I want to thank you for being role models in the community."

Friel also lauded the fan support.

"People do not like coming in here because it's tough to get a victory," he said.

IN LOVING MEMORY

Coach Bryan Bonin Field is now complete with the addition of an outfield wind screen that includes a No. 24 jersey in memory of our late baseball coach



SPRING SPORTS SCHEDULES



COUGARETTES CLAIM PAIR OF NATIONAL TITLES!



The Commack Cougarettes won the National Dance Alliance large varsity kick and team performance national championships in Orlando.

It marked the third straight year the Cougarettes have returned home from the competition with a national title.

The team received a hero's welcome despite a late-night arrival back at

the high school. With lights flashing and sirens blaring, trucks from the Commack Fire Department and other first responders escorted the team's charter bus from the Long Island Expressway back to the high school.

Upon arrival, a horde of well-wishers greeted the Cougarettes with signs congratulating the team on the pair of national championships.

Commack School District
P.O. Box 150, Commack, NY 11725

Board of Education
Justin Varughese, president
Steven Hartman, vice president
William Hender, trustee
Susan Hermer, trustee
Gus Hueber, trustee

NON-PROFIT
CARRIER ROUTE
PRE-SORT
US POSTAGE PAID
PERMIT NO. 91
Huntington Sta., NY 11746



FLAGS FOR FREEDOM

Since 2011, the Commack School District has displayed 9/11 flags along Scholar Lane to honor and remember the victims and heroes of Sept. 11, 2001. The flags are our community's way to commemorate the tragic day and lives lost as well as to salute the bravery of those who put others before themselves. We will never forget.

If you would like to sponsor a 3x5-foot flag, please complete the form below. Each sponsor's name will be attached to the flag. If requested, your flag will be provided to you at the end of the year. Sponsors may include individuals, families, businesses, schools and organizations. All are welcome to show their patriotism. The cost is \$25 per flag. All funds raised will support a 25th anniversary remembrance in 2026.

Please make check for \$25 per flag payable to **The Commack Educational Foundation**.

Send form to:
Hubbs Administration Center
480 Clay Pitts Road
East Northport, NY 11731
Attention: Debbie Virga

Any questions may be directed to Debbie Virga at 631-912-2055 or dvirga@commack.k12.ny.us.

Name: _____ # of flags requested: _____

Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Flags dedicated to: _____

Check box if you would like flag returned to above address

Commack School District
P.O. Box 150, Commack, NY 11725

Board of Education
Justin Varughese, president
Steven Hartman, vice president
William Hender, trustee
Susan Hermer, trustee
Gus Hueber, trustee

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PERMIT NO. 1
E. Northport, NY 11731



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Commack School District
P.O. Box 150, Commack, NY 11725

Board of Education
Justin Varughese, president
Steven Hartman, vice president
William Hender, trustee
Susan Hermer, trustee
Gus Hueber, trustee

ECRWSS

RESIDENT

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CARRIER ROUTE
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PERMIT NO. 8
Commack, NY 11725



FLAGS FOR FREEDOM

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Address: _____

Telephone: _____ Email: _____

Flags dedicated to: _____

Check box if you would like flag returned to above address

Commack School District
P.O. Box 150, Commack, NY 11725

Board of Education
Justin Varughese, president
Steven Hartman, vice president
William Hender, trustee
Susan Hermer, trustee
Gus Hueber, trustee

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PERMIT NO. 17
Smithtown, NY 11787



FLAGS FOR FREEDOM

Since 2011, the Commack School District has displayed 9/11 flags along Scholar Lane to honor and remember the victims and heroes of Sept. 11, 2001. The flags are our community's way to commemorate the tragic day and lives lost as well as to salute the bravery of those who put others before themselves. We will never forget.

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