



WINTER EDITION

# Commack Courier

## National Merit Semifinalists 2023



Congratulations to Commack High School's National Merit Semifinalists, seniors Juliette A. and Emma V. Juliette and Emma were among the highest scoring students in New York State on the PSAT/NMSQT exam taken earlier this school year.

Over 16,00 Semifinalists were named in the 68th annual National Merit Scholarship Program. These academically talented high school seniors have an opportunity to continue the competition for 7,250 National Merit Scholarships worth nearly \$28 million that will be offered in the spring. To be considered for a Merit Scholarship® award, Semifinalists must fulfill several requirements to advance to the Finalist level of the competition. Finalists then have the opportunity to win a National Merit Scholarship, and earn the Merit Scholar® title.

Scholarships are underwritten by NMSC with its own funds and by approximately 340 business organizations and higher education institutions that share NMSC's goals of honoring the nation's scholastic champions and encouraging the pursuit of academic excellence.

In photo, from left to right: Dr. Jordan Cox, Superintendent of Commack Schools; Timothy Russo, Assistant Superintendent; Emma, Juliette, Nicole Kregler, Director of Guidance; and Matt Keltos, CHS Vice Principal.

## Are You Police Smart?

Sawmill students learned about protecting themselves and their personal information while online and on social media at the Police Smart assemblies with P.O. Jesse Levy.

The fourth graders were asked to raise their hands when asked if they had a cellphone, and almost all did! Surprisingly, almost all of them were acquainted with TikTok, Snapchat and other social media platforms, although they are not yet 13 years old—the age requirement to register for those platforms.



*In photo, Mr. Ciani and his fourth grade class with Superintendent, Dr. Cox and P.O. Jesse Levy.*

Officer Levy related many true stories of children who shared their personal information online, and the real-life dangers of doing so. Levy also spoke about online bullying, the ramifications of bullying someone and being the subject of bullying. His best advice was to, "Talk to a trusted adult and don't try to handle this on your own."

Social media holds many dangers for non-savvy students. Parents, please don't hesitate to monitor your children's behavior and online contacts for their safety and for your peace of mind.

Visit the Commack Website for the latest news! [www.commackschools.org](http://www.commackschools.org)

# Welcome to Commack!



**Scott Oshrin**

The Commack School District welcomes two new members to its administration team, Scott Oshrin and Laura Snell. Both were appointed at the October 13, 2022 Board of Education Meeting.

Scott Oshrin was named as the Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources. Scott was currently the principal of Woodhull Intermediate School in Huntington and has ten years of administrative experience. He holds an advanced graduate certificate in Educational Leadership and has extensive experience in the recruitment process. He lives in Holbrook with his wife and daughter. We expect him to be a valued addition to our HR team.



**Laura Snell**

"I would like to extend my heartfelt appreciation to everyone for providing such a warm welcome as I transition to my new role," Scott said. "I am looking forward to many successful years supporting the students, staff and community. Thank you to Dr. Cox, the Board of Education and all involved in the hiring process for giving me this incredible opportunity to join the Commack team.

Laura Snell, the District's new Director of Science, brings a wealth of experience to Commack, both as a physics teacher for 17 years and as an administrator. Laura recently served as the K-12 STEM Director at Carle Place School District. Prior to that, she was the K-12 Science Director at Smithtown Central School District. She is well-versed in advanced science programs, and is currently enrolled as a PhD candidate in Science Education at SUNY Stony Brook. Laura said "I am looking forward to getting to know the staff and students at Commack and I am excited about being on the Science team."

Laura lives in East Setauket with her family. Traveling, music and learning about new cultures are a few of Laura's passions. When she is not out exploring with her three children, you can find her practicing the drums. We look forward to her leadership and contributions to our Science Department and science research program.

## All-State NYSSMA Musicians

Twelve talented Commack High School musicians were selected to participate in the prestigious 2022 New York State School Music Association All-State Performing Ensembles. Thousands of students auditioned for this honor last spring at solo and ensemble festivals throughout the State.

In December, the selected students traveled to Rochester, NY, for two days to perform in All-State ensembles and concerts.

Congratulations to: Sofia P., Ava G., Katherine H., Meghan S., Eleftherios D., Ethan G., Eabha M., Jake V., Jake K., Nathaniel B., Tone C. and Jacqueline S.



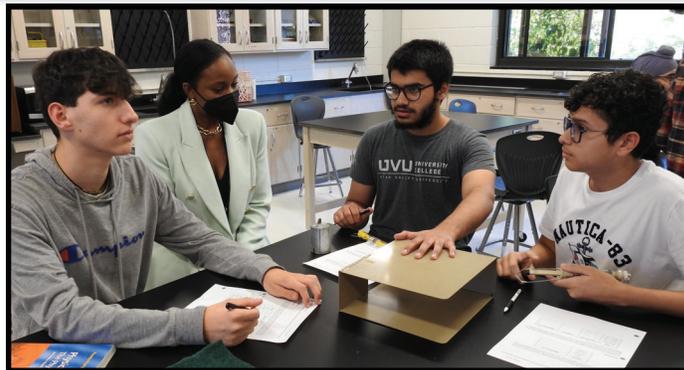
# Commack's IB Programmes: A Model for New York State

Commack was honored to welcome two Deputy Commissioners from the New York State Education Department. Angelique Johnson-Dingle and Jason Harmon requested to visit Commack High School to learn more about the High School's International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma Programme as well as the new IB Career-related Programme.

The Deputy Commissioners had specific goals in mind: they wanted to speak with school administrators, teachers and students, tour the school and observe lessons and to find out as much as possible about how other schools could benefit from Commack's innovative program. They asked many questions to our panels of teachers and IB Diploma candidate students, sat in on Math, Psychology, World Languages, Physics, Computer Science, Sports Medicine, Personal and Professional Skills classes and our popular hands-on learning program – Project Lead the Way. At the end of more than three hours they spent at the High School, both Ms. Johnson-Dingle and Mr. Harmon were elated by what they experienced and excited to see if these hands-on approaches to learning could be implemented in state-wide initiatives.

Dr. Jordan Cox, Superintendent of Commack Schools, said, "Commack High School is the first school on Long Island to implement the IB Career-related Programme. We're very proud of that fact, and that over 50 students have signed up to try out classes related to careers they may pursue in college and beyond. We have two new pathways this school year, a Business Administration Pathway and a STEM Pathway."

Student interest in other fields will determine future career pathways and next year Commack will be adding Health Sciences and Fine and Applied Arts Pathways.



*Deputy Commissioner Johnson-Dingle with IB Physics students.*

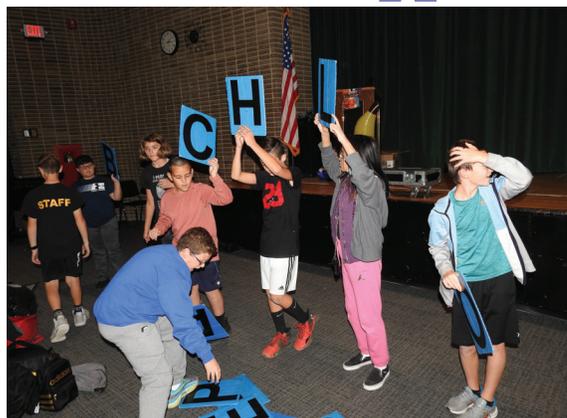


*Deputy Commissioners Johnson-Dingle and Harmon with Superintendent Dr. Jordan Cox and High School Principal Carrie Lipenholz.*

## Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports



P  
B  
I  
S



Each year, Commack Middle School celebrates the beginning of a new year with an annual "kick-off" of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports program, designed to introduce, educate and remind students of our core values; Respect, Responsibility and the role such play in the cultivation of positive Relationships.

The PBIS program ties directly with the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme (MYP), which helps students

develop ten specific Learner Profile Traits. Included within these traits are attributes associated with becoming Caring, Principled, Reflective and Balanced.

Throughout the school day, students participate in team building activities and games, both indoors and outdoors. Leaders discussed respectful and responsible behaviors at Commack Middle School and engaged in other activities designed to connect students to the wider community.



# The Calming Canine



Throughout the fall, third-grade students at Sawmill were visited by a new friend, Valentina. Valentina is a purebred greyhound from Therapy Dogs of Long Island. Valentina was a racing dog before her owner adopted her. Research has shown that the mere presence of a therapy dog can decrease anxiety and help students work through social difficulties. The students were able to practice taking turns, display empathy and foster interpersonal skills.

## Reading With a Four-Legged Friend

Little Shelter Animal Rescue and Adoption Center has introduced a Reading Program into five local elementary schools. Dogs that were originally adopted from Little Shelter have been specially trained to become "Reading Assistant Dogs."

The dogs work with students who show stress and anxiety toward reading in a traditional classroom. This literacy program also helps to develop social skills. The same dog and handler go to the same school weekly. It is difficult to feel stress or anxiety when the dog is licking your face or looking up at you adoringly while you read! As the relationship between the student and the dog grows, the child's confidence and self-esteem grows and stress and anxiety just melt away. Students stay in the program for as long as it takes for them to reach the goals that the school has set for them.

In photo, Wood Park students read to Coby, a Havanese. Librarian Karen Russo said, "There's a saying that 'a teacher takes a hand, opens a mind, and touches a heart.' The Little Shelter program does that and more, bringing smiles to the faces of young children who strive to enjoy reading. Through the unconditional love of a dog, they can do just that!"



## New NJHS Inductees



Commack Middle School's National Junior Honor Society inducted 150 new members this year! To be considered for induction in the society, students must meet the academic qualifications and practice the attributes of scholarship, leadership, service, citizenship, and character in their daily activities.

Congratulations to our new student leaders!



# A Tribute To Our Community Heroes



Commack honored local police, EMTs, firefighters, healthcare workers and community heroes at the Soccer Under the Stars event. This special evening began with a ceremony to thank our heroes with local legislators, Board of Education members, and Commack administrators, staff and students on the field.

Following the tribute, both the boys and girls varsity soccer teams played under the lights, thanks to the Commack Soccer league! It was an amazing event that brought the whole community together. Between games and periods, younger soccer teams from Commack took the field to show off their skills. The boy's team ended the night with a 3-0 win and the girls won 1-0. Many thanks to all who attended and made this night possible, including our school heroes!

## EXPLORING THE WORLD AROUND US



Every kindergarten class at Indian Hollow took nature walks as part of the kindergarten science curriculum. Students observed birds, squirrels, hawks, geese, and enjoyed the changing leaves.

Discussions ensued about the reasons leaves change color, and about the sun and phases of the moon. The children heard a few crickets and may have smelled a skunk!

In photo is Mrs. Steketeer's class who agreed it was a great way to spend a crisp morning!

## Fire Safety



A sincere thank you to the Commack Volunteer Fire Department for visiting our schools with the education trailer and providing authentic fire prevention experiences for our children.

Students learned, practiced, and reviewed fire safety tips and how to react if a fire should break out in their homes.

In photo above, fireman Tom Fazio with Cyndi Nichols' first grade class at North Ridge.

# National Merit Commended Students



Commack High School seniors Norah B. and Samuel V. were honored for their academic achievements by the National Merit Scholarship Corporation. Recognition by this organization competition is a very high achievement and the Commack School District is proud of our talented students!

Only 34,000 students nationwide achieve this distinction, based on their intellectual abilities, achievements, and exceptional academic promise.

*In photo, from left to right, In photo, from left to right: Timothy Russo, Assistant Superintendent; Dr. Jordan Cox, Superintendent of Commack Schools; Samuel, Norah, Matt Keltos, CHS Vice Principal, and Nicole Kregler, Director of Guidance.*

## “A” is for Apple



The kindergarten classes at North Ridge participated in Apple Day, an annual tradition that supports interdisciplinary curriculum work, social studies, science, math and ELA. In addition, it helps with the development of fine motor and cooperative learning experiences.

Students made apple frames, colored bead bracelets with apple colors and patterns, tissue paper apples, and lots more. They also learned about Johnny Appleseed and how he helped hand out apple seeds to grow apple trees. This kindergarten experience is one that the students and parents will cherish in years to come!



## Rolling Hills Helpers!

Rolling Hills is excited to bring back the Rolling Hills' second grade club-Hill's Helpers. This club, for second graders only, fosters leadership qualities by helping the school and community. Students belong to different committees whereby they can help teachers, the office staff and even the library! All students help the community by encouraging and motivating fellow students to support various charitable organizations.

So far this year we have collected gently used Halloween costumes and coats, collected food to create Thanksgiving meal bags and donated to Toys for Tots. Whether helping students walk safely in the halls, delivering walker notes or sharing Character Education books of the month, second grade student club members really are Hill's Helpers.



# Burr Celebrates Unity Day



Students and staff at Burr recognized Unity Day on October 19, 2022. The key message of this month, and this day, is to unite for kindness, courage, and inclusion, to prevent students from being bullied.

Students wore orange and wrote about a time when they experienced a bullying situation. Notice the word UNITY in the background and all the Post-It notes with student writings! Classroom discussions focused on kindness, acceptance, inclusion, and bullying prevention after reading the book *The Recess Queen*.

Special thanks to fourth grade student Mia Balducci for bringing this important initiative to Burr Intermediate School!

## Waiver Of The Breakfast Program

Consistent with past years, the Commack Union Free School District has applied for a waiver of the school breakfast program for the following schools: Indian Hollow, North Ridge, Wood Park, Burr Intermediate and Commack Middle School. This waiver was requested after a poll of primary, intermediate and middle school parents determined that the large majority of families in these schools would not avail themselves of a breakfast program. Interested parties may address comments or suggestions to the attention of Laura A. Newman, Associate Superintendent for Business & Operations; P.O.Box 150; Commack, New York 11725.

### USDA Nondiscrimination Statement

In accordance with federal civil rights law and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) civil rights regulations and policies, this institution is prohibited from discriminating on the basis of race, color, national origin, sex (including gender identity and sexual orientation), disability, age, or reprisal or retaliation for prior civil rights activity. Program information may be made available in languages other than English. Persons with disabilities who require alternative means of communication to obtain program information (e.g., Braille, large print, audiotope, American Sign Language), should contact the responsible state or local agency that administers the program or USDA's TARGET Center at (202) 720-2600 (voice and TTY) or contact USDA through the Federal Relay Service at (800) 877-8339. To file a program discrimination complaint, a Complainant should complete a Form AD-3027, USDA Program Discrimination Complaint Form which can be obtained online at: <https://www.usda.gov/sites/default/files/documents/USDA-OASCR%20P-Complaint-Form-0508-0002-508-11-28-17Fax2Mail.pdf>(link is external), from any USDA office, by calling (866) 632-9992, or by writing a letter addressed to USDA. The letter must contain the complainant's name, address, telephone number, and a written description of the alleged discriminatory action in sufficient detail to inform the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights (ASCR) about the nature and date of an alleged civil rights violation. The completed AD-3027 form or letter must be submitted to USDA by: mail: U.S. Department of Agriculture Office of the Assistant Secretary for Civil Rights 1400 Independence Avenue, SW Washington, D.C. 20250-9410; or fax: (833) 256-1665 or (202) 690-7442; or email: [program.intake@usdagov](mailto:program.intake@usdagov)(link is external)

## PTA REFLECTIONS WINNERS 2022-2023

*Congratulation to our imaginative students who are winners in the 2022-2023 Commack Council of PTAs Reflections Art Contest. The theme this year was "Show Your Voice."*



### Dance Choreography

Ava Demundo, BIS  
Aubrey Taylor, MSIS

### Film Production

Maya Kaur, MSIS\*  
Samantha Piazza, MSIS

### Literature

Ryan Scarola, BIS\*  
Summer Van Eron, MSIS\*  
Alex Commisso, CMS\*  
Shayna Simson, CMS  
Samantha Simson, CHS

### Music Composition

Nathan Steiner, WP  
Benjamin Lopes, MSIS\*  
Chloe Sherer, MSIS\*  
Jake Katzman, CHS\*

### Photography

Peter Filippone, MSIS  
Leah Murad, MSIS  
Mylo Trinagel, MSIS\*  
Nolan Gish, CMS  
Mia Rizzuto, CMS\*  
Amanda Beiner, CHS\*  
Lola Duff, CHS\*

### Visual Arts

Arabella Visalli, NR  
Ana Brown, MSIS  
Rafael Pérez, MSIS  
Isaac Trinagel, MSIS\*  
Austin Zhang, MSIS  
Matthew Heffernan, CMS  
Eli Goldberg, CHS\*  
Eli Penn, CHS\*

\*Suffolk Region Winners

# Congratulations!!

# CMS Pays It Forward

Commack Middle School continued their “We Help Two” interdisciplinary service-learning project (begun in 2021-22) that raised awareness about the global water crisis. The school raised funds by selling colorful socks. Their contribution helped to complete the construction of an artesian well in the town of Nyamata, in Rwanda, Africa. As a result, over 10,000 people in the surrounding area, including children going to a new school being built, will finally have access to clean water.

This school year, in return for every pair of socks we sold to fund this project, “We Help Two” sent us back a pair of warm, neutral socks to donate to a local organization of our choice. CMS’ Pay It Forward Club and Best Buddies Club, as well as our 8:1:2 classes and some of our 15:1 classes, decorated bags and helped to package the socks for this worthy cause. It was heartwarming to see the how excited the students were to “Pay It Forward,” especially during this time of year when so many people are in need.

What’s special about this organization is that the students get to make twice the difference impacting those in need right here in our own community!



## Going Batty at Indian Hollow



First graders got an in-depth look at the lives of bats when Ms. Judy from the Long Island Science Center came to roost at Indian Hollow.

The children learned about bats’ habitats, what they eat, where they live, baby bats & how they use echolocation to find food. They also got to see bats close up and learned how bats help with bug control in the ecosystem. As a bonus project, each student made a baby bat to take home!



# Business Students **Shine** at Annual Competition



Twenty-three business students showcased their business acumen at the annual Huntington Chamber of Commerce Emerging Leaders Business Competition held at St. Joseph's University in Pat- chogue. This was the 20th year of the event and the CHS Business Department has participated since it began.

Students compete in a variety of events from job interviewing to graphic design to entrepreneurship. Almost half of our stu- dents placed this year!

#### First place awards:

- Entrepreneurship A - Heidi B. and Anam R.
- Entrepreneurship B - Ava J. and Many K.

#### Second place awards:

- Max S. and Nick W. in Sports Marketing
- Amantej R. and Victoria W. in Not for Profit Fundraising
- Brynn A. and Rebecca N. in Hospitality Management
- Alison L. in the Job Interview

## Women in Technology!



Shivani M., Mackenzie R. and Jacqueline S. (not pictured) celebrated their graduation from British Aerospace Systems' (BAE) Women in Technology (WiT) Engineering internship. WiT is a collaborative partnership between BAE Systems and local high schools.

The program allows female students to work with their peers and explore a variety of technical careers in a team environment with support and guidance from BAE Systems employees. The program offers mentorship, support, and hands-on learning opportunities for female high school students interested in pursuing STEM careers. Thank you to their teachers, Tom Shea, who taught the students engineering, and Diane Nelson, who managed the internships.

## Phonics Fun



North Ridge students are working hard during the district's new phonemic awareness push-in program for kindergarten. This new program is taught by the district's speech-language pathologists who have expertise in the area of phonological processing.

Phonemic awareness is the ability to understand that spoken words are made up of individual sounds called phonemes, and it's one of the best early predictors for reading success. These weekly lessons provide opportunities for the students to develop phoneme awareness and proficiency through rhyme, blending, segmenting, and substituting syllables and phonemes.

# Science Honors



## Harvard Science Research Conference

Commack High School Science Research students had the opportunity to participate in the Harvard Science Research Conference (HSRC). HSRC is a two-day conference for exceptional high school students, hosted on Harvard's campus that included a series of speakers, workshops, and mentoring sessions designed to encourage and promote interest in the natural sciences as well as research. Students are invited to apply to participate, and then are selected to be part of the HSRC cohort.



***In photo, left to right with HSRC Innovative Challenge winners are science research assistant Andrea Beatty, Director of Science Laura Snell, Superintendent Dr. Jordan Cox, Zainab B. (2nd place winner), Lily A. (1st place winner), Juliette A. (1st place winner), Amana G. (1st place winner), Kenzie A. (1st place winner), science teacher/mentor Jeanette Collette, CHS Principal Carrie Lipenholtz, and science teachers/mentors Charlie Guercia and Daniel Kramer.***

While at the conference, students have the opportunity to take part in the Innovation Challenge, a competition where students work collaboratively with other high school students from all over the country to design a solution to a real-world problem. This year, two of our students who chose to participate were honored as First Place winners for their projects. Congratulations to:

- Juliette A., Lily A., and Kenzie A. for their project involving Machine Learning in the Treatment of Psychiatric Patients, specifically focusing on depression and panic attacks.
- Amana G., for her work involving Machine Learning as a Tool for Better Kidney Transplant Match and Database Development.

To view the project Powerpoints, please visit: [www.hcura.org/hsrc-innovation-challenge-winners-1](http://www.hcura.org/hsrc-innovation-challenge-winners-1)

# Science Honors

## SUNY Stony Brook University African Killifish Research

Sophomore research student, Akarsh C., is part of a team working under Dr. Hu at Stony Brook University, studying the dormancy cycles of the killifish. The goals of this program are to learn how to turn back, pause, and fast forward the clock of life, by studying the African killifish and its dormant state, known as Diapause.

Apart from his in-school Research work, Akarsh will be part of a group including other students from across the country participating in this real world, authentic Science Research investigation.

From left to right: CHS Principal Carrie Lipenholtz, Superintendent Dr. Jordan Cox, Akarsh, Science Director Laura Snell, and research teacher and mentor, Jeanette Collette.



## BNL CSI Spark Program

Brookhaven Lab's Computational Science Initiative (CSI) excels at integrating computer science, applied mathematics, and computational science with broad domain expertise to tackle problems and advance knowledge impacting scientific discovery. CSI's newest program, CSI Spark, fosters students as they conduct hypothesis-driven research through collaborations with scientific experts at Brookhaven Lab. This experience enables students to actively contribute to the scientific community, obtain real research experience, and motivates students to consider careers in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics fields.

Commack junior Ishaan S. was accepted into this novel program and is being mentored by Dr. Mathew Carbone, Computational Scientist at BNL, as he conducts his work on Machine Learning.



## Columbia Honors Program

The Columbia University Science Honors Program (SHP) is a highly selective program for high school students who have a strong interest in the sciences and mathematics. Sophomore Mehek S. and Junior Sahaj P. were accepted into this rigorous program, committing to spending each Saturday during the academic year in classes with Columbia professors. SHP instructors are scientists and mathematicians who are actively engaged in research, and Mehek and Sahaj have chosen to concentrate their program work on Chemistry.

From left to right: Science research assistant Andrea Beatty, Director of Science Laura Snell, Superintendent Dr. Jordan Cox, Sahaj, Mehek, science teachers/mentors Daniel Kramer and Jeanette Collette, and CHS Principal Carrie Lipenholtz.





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[www.commackschools.org](http://www.commackschools.org)

## #CommackCougars

Commack athletes and coaches had a spectacular fall season, racking up points and accolades along the way!

### **Congratulations to:**

- **Girls Varsity Volleyball** -Suffolk County Champions
- **Girls Varsity Soccer** - League Champions
- **Boys Varsity Golf** - League and Conference Champions
- **Golfer Ayan S.** placed second in the Section XI Boys Golf Championship and qualified for the Section XI State Team
- **Gymnastics** for placing second in Suffolk County
- **Joseph Brandofino** - Girls Varsity Soccer, Coach of the Year
- **Jaclyn DelliSanti** – JV Girls Volleyball, Coach of the Year
- **Kristen Pepe** – Varsity Gymnastics Assistant Coach of the Year

### **Sportsmanship Awards**

- Varsity Girls Cross Country
- Varsity Gymnastics
- JV Football
- JV Girls Soccer
- Varsity Football Coaching Staff - Mark Zumpol, Joe Reggio, and Augie Contressa



Ayan S.



Girls Varsity Volleyball

## Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program 2023-2024

The Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program (UPK) is fully funded by New York State grants. After April 1, 2023 and pending passage of the NYS Budget, the application will be posted on the Commack Website. The application must be submitted by May 1 in order to be included in the UPK lottery. There are a limited number of openings based upon the amount of grant money Commack receives from the State. The UPK half-day and full-day programs meets five days per week during the school year at local preschools.

Students must reside in the district and be four years old on or before December 1, 2023, to be eligible to attend UPK in the fall of 2023. Students are selected utilizing a lottery system to ensure that all applicants have an equal opportunity for participation. A numerical waiting list is maintained. In the event of availability, families will be notified in the order in which their number was chosen.

## **KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION FOR THE 2023-2024 SCHOOL YEAR**

Children who will be five years old on or before 12/01/2023 are eligible for admission to Kindergarten for the 2023-2024 school year. Kindergarten registration for these children will take place in January/February 2023 through our electronic registration system. Information concerning this Kindergarten registration process will be sent in January. If your child is eligible for Kindergarten and you do not receive a notice, please call the Registration Office at (631) 912-2028.

## **Notice of Nondiscrimination**

The Commack Union Free School District does not discriminate on the basis of an individual's actual or perceived race, color, religion, creed, ethnicity, national origin, citizenship status, age, marital status, partnership status, disability, predisposing genetic characteristics, sexual orientation, gender (sex), military status, veteran status, domestic violence victim status or political affiliation, and additionally does not discriminate against students on the basis of weight, gender identity, gender expression, and religious practices or any other basis prohibited by New York State and/or federal non-discrimination laws in employment or its programs and activities. The District provides equal access to community and youth organizations.