



# Irvington Insight

The Official Newsletter for Irvington UFSD

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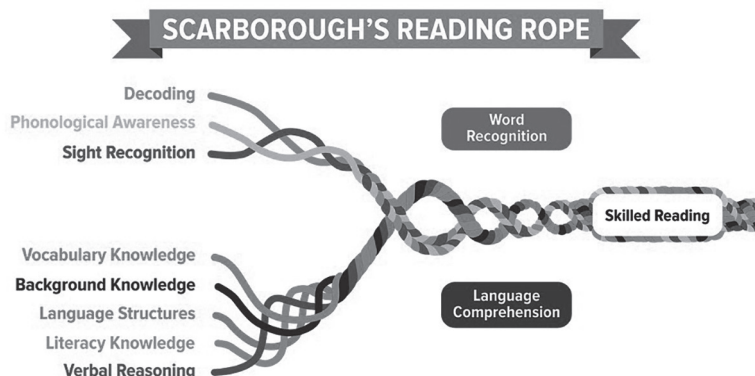
## A Focus on K-5 Literacy

The Irvington Union Free School District is committed to fostering a love of reading and writing and providing students with a strong literacy experience. In alignment with the science of reading research, the District incorporates evidence-based practices to enhance literacy skills.

### What Is the Science of Reading?

Imagine the process of reading like building a house. The science of reading gives us the essential blueprints, carefully crafted based on ongoing research into how children learn to read most effectively. These blueprints outline the fundamental skills that children master to build a strong foundation for successful reading, including:

- **Phonemic Awareness:** Mastering the skills of hearing and manipulating individual sounds within words.
- **Phonics:** Understanding how letters connect to sounds.
- **Fluency:** Reading smoothly and effortlessly.
- **Vocabulary:** Knowing and understanding many words in a variety of contexts.
- **Comprehension:** Making meaning of the text using background knowledge, decoding skills, vocabulary and critical thinking strategies.



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*"In public education, our landscape is dynamic, marked by continuous change and the development of new teaching methodologies as identified through emerging research and assessment of current practices. Teaching students to read is the gateway to limitless possibilities. Across the U.S. and right here in Irvington, we continue to examine and integrate the latest research findings as we implement vital changes to enhance our approach to the teaching of reading. What is exciting about education is that it is never static and always evolving."*

Acting Superintendent  
Dr. Joel Adelberg

Dear Irvington School Community,

I had the pleasure of joining the District in August to serve as your acting superintendent during Dr. Kristopher Harrison's leave of absence. I joined the District with an awareness of the fine reputation of the Irvington Schools, having served as a colleague in the region for many years. I joined a system that represented the best in public education, the result of a community committed to quality instruction, inclusion and membership for all, and that shares a common vision for supporting student growth and development. I can share that the District has remained committed to developing a robust Strategic Plan that puts students first. Thanks to the Board of Education, the dedicated leadership team, staff and faculty, the supportive families, and our students, who I've learned are second to none, our schools opened this year as strong as ever and destined for continued growth and success.

I've had the privilege to visit classrooms throughout the District. Our students are active learners who continue to thrive in instructional models that engage them in critical thinking and problem-solving. From our youngest students engaged in engineering through Project Lead The Way, to our high school students earning regional, state and national recognition in science research, our students are thriving! Our students are challenging convention and creating a deeper understanding of the critical issues before them.

Our teachers participate in continuous professional learning, as they strive to meet ever-evolving standards and best practices in education. We continue our efforts to assure that our approach to early literacy is consistent with research-based science of reading practices. We have continued our commitment to offering a full continuum of reading services for students at every grade level, including the training of additional staff in Orton-Gillingham. Our elementary faculty just concluded the thoughtful and thorough process of selecting a new math curriculum to be adopted next fall. As recently presented in our Student Performance Report, we continue to use data to identify student needs, curricular alignment and to inform instruction and system programming.

Teachers support one another, sharing practices and inviting colleagues into their classrooms to share their work. For example, our world language teachers visit each other's classrooms to create coherency and consistency in practice for a sequential program of language acquisition. This year, we have piloted an early exploratory world language program for students from Dows Lane and MSS as part of our weekly afterschool program. For the first time, our District is offering our high school students an opportunity to reach the highest level of world language proficiency by achieving the Seal of Biliteracy.

The District is unwavering in our commitment to SEL. This year, we welcomed two additional DEI coordinators, so each of our buildings is supported by a colleague in this critical role. Students, staff and faculty work to ensure that our schools are welcoming and inclusive of all. We remain committed to providing our students with opportunities to be engaged citizens.

Finally, I can share that I feel the true spirit of what it means to be a Bulldog! Whether cheering our kindergartners as they parade through Dows Lane showing off their pride in the books they've read, applauding our VIP students' stage production with the CO/LAB Theater Group, or sitting in awe as MSS students cheer each other on during their annual Spelling Bee, there is an incredible spirit that runs throughout our District. That spirit was never more evident than on the occasion of the historic 800th girls basketball team win for coach Gina Maher. I was fortunate enough to be present to witness this amazing achievement. Our community came together, across generations, former athletes and students from 40-plus years ago and many from today, to celebrate the true spirit of Irvington.

I've experienced the first half of the year with pleasure and pride and look forward with great anticipation and excitement to the second half of the year together, sharing more incredible experiences.

With gratitude,

Dr. Joel Adelberg  
Acting Superintendent of Schools



## A Message From Your Acting Superintendent of Schools

Joel Adelberg, Ed.D.

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

As I previously wrote to the community, Dr. Kristopher Harrison announced his retirement from the District for medical reasons. The Board would once again like to extend our sincere thanks to Dr. Harrison for his nearly 12 years of tireless and dedicated service to our District. His leadership was instrumental in shepherding the District through COVID, the completion of the two capital projects and, most recently, the development of the Strategic Plan and Portrait of a Graduate.

As a result, the Board has embarked upon one of its most important responsibilities: hiring a new superintendent to lead the District. The Board has engaged Hazard, Young, Attea Associates to lead a comprehensive and thorough search process. Over the next few weeks, HYA will engage with various stakeholders to gather input on the qualities our community desires in our next superintendent and to gain a deeper understanding of our school community which will help guide the hiring process.

There are two important opportunities for our school community to take part in the process. HYA will facilitate three community open forums by Zoom on March 11 at 7:30 p.m., March 12 at 10 a.m. and March 13 at 7:30 p.m. We welcome you to come and provide your feedback on this most important task. Additionally, the community is invited to participate in a survey administered by HYA. Details of how to access the survey have been shared by email and also are available on the District's website. The survey will be open until March 14. Again, we encourage and value the community's participation in the forums and survey.

Finally, we hope that you will attend the March 19 Board Meeting at 7:30 p.m. in the CPR in the high school where HYA will publicly present the School Leadership Profile to the community and Board. The School Leadership Profile will be developed based on the feedback HYA collects from its interviews with District staff, forums and the survey.

February brought the start of school budget season and, as always, a series of Board of Education meetings dedicated to the budget process occur in March and April. The BOE and the District administration, as always, will be guided by our strategic objectives and long-range plans to develop tax-cap compliant budgets that maintain fiscal responsibility while endeavoring to continuously improve the educational experience for students and teachers.

We encourage you to attend our meetings to learn more about the budget and the District's work and long-term goals. Also, you can always contact us at [board@irvingtonschools.org](mailto:board@irvingtonschools.org).

Best,

Brian Friedman  
Board of Education President



## A Message From Your Board of Education President

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Brian Friedman



# A Focus on K-5 Literacy (continued)

## Literacy Instruction in IUFSD Aligned With Essential Skills

Across the elementary schools, educators continuously adapt practices to align with current research on reading. At Dows Lane, teachers have embraced a literacy philosophy for the teaching of reading and writing, incorporating explicit instruction in grammar usage, phonological and phonemic awareness, and phonics instruction. This approach also encompasses diverse instructional methods, such as writers' workshop, guided reading, shared reading and writing, read-alouds and interactive reading and writing.

"We firmly believe in the direct connection between reading and writing, fostering a comprehensive approach to literacy that integrates reading, writing, listening and speaking skills," Dows Lane Principal Dr. Andrea Kantor said.

Students K-2 participate in the Wilson Foundations, an early phonemic program aligned with the science of reading, before transitioning to the Patterns of Power program in third grade. Patterns of Power is also included in literacy learning in the first and second grades. Teachers and reading specialists employ a variety of resources to support students in literacy instruction.

In the fourth and fifth grade English language arts curriculum at Main Street School, educators continue to support students in phonemic awareness and science of reading strategies, as they also differentiate instructional strategies to meet individual student needs. These decisions are made through the collection of data on each student's progress and performance. Additionally, an extensive comprehension model is employed to teach reading and writing, grounded in essential questions and enduring understandings that guide students in exploring various literary genres.

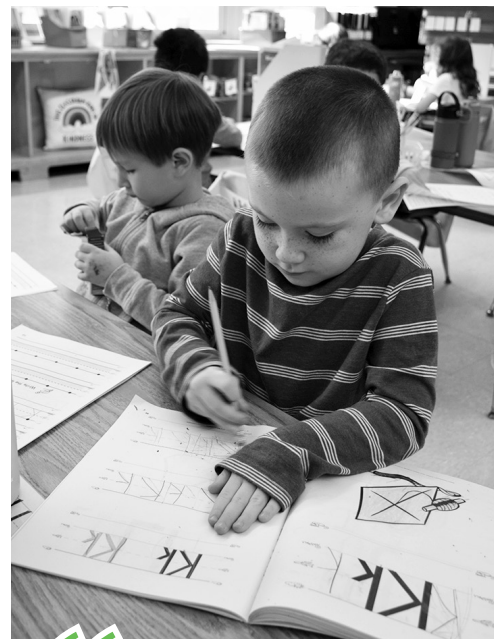
"By integrating evidence-based practices, including the science of reading components, into our instructional framework, we ensure that all components of a strong literacy program are in place at the intermediate elementary level," Main Street School Principal Joyce Chapnick said. "Our model, with

increased emphasis on providing students with voice, choice and agency, becomes the conduit through which students develop a love for reading and writing during their intermediate years. Through this model, students not only see themselves as readers and writers but also actively engage in the process of becoming lifelong learners."

Teachers provide direct instruction through read-alouds, whole group mini-lessons, conferring and small-group strategy lessons. Each student maintains a readers' and writers' notebook, fostering the development of critical thinking skills and self-reflection, while independent reading is a central component, allowing students to engage with books at their level and interest, promoting a love for reading. For students who need additional support in phonics and phonemic awareness, explicit instruction continues in this area.

Vocabulary development is addressed through the Wordly Wise program, focusing on academic vocabulary to strengthen the link between vocabulary and reading comprehension. Students engage in extension activities that target a deeper understanding of morphology. The Patterns of Power resource is utilized for grammar instruction, grounding the learning in inquiry, collaboration and conversation. This approach allows students to explore conventions through the lens of author's purpose and craft, fostering the deeper understanding of language use and application. Within the writers' workshop, students follow a process-oriented approach, encompassing idea generation, drafting, revising, editing and publishing. The iterative process acknowledges that writing development is not linear, with steps revisited multiple times to refine and enhance their work. Explicit lessons on writers' craft are taught and assessed, providing students with a solid foundation in writing skills.

Aligned to the New York State Literacy Initiative, Main Street School has developed a comprehensive, knowledge-building unit on human rights. This unit of study centers the importance of the reciprocal relationship between reading and



*"Our primary focus in K-5 literacy is to foster a love of reading and writing among all of our students. The science of reading serves as a valuable guide in supporting each child's literacy journey. Research indicates that reading, much like learning a sport, demands explicit instruction, consistent practice and honoring various skills. We are committed to providing our students with a strong literacy experience and adapt our practices to align with latest research on reading."*

Assistant Superintendent for  
Instruction and Human Resources  
Dr. Gail Duffy

writing on a topic to promote a deeper understanding. Students can engage in high-impact practices such as reading high-interest, diverse, and complex texts, participating in text-based discussions, writing about reading, as well as crafting writing products to match audience and purpose.

Each of these instructional approaches immerses students in opportunities as readers and writers, developing fluency and comprehension through engagement with genre-based teaching and thinking curriculum. They also embrace current research findings to create a dynamic and effective learning environment for students, preparing them for success in language arts and beyond.

### Training Initiative Implemented in the 2023-2024 School Year for Teachers

Teachers are being trained in the Orton-Gillingham (OG) program, which focuses on explicit, systematic, multisensory and individualized instruction in order to align with the principles of the science of reading. OG explicitly teaches phonemic awareness skills, such as rhyming, blending and segmentation, systematically advancing to foster proficient phonics skills.

### More Work to Come

The District continues to embrace research and gather and utilize data in the continuous growth and development of our approach to early literacy. We are continuing to provide professional development in the science of reading. We are continuing to work on aligning instructional practices in reading and writing. We plan to initiate a K-12 Vertical Literacy Team to identify common goals, shared vocabulary, and practices that are aligned with research and District philosophy.

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## Welcoming New Administrators

### Heather Shaughnessy, Director of Special Projects

The Irvington Board of Education appointed Heather Shaughnessy as director of special projects during a special Board of Education meeting on July 5, 2023.



Shaughnessy most recently served as a learning specialist at Fox Lane Middle School in Bedford, where she collaborated with teachers on implementing instructional plans and designed technology-infused lessons. She also served as director of the Bedford Staff Development Center at the Bedford Central School District and New York State Teacher Center, where she facilitated professional learning opportunities for staff, oversaw management of operations, and maintained communication between the district, teachers and facilitators. Prior to that, she worked as a special education teacher at the Greenburgh-Graham Union Free School District in Hastings-on-Hudson and P.S. 58 in the Bronx.

"We are excited to have Heather join the IUFSD team in her new

role," Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Human Resources Dr. Gail Duffy said. "She uses her extensive background and expertise in the areas of special education and facilitating professional development to provide support and leadership to enhance the District's 504 process, expand the use of data across the District to support student learning, and provide administrative support at Main Street School. She is extremely well-equipped to continue to advance the experiences our District affords its students."

### Emerson Segara, Director of Technology

Emerson Segara joins the Irvington School District with more than 26 years of diverse experience in technology, spanning education, health care and the financial industry. His broad expertise is anchored in significant roles, including director of technology, chief information officer and data privacy officer at both the Irvington and Port



Jervis school districts, and assistant director of technology in Brewster. Segara previously worked at Nuvance Health, where he spearheaded IT infrastructure mergers, enhancing operational efficiencies and patient care. His tenure at Bank of America in Global Infrastructure underscores his capability to manage complex systems on an international scale.

"I am excited to welcome Emerson to the Irvington school community," Assistant Superintendent for Instruction and Human Resources Dr. Gail Duffy said. "He is a passionate educational leader who possesses a wealth of knowledge, skill and experience in the field of technology with a focus on infrastructure, systems and innovative practices. He has already begun to develop strong relationships with the community with a focus on responsive customer service. Working in partnership with the District's staff and students, Emerson will help to shape innovative experiences to prepare our students for successful futures."

Appointed by the Board of Education on July 1, Segara brings a wealth of knowledge and a proven track record of innovative leadership across multiple sectors to the community.



# Seal of Biliteracy Celebrates Linguistic Excellence

Irvington High School students have been diligently working toward earning the prestigious New York State Seal of Biliteracy, a distinction bestowed upon graduating seniors who exhibit proficiency in both English and another language. This achievement serves not only as a personal milestone but also as a celebration of the students' diverse linguistic heritage and their dedication to language study.

To attain this prestigious seal, students undergo a comprehensive journey of language mastery. They prepare written pieces in both English and a world language, presenting their work to a panel of judges. During the process, they engage

in a rigorous Q&A session to showcase their language proficiency across speaking, listening, reading and writing skills.

"This achievement is a celebration for English language learners, native and heritage speakers, and classroom language learners alike," remarked French teacher Devon Steuer. "It stands as a testament to their hard work, perseverance and unwavering dedication to mastering the art of language."

As New York State enters its eighth year of offering the Seal of Biliteracy, Irvington High School proudly contributes to the growing number of recipients statewide. Last year,



1,514 students earned this seal, and Irvington is poised to add to this impressive tally. In January, Irvington High School students displayed their proficiency in English during a panel presentation day. In March, panelists will reconvene to evaluate the students' proficiency in their chosen world languages.

## Students Gain Independence With VIP Program



The Vocational Independence Program (VIP) at Irvington aims to cultivate and support each student's independence and communication skills. VIP students have been engaging in new learning activities throughout the school year, supporting them to be as independent as possible.

Students participated in the First Lego League curriculum as they worked together to follow

instructions to make Lego creations and present their creations to the class. They explored teamwork, problem-solving and creative thinking.

Each month, the students participated in trips to the grocery store to increase their independence with shopping. They created shopping lists, located items in the store and made purchases, which they used in their cooking lab every Friday. In the kitchen, they continue to learn practical kitchen safety and functional cooking skills by making a full breakfast with toast, eggs, sausage and bacon.

In the fall, the VIP students further enhanced their independence with vocational landscaping skills and helped the O'Hara Nature Center prepare for the winter season.

In addition, they spent 12 weeks working with artists in residence from the CO/LAB Theater Group, which cultivated their love for theater. The students learned about a



variety of puppets, gained new communication and coping skills that all related to the performing arts. They also worked to build their confidence and puppetry skills, which they showcased on the campus theater stage in a community performance in December. The enriching theater experience was made possible thanks to the generous support of the PTSA.

# Awards and Honors at IHS

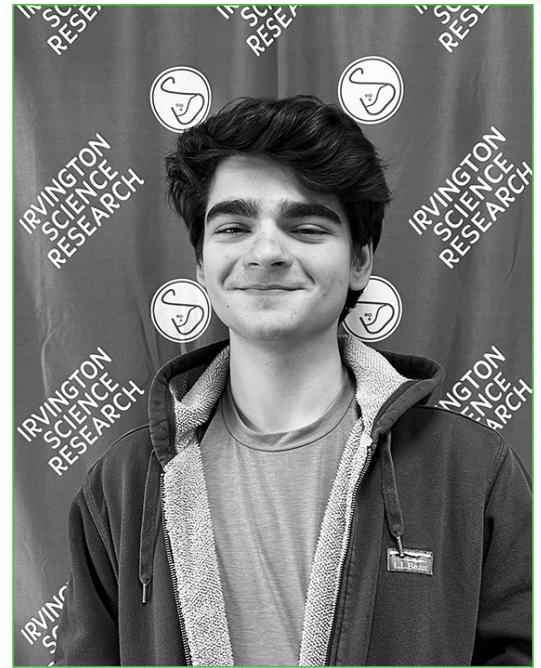
## Junior Performs in NYSSMA All-State Mixed Chorus

Irvington High School junior Gabriella Brenner performed with the New York State School Music Association's All-State Mixed Chorus at the Eastman Theater in Rochester, New York, on December 3. The talented singer was among 200 students in the choir, all of whom auditioned to be part of the ensemble. Brenner was chosen based on auditions at last spring's NYSSMA solo evaluation festival. The highest-scoring students from across the state with the most advanced skills demonstrated at the festival were invited to participate in the All-State music ensembles.

## Regeneron Science Talent Search Finalist

Irvington High School senior Christopher Zorn has been named a finalist in the prestigious 2024 Regeneron Science Talent Search and awarded \$25,000. He presented his research, "The Role of MYC in RET Fusion Tumorigenesis and RET Inhibitor Resistance."

Selected from 300 scholars and 2,162 entrants, Zorn is among 40 finalists chosen based on originality and creativity in their scientific research, as well as their achievement and leadership inside and outside of the classroom. The honor identifies Zorn among the nation's most promising young scientists or mathematicians.



## 'Irvington Innovators' Guide Students



The "Irvington Innovators" is a strategic initiative within the District, aimed at uniting the best minds from all areas and buildings of the District to guide the future of technology in education. The group of individuals is committed to identifying technological needs, evaluating, and piloting innovative tools, with a current focus on the potential of artificial intelligence to enhance classroom learning.

"The team embodies a collaborative effort to ensure technology adoption aligns with educational goals, fostering an environment of forward-thinking and continuous improvement," Director of Technology Emerson Segara said.

During the team's most recent meeting, they discussed and explored AI tools. As they tinkered with a different tool, they provided feedback and reflected on which grade levels might benefit from the tool and the opportunities it might provide for students.

As the instructional

innovation coach at the District, Dr. Stephanie Pedorde Burke has been working with teachers to help them embed creativity into the classroom with edtech tools like Canva, Tinkercad and WeVideo. She recently supported sixth graders in creating infographics in Canva about their favorite holiday. In this project, each student showcased their family's culture and traditions while sharing information about foods, clothing, numerical facts, festivities and more.

Throughout the remainder of the school year, the group will be the sounding board for District-level decisions on technology and innovation. They will provide guidance, ideas and feedback on educational technology initiatives, as well as participate in discussions about relevant technology topics in education, provide input on Irvington's technology plans and needs, pilot new technologies, and recommend professional development opportunities for staff.







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## Athletic Accomplishments

### **Coach Gina Maher Makes History With 800th Career Win**

Bulldogs' girls basketball coach Gina Maher has reached a major milestone in her career – 800 wins – after her team won a game against Eastchester High School on February 1. She became the first high school girls basketball coach in New York State history to reach 800 wins.

“Coach Maher’s coaching journey has been nothing short of extraordinary, marked by a tapestry of championships and accolades that speak volumes about her unwavering dedication to the program,” Athletic Director John Buonamano said. “In a league of her own, she stands as a true champion.”

Maher’s commitment to excellence has resulted in

an impressive collection of titles, each a testament to the passion she brings to her role. She boasts 16 sectional championships, six state titles and five federation championships. Buonamano expressed that what sets Maher apart is her humility – a quality that shines through as she has consistently redirected praise for the program’s achievements to her assistants and players over the years.

“Her coaching style is not just about wins,” Buonamano said. “It’s a heartfelt approach that blends humility, leadership and an unyielding dedication to her players. Her focus on the collective success of the program is a reflection of her character and coaching philosophy, creating an environment where every achievement is a shared triumph.”

*... Her focus on the collective success of the program is a reflection of her character and coaching philosophy, creating an environment where every achievement is a shared triumph.*

Athletic Director  
John Buonamano