Dear Spackenkill Community,

I, along with many of you, have been following the "lockdown" situation that occurred at Arlington High School and the stress that unforeseen false alarms can trigger. So it seems timely to make a few comments about school lockdowns:

- At Spackenkill all safety drills are planned and announced to staff in advance. We recently discussed the fact that some schools hold unannounced drills for the purpose of training. There have been several professional articles advising schools not to do that because of the stress that unannounced drills can create.
- Even though we do not hold unannounced drills, it is fairly common that at some point in the school year a faulty smoke sensor will malfunction or a fire alarm will be inadvertently bumped and set off. Students are accustomed to those accidental occurrences and have handled them calmly and appropriately.
- It is also common for medical emergencies to require a "hold in place" to ensure that halls are cleared. So please realize that if you see EMTs, fire trucks, and police vehicles at our schools, it is likely that someone needs to be transported to a hospital. Most of the time this is needed for precautionary reasons.

If we ever experienced a need for a lockdown that was unplanned, we would inform you, as Arlington did, throughout the process. If there were a legitimate, dangerous situation, we would follow our protocols that have been planned by our safety team with law enforcement participation. As stressful as this may be for parents, we would also need parents and visitors to stay off our campus. It only compounds the supervisory job of law enforcement.

In summary, even though it may seem that a day does not pass when some horrific event is reported in the press, the likelihood of violence in our schools is much lower than events out of school. Recently, the FBI released an updated report on school safety based on a review of all school shootings. The message was loud and clear and echoes our approach. The greatest tool to prevent school violence is us: students, staff, and parents. Strong and caring relationships where students seek the support of adults, where parents call counselors when worried, and staff inform our administrators when they observe changes in student behavior are our best defense against school violence. We care deeply for your children and will do everything in our power to keep them safe.

My best,

Mark Villanti, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools
The Hagan Elementary Art Club, under the leadership of Sharon Ciccone, participated in The Global Art Exchange, a one-to-one exchange of artistic peace building. They shared handmade, heartfelt artwork with kids from countries that are culturally very different from the USA. The Hagan students are exchanging with children from Pakistan.

Each child from Pakistan created a drawing or painting based on themes of happiness, peace, kindness, and friendship to share with us (example at left). Then we matched our Hagan Art Club students with each child abroad so that they can respond with their own meaningful creation. To make the exchange even more personal, students write their names and ages, attach a photo, and trace an outline of their hands on the back of their artwork as a way of symbolically touching hands with the child on the other side. Now that the artwork is complete, the club has mailed its artwork to our new friends in Pakistan.

The children on the other end of the exchange are from countries that we usually only hear about from headlines and that most children in the U.S. will never get to experience. By connecting children from different cultures in a heartfelt, personal way, the exchange means to humanize all sides and promote intercultural awareness. There are real, loving, wonderful children living in countries all over the world. Although we live in very different situations, we are all more alike than not. CLICK HERE TO VIEW THE ART

**Todd Celebrates Senior Community**

Todd Student Government invited district seniors to the dining hall on December 6th to show their appreciation for their role in the community. Seniors enjoyed a breakfast prepared and served by students, while also being entertained. One highlight was a band performance conducted by Mr. Catanzaro. Adviser Albert Scanlon organized students to bake cookie favors for the seniors. It was a large turnout and a very lovely morning.

**Students Discover the Power of Dance**

Fifth grade students entertained third and fourth graders with an energetic dance performance on Thursday. Over the previous week, students worked with the New York Dance Residency program, taught by Edwin Fion, to learn intricate moves. In working on such a tight schedule, students experienced the importance of teamwork, individual expression, and discipline. Principal John Farrell thanked the Elementary PTA for bringing this program to Hagan, as well as Mrs. Sample and Mrs. Pilcaim for keeping the schedule on track, even with a week that included a snow day and two-hour delay.
Midnight Madness Returns

The Spackenkill Basketball Booster Club held its fourth annual Midnight Madness event two weeks ago. The community came out to support the basketball program and kick off the season. Raffles and contests made for a fun evening. All proceeds supported the Boys and Girls Basketball Program.
Model UN Visits Vassar

On November 21st, 20 sophomores from Spackenkill High School took part in a Model UN at Vassar College. These students were presented with the issue of nuclear weapons production in North Korea and Iran and how to manage it. While there, students interacted with peers from various other local high schools. Their main goal was to develop a resolution to the issue, gather votes for it, and ultimately get it to pass. Through their hard work and use of diplomacy, the group was able to get the resolution to pass, which is a rarity. All 20 of the students that took part did a fantastic job and should be proud of their accomplishment. Thank you to Mr. Boening for advising them.

Concert Season Is Here

Todd Middle School had the honor of ushering in concert season this year at Spackenkill High School. On Wednesday evening, the 7th and 8th Grade Orchestra, Chorus, Band, Cadenza Orchestra, and Jazz Band performed for an appreciative audience. Musical directors Gretchen Franca, Holden Maiorana, and Victor Catanzaro did a wonderful job preparing the students for their performance.

The following night, the 6th Grade Orchestra, Band, and Chorus took the stage. Musical directors Gretchen Franca, Pennie Burgess, and Jeannine Berube inspired their students to do their best. Thank you to those who purchased poinsettias, which made beautiful stage decorations.

Click here for the 6th Grade Winter Concert program.

Click here for the 7th and 8th Grade Winter Concert program.
Above: Scenes from the 7th and 8th Grade Winter Concert. Top to bottom: Victor Catanzaro, Holden Maiorana, and Gretchen Franca conduct band, chorus, and orchestra, respectively.

Above: Scenes from the 6th Grade Winter Concert. Top to bottom: Gretchen Franca, Pennie Burgess, and Jeannine Berube conduct orchestra, band, and chorus, respectively.

Science Afloat

Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Zanca/Mrs. Christolon recently presented their students with a November STEM classroom activity. The challenge was to build the Mayflower and set sail on a water-filled gutter, propelled by a small fan. The students were given one straw, aluminum foil, one foot of tape, and a Styrofoam plate. They had individual and group planning time and then 20 minutes to build. There were 11 groups in all and three boats successfully sailed on the first round. Students then had the opportunity to alter their boats and sail them again. On the second round, five boats were successful. The fastest time was 4.72 seconds.
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@susdnny.org