Dear Spackenkill Community,

I've been a little verbose in the last two notes to you, so today I'm going to keep it short because there's so much in this issue. It's been a while since we've had a contested school Board election. I urge you to learn about both candidates, Daniel Koehler and Vickie Setzer. We are fortunate to have two community members who want to be part of the Board leadership team, so I thank them in advance for their interest in participating.

As you'll note in this issue, on Wednesday, May 15th, there will be a Candidate Forum in the Black Box Theater at the high school starting at 6 pm. Former Board president Mike McCall will ask questions based on those received from the PTA and PTSA. If time permits, there will be time for questions from attendees. This event will be livestreamed on the front page of the District website (www.spackenkillschools.org) as well as videotaped.

I wish both candidates well. Please, don't forget to vote on Tuesday, May 21st at the high school.

My best,

Mark Villanti, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
**Save the Date: May 15th**

Event Will Be Livestreamed on the District Homepage [www.spackenkillschools.org](http://www.spackenkillschools.org)

Come out and meet the Board seat candidates on May 15th at 6 pm at Spackenkill High School’s Black Box Theater. The event is sponsored jointly by the PTA/PTSA.

The following two candidates are running:

[Click here to read about Daniel G. Koehler.](#)

[Click here to read about Vickie Setzer.](#)

**ANNUAL VOTE & ELECTION:**

[Click here for information about upcoming budget vote on May 21st at Spackenkill High School from 7 am to 9 pm.](#)

[Click here to download Absentee Ballot Application.](#)

---

**Teacher Appreciation Week**

In celebration of Teacher Appreciation Week, we visited classrooms around the district to see teachers at work. Thank you to the PTA for providing staff luncheons at Nassau last week and Hagan next week. Next week, the PTSA will put on a luncheon at Todd, followed by another teacher event at the high school to wrap up the school year. Also at the high school, Student Government Organization held a Teacher Appreciation breakfast on Thursday in the faculty lounge. With such great teacher-parent-student relationships, it's little wonder that [Spackenkill has been ranked #3 among the 35 best places to teach in upstate New York by Niche for 2019!](#)
Click on this link to see photos of teachers in action across the district.

Teacher Mentor Program Going Strong

The Spackenkill Teacher Mentor Program then and now: Above left: In the fall of 2017, the first year of the program Above right: At a meeting April of 2019.

Karen Crichton is coordinator of the Spackenkill Teacher Mentoring program. Now in its second year, the program pairs district teachers with incoming teachers to help them become stronger professionals and acclimate to the Spackenkill community. The first year, the program had 13 assigned mentors and 13 mentees. This year, the total number is 38. Mrs. Crichton presented an update at the November 13, 2018, Board meeting. Here she discusses the development, growth, and future of the program.

How did the mentoring program come about?
In late winter 2016/early spring 2017, we had a district professional development committee that reviewed new New York State regulations, including the NYS Mentoring Standards. We were charged to review and possibly update our mentoring program. As a committee, we decided to carefully review our own program, look at studies, and reach out to professionals in other districts to see what was happening locally for comparison. This information was collected and presented to Dr. Villanti. Then further discussion took place within the committee.

We made the decision that we'd like to shift from a school-based group model to a 1:1 mentoring program in which 1 mentor would be assigned 1 new hire. We then created the District Mentoring Committee, which is made up of four principals, four STA volunteer members (you cannot serve on the committee as well as mentor), myself as a facilitator, the STA president, and Dr. Mulford. The mission of this committee was to review all mentor applications and the new teacher cohort in order to pair an experienced teacher with a new district hire. New York State requires one full year of mentoring experience. Generally in Spackenkill, teachers new to the district go through two years.

**What is the process of becoming a mentor?**

Tenured staff have the opportunity to take a three-hour in-district mentor training, which is the first step of the process. After taking the training, teachers can choose to apply to be a mentor. This involves filling out an application, which requires the mentor candidate to self-reflect on their own practices and write a short essay on why they would like to be a mentor. The training is offered in the spring of every year and as needed throughout the year. Initially, we out-sourced the training, but I have provided the last two trainings. A mentor candidate's application stays active unless they defer for a particular year. In June, the District Mentoring Committee gets together and reviews all of our new hires and through discussion matches a mentor with a new teacher to best meet the perceived needs of the new teacher. Additional meetings take place throughout the year as necessary.

**How often do mentors and mentees meet?**

There's a 40-hour minimum requirement, so they meet for at least one hour a week. The vast majority are paired in the same building, so they can talk face to face. Many also utilize Google Docs and texting to communicate and keep each other up to date. We have online checklists that they update as they meet. Every other month we all meet together as a large cohort, and during the other months, smaller cohorts have elementary, secondary or specialized activities. We also bring guest speakers in. For example, Dr. Mulford did a presentation Special Education so that new hires can understand their responsibilities and Principal Dan Doherty shared Cognitive Coaching techniques with the group.

**How is the program evolving?**

Based on the feedback from the end of year one, the teachers said the original checklists listed in the handbook needed to be individualized by department or content area. We went from the paper mentor handbook to the computerized shared Google Docs, so it grows as the needs arise. I foresee the model is going to stay the same this spring. We'll review what openings we have for applicants and we'll look to follow the same type of matching process. Another change from the initial year of the program is the alternating of the large and small cohort monthly meetings.

From our mid-year evaluation this year, we have determined that our New Teacher Summer Orientation needs to include an additional day to address technology and program needs to better support new staff. We are in the process of determining what exactly that will cover. This summer I'm looking at improving the digital master checklists to reflect any new additions the staff has added. In addition, I will be taking a close look at the end of year evaluations from the cohort and presenting highlighted strengths and needs in order to share the findings with the District Committee and Dr. Villanti.

The mentoring program is a vital element of a district's induction program: orienting and acclimating new staff to the district. I fully expect that each and every year will bring a new or different element to the program in order to best support the mentors and mentees in their efforts to be the very best they can be.

**What are the benefits for the new teachers?**

Everyone has been so welcoming and each of our meetings have had a friendly collegiate and informal atmosphere - very comforting. Thank you for providing this fantastic opportunity and a way to meet people outside my department and across the grades.

- New Teacher
New teachers have a "go-to" person who is totally invested in their professional growth, acclimation to the district, and "surviving the emotional roller-coaster" of the first years of teaching. Many mentor-mentee pairs meet far more the minimum hours. Getting to know other new hires has also been a benefit. The new hires recently expressed that they would like more opportunities to get-together and share their experiences, so we are working on that. It's community building. Teaching is not an easy endeavor. Everyone has said the 1:1 model is much more beneficial than, for example, being one of six new hires paired with 1 teacher. There are other benefits such as peer observation. The program supports peer observation, both in and out of district.

How do the mentors benefit?

The biggest benefit is giving back to new people in the profession and helping people acclimate. There's a feel-good element. It also sharpens their skills because when you have to teach or observe someone else, it's a good opportunity to go back and reflect upon your own skill set. Mentors often wear two or three hats: They're a coach, as well as a mentor. In many cases, life-long friends are made.

Alumni Spotlight: Alex Olsen and Patrick Letterii

Above left: Patrick Letterii on set (shown right). Above right: Alex Olsen in the studio.

On Wednesday, May 15th at 7 pm in the Spackenkill High School auditorium, there will be a preview showing of the documentary “Lead and Copper,” a joint project of Spackenkill alumni Alex Olsen and Patrick Letterii, along with the director Will Hart, regarding the Flint, Michigan, water crisis. Here they answer questions about life after high school and what led them to get involved in filmmaking.

After you graduated in 2005, what paths did you choose? Go to college? If so, where and what were your majors?

Patrick: I went to school for acting at University of Maryland Baltimore County. After school, I moved to NYC and got into filmmaking through internships, and eventually started my own production company.

Alex: I went to the University of Pennsylvania, and graduated with a degree in communications and a minor in history. After graduation, I came back to Poughkeepsie and subbed at Spackenkill for two years before I got a full-time job with FOX Sports in Los Angeles. I lived there for five years before moving to New York in 2016.

Were there any teachers/moments at Spackenkill that inspired you to pursue a particular path?

Patrick: Studying multiple languages, Spanish and French, inspired me to have the goal of traveling and learning French while in college. That's thanks to teachers like Ms. Moss and Ms. Stathidis [now retired]. And being involved in the plays and musicals with Ms. Ciancio [now Oakley] was also an influence in regards to my theatre
work and eventual foray into film.

Alex: No matter what you pursue in life, it's vital to express yourself well. Mrs. Tremblay not only fostered my love of reading, but made me a much better writer too. And Mrs. Zimet-Aaron and Mrs. Stathidis made French really fun, and our trip to France my senior year really inspired me to travel as much as I could when I got older.

How did you get involved in the film industry?

Patrick: I interned at a small film production company on the Lower East Side, where I learned how to edit video and produce commercials. From there, I began to do projects with friends and eventually developed my skillset in producing, directing and editing to the point where I opened my own production company and managed multiple clients and projects.

How did you meet the director for this documentary?

Patrick: Will and I originally met working on a film together, and then I would get Will on board for commercials I was producing or directing. We eventually made more short film projects together.

What was/are each of your roles for this production?

Alex: Pat and I are co-producers of Lead and Copper, and since the core team for the past three years has been just three people, we've both had a lot of responsibilities. For the most part, I'm in charge of fundraising, logistics of our trips and interviews, and helping our director Will with research and formulating questions for our interview subjects. Patrick handles the film side, whether that's editing, notes on our latest cut, shooting, or helping Will with the overall vision and direction of the film. We've been friends since third grade, so we know the other person's strengths really well.

What do you hope to accomplish with this documentary?

Alex: Several documentaries about the Flint water crisis have come out over the past couple years. We believe ours is the most objective, complete look at the history of Flint, and all of the events that eventually led to the water crisis. While our primary objective is to shine a light on the economic, social, and racial injustice that Flint has faced, we also want to make it clear to the viewer that this is not just a Flint problem. Thousands of municipalities across the country have old infrastructure, and have dealt with lead in water problems in the past two decades: New York City, Newark, NJ, Chicago, and Washington, D.C., just to name a few. In our own background right now, Newburgh is facing a lead in water problem. Clean water is a basic human necessity and right. It's important to know these problems can happen anywhere.

What else do you work on? Are there any future projects we should know about?

Patrick: I have a feature-length narrative film that I wrote and directed which is in the final stages of post-production, and will hopefully be premiering at film festivals this fall.

Alex: I work as a freelance associate director and producer, primarily for FOX Sports and NFL Network, covering live broadcasts of NFL, college basketball, soccer, and baseball games. In a few weeks, I'll be the lead tape producer for FOX's coverage of the FIFA Women's World Cup in France.

Many Discoveries on Esopus Meadows Trip

Mrs. Rogers's seventh grade classes wrapped up the last leg of the Esopus Meadows Preserve field trips last week. The purpose of the trip, which is for all seventh grade classes, is to study biodiversity. The students were excited to explore the estuary and study its inhabitants. They studied fish adaptations and senses using an aquarium stocked with fish collected during a seineing activity. Students also learned about food webs and aquatic macroinvertebrates, while also observing wildlife.
Above: Students explore the estuary.

Click here to view a gallery of images by MaryBeth Romani of Mrs. Joy's 7th grade at Esopus.

Meet Student Photographer Jack Currie

Jack Currie is an eighth grader at Todd Middle School who spends much of his free time photographing wildlife, birds in particular. On last year's Esopus Meadows trip, he was the official photographer and captured beautiful footage of the field trip (shown below). In addition, this year, Jack taught a class on how light affects photography to Todd students to Mrs. Joy's students (pictured below right). Colorful wood ducks, snoozing screech owls, and eagles in flight are some of the special scenes he captures. Jack (pictured at left with a screen of images from his website, jackshotz.com) tells us here about how he became interested in wildlife photography.
How long have you been shooting wildlife? What got you started?
I've been doing photography since I was 8. My grandmother got me into it and she took me to Innisfree [the public garden in Millbrook] and we'd take pictures of flowers. Around age 10 I got into the wildlife photography. My grandmother had given me her old cameras and my parents bought a camera and I started to learn how to use it. And my uncle taught me how to use the manual setting. I started with a small Sony and worked up to a bigger Nikon. Last June I saved up and bought a Nikon 200 to 500 lens, which was a big improvement.

What are the secrets of great bird photography?
Definitely a lot has to do with weather and tides. Over the summer I knew that down by the marsh by Bowdoin Park, it was most active at low tide so I'd go down there in the morning on days when there is low tide. Also, when photographing bald eagles it's best to have an overcast day because their white heads in bright lights becomes overexposed.

Also, I'm not the most patient person in school, but I am definitely when I'm out. Over the summer I would spend 12 hours at Bowdoin Park even if I only got a few pictures. I met other photographers there.

Do you read about animals and their habits?
I have a lot of bird books at home and have feeders in my backyard. I definitely like to know about what I'm photographing so when I'm out and people ask I'll know something about the bird.

Do you plan on any bird-related travel?
For my birthday, me and my mom are Conowingo Dam in Maryland. They have hundred of eagles. The week before Thanksgiving is the best time to go.

STAR Exemption Update

If you currently receive your STAR benefit as a reduction on your school tax bill (the STAR exemption), you may receive a greater benefit if you switch to the STAR rebate check. Click on this government link to learn more. If you have questions, please call the Town of Poughkeepsie Tax Collector's Office: (845) 485-3611.

Parent/Guardian Survey Available

The New York State Education Department (NYSED) is developing a Parent Dashboard to increase transparency and make information about school performance and other school-level data easier for parents and the public to access. NYSED is
Students Make Straws Fly
And Learn What About Computer ‘Brains’

Last Friday, engineers/parents from IBM visited Deb Boyce’s and Danielle Wilcox’s second grade classrooms. Mrs. King, Mr. Geva, and Mr. Wcpert did a hands-on science project and showed students various parts of a computer. The session began with a video about the many roles of computers. They learned how common items around us like cellphones and other electronic devices have “a little bit of computer in them.” The students’ task was to build gliders using straws and bits of paper.

After some successful student launches with the paper attached to the straws, many in loops, the engineers challenged the students to make the glider cooler or better by using extra pieces of paper. The students were encouraged to team up and talk to each other to share ideas and experiment. Mrs. Boyce pointed out that continually trying to make something better is a lot like editing your writing.

The students all lined up and tried their creations. Afterward, the parent team showed them the inside of a computer and explained how CPUs are the brains of a computer. They showed the kids computer chips and explained that there are 9 billion switches on one chip, so small that the engineers need a special microscope to see them. The students thoroughly enjoyed the visit and learned a lot. Thank you to the parents!

Click here to watch students launching their straws.
Nassau's Own Chess Champ

On Saturday, April 27th, Peter Bi participated in the 5th Annual Yonkers Scholastic Classic Chess Tournament. Peter competed in the Kindergarten - 1st Grade section. He played four games against opponents from Yonkers, Armonk, Rye, and Suffern. Peter won all four games and came in clear first place. Congratulations to Peter!

Acting Out

Mrs. Riehl’s third grade enrichment students selected some of Aesop’s Fables and turned them into a puppet show. They performed five different fables for Mrs. Murin’s and Ms. Darling’s classes.
A Trip to the Past

Nassau's second graders went on a field trip to Museum Village in Monroe recently. The children had the chance to see what life was like in the 19th century. They were able to tour several buildings and see many artifacts from the past. Some of the highlights of the trip were sitting in the schoolhouse and going into the candle-making shop. The children were able to make a candle and bring it home for a souvenir. These are some pictures of Mrs. Strapec's class in the schoolhouse, the general store, the weavers shop, the print shop, and in the candle shop. The children enjoyed the trip very much.

Generosity Abounds

Thank you, Nassau families and staff, for all your generous donations to Cereal Counts. School Social Worker Joann Klein counted 85 boxes of cereal, breakfast treats and granola bars and donated them at the collection site.
a week ago.

In addition, Nassau and Hagan elementary schools together raised nearly $8,500 for Kids Heart Challenge. Plus, Hagan’s Junior Spartans Running Club has received about $2,000 in donations. Clearly, there is a strong giving spirit in the community year-round!

### Upcoming PTSA Meetings

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>May 13th</td>
<td>Todd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June</td>
<td>No meeting</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All meetings at 7 PM in middle or high school library*

15 Croft Road, Poughkeepsie, NY

(845) 463-7800

Mission: Inspired by a tradition of excellence and a spirit of continuous improvement, the Spackenkill School District will provide all of our students with the academic and social skills necessary to pursue their goals and become responsible citizens in an interdependent global community.

Vision: All Spackenkill graduates will be lifelong learners who are inspired to pursue their dreams and contribute to the global society.

Please submit story ideas to mary.forsell@suhsdny.org