



THE EDUCATOR

Newsletter of the Arlington Teachers' Association

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Let's Start With a Clean Slate

Welcome back ATA Members! After hopefully having some time this summer to decompress, I ask that you try to start the school year with a clean slate regarding any attitudes you may have held toward district administration.

After a challenging few years, there is reason to be optimistic that our new superintendent, Phil Benante, will be able to right the ship.

As you will read on page 3, I recently interviewed Benante, using questions that you submitted. In the transcript of that 25 minute interview the word "community" appears 17 times. Benante is a true part of Arlington, having grown

up here, and has a sense of what we have been, and what we can be. Community is important to him, and not just as the shallow buzzword that the previous administration may have deemed neces-

being on baseball teams was a connection to his community. Yes, there was that one specific memory, but for the next five minutes he expounded on the theme of community, not any of his personal victories.

To my ears, it is legitimate. Please, let's all try to be an active part of that community that will work together to make Arlington be all that it can be. Let go of those previous feelings of futility

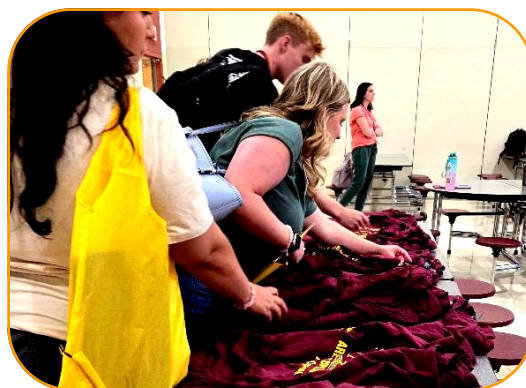
and, if there is a call to be on a committee, volunteer; if you are asked to fill out a survey, do it. Give this working-together stuff a chance, and let's see where it takes us.

Happy New Year!

-Sam Falk,
Communications Chair

Let go of those previous feelings of futility and, if there is a call to be on a committee, volunteer; if you are asked to fill out a survey, do it.

sary to mention once in awhile. For example—when asked what his most memorable moment was as an Arlington baseball player, (taking a no-hitter into the last out of the last inning in his first start as a varsity pitcher) Benante talked about how, to him,



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Benante Is Back

Trivia Challenge

Answer the question below correctly and you could be the proud winner of ATA gear!

In what year was the first Arlington High School graduation held?

Submit your answer to the above trivia question to sfalk@acsdny.org by September 20. The winner will be randomly selected from the correct submissions.



Photo by Sam Falk

ATA President Bob Maier (left) and superintendent Phil Benante welcomed new educators to Arlington on August 26.

Although Phil Benante is not new to Arlington, he returns to us in a new role—superintendent. Most recently the superintendent of the Haldane Central School District, Benante, a 1998 Arlington graduate, started his educational career in Arlington as a fifth grade teacher at Titusville Intermediate School for seven years, then an assistant principal at AHS for one year, and the principal of Beekman elementary for two years. He was then the deputy superintendent for five years before leaving Arlington in 2018.

But Benante never really left. He resides in the Arlington district, his sons go to school here, and his wife and sister teach here. He is no stranger to the challenges that we have faced over the past few years. When asked why he chose to come back to Arlington as superintendent, Benante explained, "I

didn't have to, I was in a good place. I'm candid about that. But I hear a lot about the experience that our kids are having here and by way of that, the people who are also serving in our community. And I felt that I could help. I think if our employees are experiencing things in some way or another, that trickles down to our kids. I felt based on what I was observing and what I was hearing, that I could help my community. And I felt that I had a responsibility too, in

that way."

Benante's response to the question as to how he can balance his own strong connections to the district with the needs of the whole community is that he wishes to build connections with as many parts of the Arlington community as he can. "I certainly see the district through the lens of a parent just as much as I see it through the lens of a superintendent," he says, "Those are strong ties and I'd be lying if I didn't say that they weren't in some way directly or indirectly influencing me, but I think in a really positive way. That being said, I have a responsibility to be everyone's superintendent and balance the many perspectives and needs within our community."

In his first month as superintendent, Benante estimates he sat down to talk with 40 members of the Ar-

lington community, with plans to continue those meetings into the fall. "I don't take for granted that my previous experience with the district is the district that's still in place," he says. "I think it's pretty evident that it's not. And I want to honor the fact that, there's some changes that are positive, there's some changes that I'm not really sure about, and then there's things that I may be influencing that'll change in the years ahead."

Expounding on that, Benante says, "I think most of our teachers have a desire to be a part of a school district that's continuing to grow and change, but what I hear initially from our teachers is a sense of frustration that they've been asked to do too many things in too short a time without the resources and support that are necessary to implement them successfully. I would encourage us to consider that less is more in the way that we're trying to improve ourselves."

When asked about what he would like to accomplish in his first few years as Superintendent, Benante replied, "Arlington has a rich history. We have many traditions and a strong legacy among our faculty and our staff of really excellent teachers, really excellent administrators and really outstanding support staff. I hope that we feel a greater sense of connection to our history because I see our history as really a strength of our school district. A lot of our staff are nearing the end of their careers, and we have

See Benante on page 3

Congratulations To Newly Tenured ATA Members

Elementary

Arthur S. May
Victoria Lischinsky

Noxon

Kelli Snowden

Traver Road

Leah Chasse
Audrey Tan

Vail Farm

Mariah Cordaro
Bridget McGorry
Julia Quinn
Jacquelyn Stevens

Middle

LaGrange

Christine Otero-Fine
Stephen Ryan

Union Vale

Olivia Gorlan-Delfs
Allison Keiser

High

Tanner Diebold
Ron Johnson
Heather Milano
Sara Schmader
Danielle Stier
Brittany Tompkins
Kristy Zukswert

Benante Returns To CAO

Continued from page 2

to have a long term plan for how we honor their legacy, but also support the next generation of teachers that are coming in. And I hope over the next few years that we have a structure in place where a group like the ATA and the district leadership can really work together to create something that allows Arlington's future to be something that we know really is reflective of the progressive education that Arlington's past faculty and staff were part of."

To Benante, Arlington's labor groups are a vital part of the continued success of the district. He has a long history with unions, starting with growing up in a household where his father was the business manager of his local in the building trades. As a teacher Benante was an ATA senior building rep, and in his short time as a principal, he was the president of the Arlington Administrators Association. In his role now as superintendent, he sees that unions like the

ATA have a shared goal of helping Arlington thrive, and part of achieving that is having effective conversations. He explains, "I think that we have a responsibility when it comes to key decisions to engage our staff proactively in a discussion around

engaged, I think, than if we're making decisions in isolation and folks don't feel a connection to the decisions that are being made at the district level in any way. They become frustrated and they become disengaged, which is where we're at,

where morale is negatively influenced. So part of my work this year is working with the union leadership to understand what is that process by which we should be even having these types of conversations."

Benante expresses a strong desire to listen to different constituents in the Arlington community and to honor our long

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-Superintendent Phil Benante

what it is we see maybe as a problem in the school district or a way in which we feel we need to improve. And I think folks should be authentically engaged in the process; if we're able to sit down together, to hear what the concerns may be or what ideas folks may have, and to reflect back to folks how that thinking influenced a final decision that was being made, it doesn't mean we're always going to agree, but they will be more

ton community and to honor our long history, but also to help the district to move forward. He plans to re-evaluate programs and procedures that have been developed in recent years, and recognizes the necessity of authentically including stakeholders in any decisions that are made. Time will tell whether his words translate to actions, but there is a feeling of hope in the air as the 2024-25 school year begins.

Welcome, New Members!

The Arlington Teachers' Association would like to welcome the following people to the Arlington School District and the ATA. To help us get to know them, each new member was asked **what they will be teaching, where they are from, and what their favorite food is**. Please let us know if there are more additions to your building that we can include in the next issue.

♦ ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ♦

Arthur S. May

Nancy Bunyea—Special Ed.—Mahopac, NY—Pizza

Selena Hernandez—Kindergarten—Dover Plains, NY—Sushi/Mexican

Alexis Jacques—5th Grade ELA—Poughquag, NY—Sushi

Frank Sanzo—Phys. Ed.—Hopewell Junction, NY—Tacos

Beekman

Felecia Courchaine—Reading—Wappingers Falls, NY—Chicken Nuggets

Megan Kaen—RSP—Cortlandt Manor, NY—Smoothie Bowls

Noxon

Kelsey DiFrancesco—5th Grade—Fishkill, NY—Macaroni and Cheese

Julianna Fernandez—Art—Stormville, NY—French Fries

Emma Stephens—1st Grade—Poughkeepsie, NY—Chicken Parm

Overlook

Melissa Kunicki (also at TRP)—Reading—Wappingers Falls, NY—Fruit

Lauren Sarli (also non-public)—Speech—Stormville, NY—Sushi

Titusville

Kayleigh Byrd—4th Grade—Lafayette, LA—Pasta

Shane Power—3rd Grade—Yorktown Heights, NY—Salsa Fresca

Stephanie Rivera—Special Ed.—Poughquag, NY—Tacos

Vail Farm

Katy Burger—Kindergarten—Pleasant Valley, NY—Chocolate

Abigail Ruhe—Special Ed.—East Haddam, CT—Crispy Chicken Sandwich

West Road

George Collins—ENL—Hopewell Junction, NY—Shepherd's Pie

Nora Greenfeldt—4th Grade—Somers, NY—Tacos

Emily Nolan—4th Grade—Pleasant Valley, NY—Tacos

Stephanie Page—4th Grade—Ronkonkoma, NY—Tacos

Maximilian Spagnoli—Special Ed.—Red Hook, NY—Pasta

Nicole Tata—3rd Grade—Carmel, NY—Sushi

♦MIDDLE SCHOOL♦

LaGrange

Andrea Velasquez—Music—Wappingers Falls, NY—Everything

Union Vale

Randi Cunningham—Health—LaGrangeville, NY—Chicken Parm

Stephanie Herbst—FACS—Babylon, NY—Pasta

Thomas Koo—Music—Granite Springs, NY—Sushi

Kelly Markou (also at LMS)—Business—Hyde Park, NY—Mexican

Michael Scaramellino—Tech Ed.—Dover Plains, NY—Pizza

Patrick Vivalda—Special Ed.—Hyde Park, NY—Chicken Parm

Wendy Wasserman (also at LMS)—Math—Wantagh, NY—Chicken Caesar Salad

♦HIGH SCHOOL♦

Danielle Brescia—Theater—Red Hook, NY—Macaroni and Cheese

Katie Matott—Phys. Ed.—Rouses Point, NY—Pizza



Photos by Sam Falk

New teachers and their mentors were treated to lunch while learning about ATA benefits at AHS on August 26.

2024 — 2025 ATA Officers

President

Bob Maier

Elementary Vice President

Nicolle McMorris

Secondary Vice President

Greg Nieman

Vice President For Membership

Steve Hertzog

Treasurer

Dave Cordella

Chief Negotiator

Robert McHugh

PR Committee Chair

Kristine Jackson

Community Action Chairs

Brendan Lawlor

Bill Mueller

Communications Chair

Sam Falk

Senior Building Representatives

ASM — A'Rehema Leach

BES — Christie Boydston

Noxon — Lynette Battle

VFES — Alison Durkin

OPS — Christene Way

Traver — Diana Judge

JDWR — Barbara Mackey

TIS — Heather Blatz

LMS — Bill Mueller

UVMS — Jim DeBonis

AHS — John Filor

AHS — Theresa Daleo-Stock

What's Going On?

"What's Going on" is a monthly feature of The Educator. It highlights noteworthy accomplishments by ATA members. Do you know of a colleague who deserves recognition? Let The Educator know by emailing sfalk@acsdny.org. We can't know what's going on at all of your schools without your help!

Congratulations to the following ATA members for their contributions to the Arlington community and beyond.



Photo Courtesy of Colleen Napora

Educator Retreat

AHS special education teacher Colleen Napora attended the Wild Heart Teacher retreat in Colorado in July. For only \$50, meals, activities, and lodging are included. The retreat gives educators the chance to rejuvenate and work on their mental health through activities such as fly fishing, painting, equine therapy, and hiking. More information can be found at sites.google.com/wildheartteacher.org/wildheart-teacher/.



Photo by Sam Falk

Art Exhibition

Vail Farm special education teacher Mark Garnot had artwork displayed at Millbrook Library in July. The description with it read, "Garnot is primarily a steel sculptor, but when Russia invaded Ukraine, that all changed. The images in the newspapers of the death and destruction of a peace-loving, agrarian and civil society shook him. 'I felt as though I had to slow the images down, each one more dramatic than the one before it. I began painting them in watercolor, and didn't know why. I don't even paint. Maybe it was to spend more time dwelling on the images. Maybe it was my way of showing solidarity with the Ukrainians and their plight.' Mark has completed nearly 60 paintings to date."

Science

AHS Biology teachers Steve Hertzog and Caitlyn Corigliano-Masceli participated in the Biological Research Experience for Teachers (BioRETS) at Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies in Millbrook. This six week program involved having teachers work in teams with a mentor from the Cary research staff to plan and conduct an original research project. The pro-

ject culminated in a poster presentation on August 13. Participants also attended scientific and educational workshops, and developed instructional materials. Each teacher in the program was granted a \$2000 budget to purchase equipment and supplies for their classrooms. The program will continue with four follow-up meetings during the school year.

NGO Work

Traver Road kindergarten teacher Nancy Werner (shown to the right with Ghanaian students) did volunteer work in Africa this summer. She describes:

"I traveled to a small fishing village in Ghana, West Africa (called Elmina) to work for my father's nonprofit that supports education there. The NGO is called Tomorrow's Stars (www.tstars.org). We do everything from building/running libraries, study groups, scholarships, early childhood resource room to technology lab. We work with students that receive scholarships to 'pay it forward' by giving back to the community through running the study groups, being mentors and running the libraries. I have supported this cause since 2004. The progress has been incredible. I would like other teachers



Photo Courtesy of Nancy Werner

to become aware of what we do in hopes that more people will

get involved and/follow our progress."

Pediatric Epilepsy

Overlook ENL teacher Sucheta Baichwal and her husband presented at the Pediatric Epilepsy Surgery Conference in Boston on Aug 2. After their son Sachit passed away in November 2023, the Baichwals started a research foundation in his name. At the conference they shared stories about him and how, due to epilepsy surgery, he was able to live for 35 years when at birth they were told he would not see his first birthday due to intractable seizures caused by a brain malformation (hemimegalencephaly). They also met with parents of young children who had the same diagnosis and were able to offer some hope and advice and to share their journey and knowledge about the type of brain surgeries that their son underwent.



Photo Courtesy of Kris Rizzo

Music

This summer ATA members Jonathan Handman (AHS), new ATA member Andrea Velasquez (LMS), Danielle Stier (AHS), Kristina Rizzo (UVMS), and Kim Handman (AHS and UVMS), pictured here from left to right, taught at the Stringendo Summer Strings Orchestral and Fiddle Program. This program was founded by Jonathan over 25 years ago and over 120 students participated every week for 3 weeks in July. Many students from school districts throughout Dutchess, Putnam, and Orange County participated.

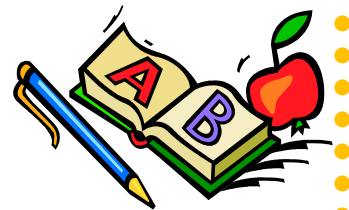
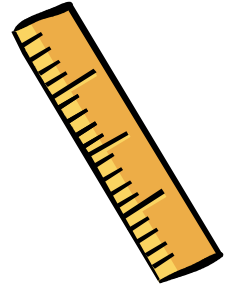
Dates to Remember

SEPTEMBER

- 10th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., CAO
- 17th—ATA Executive Council Session, 4 p.m., AHS room 1432
- 19th—Middle School Open House—Half Day For Students
- 24th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., CAO
- 26th—ARTA Lunch, Joe Willy's Seafood House

OCTOBER

- 1st—Deadline to submit information for graduate or inservice credit
Deadline for using 2023-2024 Welfare Trust benefits
- 3rd—Rosh Hashanah—No School
- 8th—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., JDWR
- 9th—High School Open House—Half Day For Students
- 11th—Professional Development Half Day
- 14th—Columbus Day/Indigenous People Day—No School
- 15th—ATA Executive Council Session, 4 p.m., AHS room 1432
- 22nd—Board of Education Meeting, 7 p.m., TIS
- 24th—Elementary School Half Day



Announcements

A note from Ron Higgins—

“Now that I am really retired, I write this thank you note to let you all know much I appreciate every one of you and all you have done for me. There would never be enough time to thank everyone individually, but the outpouring of cards, calls, and letters I received was above and beyond what I could imagine. I started teaching in 1964 and it took me 60 years to truly retire, but as the song goes: You have to know when to hold em, know when to fold em...and know when to walk away! Thank you for all you do!”

ATA Executive Council meetings are open to all members. They will take place this school year at 4 p.m. in AHS room 1432 on the following Tuesdays: 9/17, 10/15, 11/19, 1/21, 2/18, 3/18, 4/8, 5/13, 6/17

Stay informed! Follow us on Facebook and Twitter or check out www.arlingtonteachers.com for forms, photos, calendars, and more.