

From Classroom to Community



Developing Active Citizens Through Authentic Learning Experiences and Innovation

Social Studies Department Update, March 10, 2026

Charles Benvenuto, Ed.D., K-12 Director of Social Studies

Introductions and Agenda



Fellow Speakers

- **Ms. Mary Connors,**
 - *MPE Grade 5 Teacher & Elementary Soc. Studies Instructional Specialist*
- **HSE School Leadership Representatives**
 - Riley Fleming
 - Carinne Maher
 - Madison Trabosh
- **HSW Civic Leadership Representatives**
 - Ryan Ajit
 - Ashlynn Renkowski
 - Leighton Stahl

01



The Foundation

Redesigned K–5 Elementary Social Studies Program

02



Authentic Learning Experiences

Living history, civic engagement & technology innovation

03



Students in Action

Service learning & student project presentations

04



Celebrating America's 250th

A year-long civic countdown and celebration

05



The Road Ahead

Future growth and program expansion



The Foundation

Elementary Social Studies Redesigned K–5 Program

Nassau BOCES Curriculum

Research-backed framework

Connections to the Community

Relevant curriculum and resources

NYS Standards

Thematic & conceptual alignment

K–5 Program Scope & Structure



***The Goal:** Students who understand how communities are built, how societies interact, and how they — even as young people — fit into that larger story.*

Grade-by-Grade Themes



Nassau BOCES Regional Social Studies Curriculum



Full redesign of K–5 Social Studies instructional resources — adopted district-wide across all schools aligned to New York State standards

Pillar 1: Active Engagement

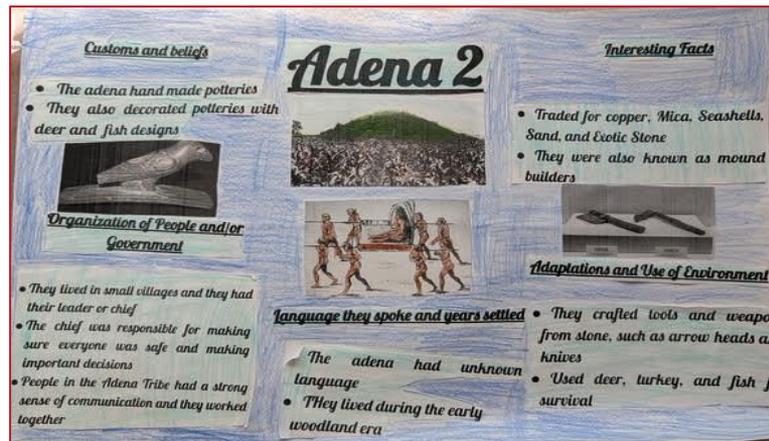
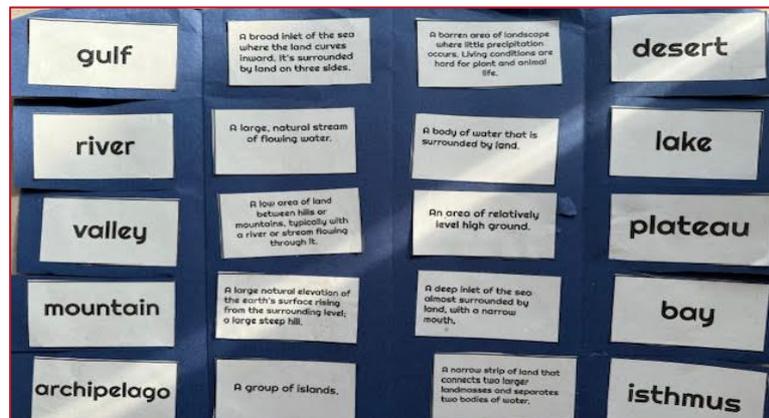
Students doing Social Studies — not just reading about it
Hands-on, participatory learning in every grade

Pillar 2: Local Relevance

Connecting big concepts to students' own families, neighborhoods, and community — making the curriculum personal

Pillar 3: Flexible and Adaptable

Designed to accommodate diverse classroom needs and allows for supplemental and/or substitution materials as needed



Program Highlights - Learning In Action



Students build geography vocabulary and landform knowledge through hands-on foldable booklets and sorting activities — making abstract concepts concrete



Students research Indigenous People and their interactions with the environment



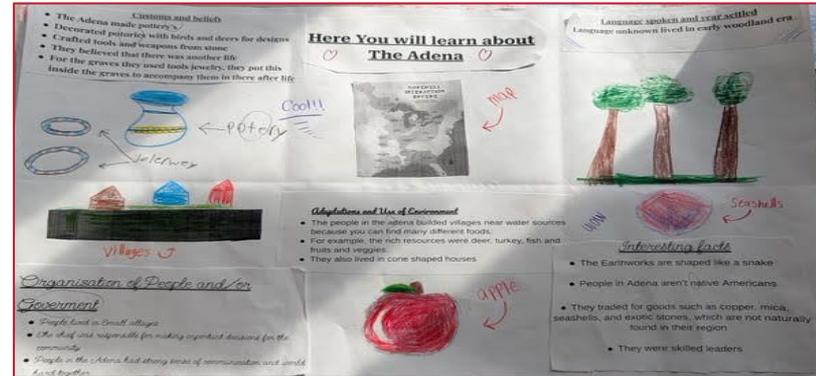
Pupils create multi-section research posters covering customs, government, adaptations, and language



Collaborative projects build teamwork and communication skills alongside content knowledge



Hands-on learning fosters investment in civic life and the world around them



From Learning to Doing



Creating Authentic Learning Experiences

Empowering student agency through civic engagement and service-learning opportunities

Witnesses to History - Holocaust Survivor's Story



Dr. Bernie Furshpan, 2G Holocaust Survivor

Shared his father's story surviving the Holocaust to our 10th grade students

Witnesses to History - Auschwitz Virtual Tour



Connecting history to students using technology

Model Schools grant winners Ms. Jennifer Keller and Mr. Joseph Toth brought the Spirit of Triumph organization to pilot a virtual reality tour of Auschwitz with their 10th grade classes.



Witnesses to History: 9/11



Rt. FDNY
Firefighter Mike
O'Connell speaks
of his experience
at Ground Zero
during and after
9/11



NYC/LI History & Rho Kappa field trip to
Ground Zero & 9/11 Museum

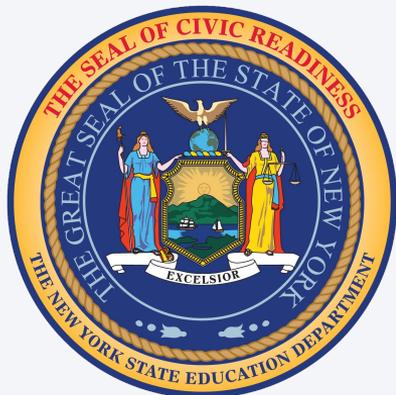
Students in Action - Paying Tribute to 9/11 Victims





What Is the Seal?

The NYS Seal of Civic Readiness is a graduation distinction awarded to students who demonstrate a deep understanding of civic knowledge, civic skills, civic mindset, and civic experiences.



School Year	Graduates Earning the Seal
2022-23	105 (<i>pilot</i>)
2023-24	223
2024-25	152
2025-26	227 (<i>anticipated</i>)

Expanding Opportunity to Middle School



8th Grade Honors Capstone Project

This year, our department developed a new Seal-aligned capstone project piloted in 8th grade Honors classes.



Contextualization

Students investigated how Progressive Era reformers addressed the major social issues of the early 20th century.



Then & Now Connections

Students drew documented parallels between those same issues and the challenges we face today.



Civic Action in 2026

Students proposed evidence-based solutions to current issues, rooted in historical precedent.



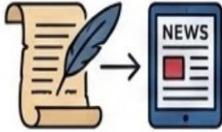
Expanding Opportunity to Middle School



1

Social Science Research

It is conducted in partnership with the Library Media Center requiring primary and secondary source analysis.



2

Connecting Past to Present

Students make documented connections between American history and current events and civic issues.



3

Seal of Civic Readiness

The project is aligned to NYS Seal of Civic Readiness Middle School Capstone project requirements.



4

AP-Style Long Essay (LEQ)

Students wrote their first full-length Advanced Placement style Long Essay Question.

New Leadership Program



Students choose the pathway that best fits their leadership interests and goals.

School Leadership

FOCUS

School-Based Leadership & Service Learning

-  Public speaking & communication
-  Collaborative school or community projects
-  School-based service: blood drives, pep rallies, Battle of the Classes & more
-  Leadership theory, problem-solving, teamwork

OR

Adv. Part. In Gov't/Civic Leadership

FOCUS

Government, Civic Engagement & Research

-  Local, state & federal government structure
-  Digital/media literacy & civic advocacy
-  Connections with the community
-  Civic Capstone Project

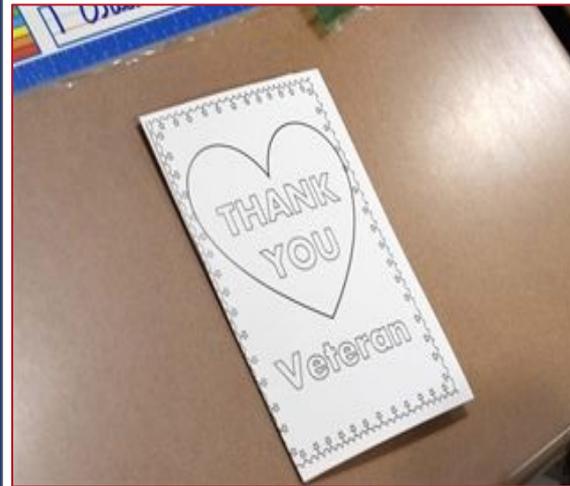
Both pathways develop 21st century leadership skills and provide opportunities to earn the NYS Seal of Civic Readiness.

School Leadership Students Become Teachers

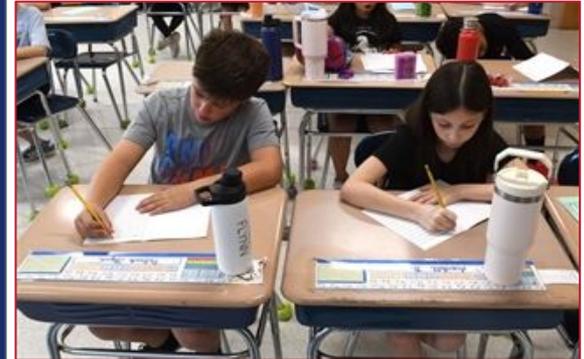


Students learn about service and sacrifice

Honoring Our Veterans



Thanking Veterans for their service



School Leadership Highlights



School Leadership Spotlight



Furever Home Finders

- Riley Fleming
- Carinne Maher
- Madison Trabosh

MAIN Purpose

- Helping shelter animals get adopted
- Spreading the word about the Smithtown Animal Shelter
- Getting the dogs names out there who have been at the shelter for many years
- Creating videos, posters, stickers to send to businesses to promote the shelter/dogs



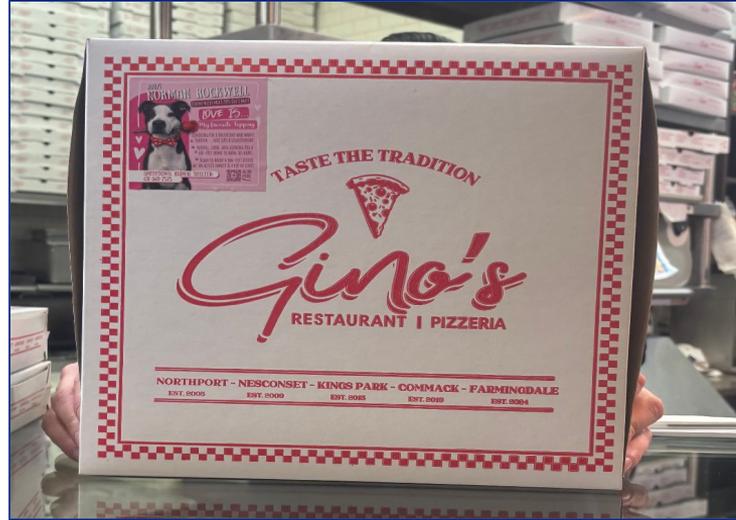
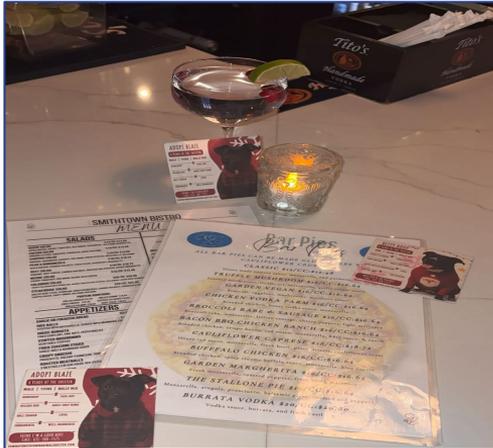
WHY?

- We want to help animals in need
- Every animal deserves a home
- Helping the shelter get more media and more publicity
- Classmates all agreed we should work with animals
- Get more animals adopted



NOW

- Coasters
- Mickeys-stickers
- Pizza boxes-Stickers



FUTURE

- Koozies
- Adoption day at Deepwells

BETTY BOOP *adopt*

6 YEARS AT THE SHELTER

GIRL | 12YRS | BULLY MIX

STAGE 5 CLINGER | COUCH POTATO

LAND WALRUS | ADULT ONLY HOME

LOVES NETFLIX MARATHONS | LOYAL

LAZY ALL DAY | GAS BLASTER

WILL YOU BE MY PERSON?
CALL: 631-360-7575

TOWNOFSMITHTOWNANIMALSHELTER.COM

REQUESTS FOR FUNDING

- We have completed fundraisers to help raise money to make all of the stickers, coaster, and koozies.
- If we do win the grant we plan on using the money to continue this project on next year to the next class.
- Service learning project



Thank You!



Furever Home Finders

- Riley Fleming
- Carinne Maher
- Madison Trabosh

Civic Leadership: Community Connections



Elected Officials Speaker Series

Civic Leadership students heard from local elected officials about the responsibilities and realities of public service.

Suffolk County Legislature Day

Civic Leadership students will visit the Suffolk County Legislature for Legislature Day, where they will research, debate, and vote on a bill after meeting with elected legislators.

Smithtown Town Hall Civics Day

Student attended an immersive Civics Day at Smithtown Town Hall and engaged with local government processes, departments, and officials.

Peer Diversion Court

Student volunteers serve as advocates, jurors, bailiffs, and court clerks in a real peer-led courtroom setting, hearing actual cases involving first-time youth offenders charged with minor crimes.

Civic Leadership Highlights



Safer Streets for St. James: The Case for a North Country Road Crosswalk

THE SAFETY CRISIS

- A Dangerous Daily Challenge**
Students must cross a fast-paced thoroughfare without any designated or protected safety zone.
- History of Serious Accidents**
The lack of a crossing has already resulted in multiple injuries within the community.
- High-Traffic Vulnerability**
The area near 417 North Country Rd is a hub for students and residents.

THE PROPOSED SOLUTION

- Crosswalk with Flashing Beacons**
Immediate installation of a marked crossing with signal lights to alert oncoming drivers.
- 40% Reduction in Accidents**
National Highway Traffic Safety Administration data proves crosswalks significantly improve pedestrian safety outcomes.
- Massive Community Support**
Hundreds of local students and families have signed the petition for immediate action.

Civic Leadership Spotlight



Creating an Outdoor Relaxing Space for Students

- *Ryan Ajit*
- *Ashlynn Renkowski*
- *Leighton Stahl*

Rationale

- Student stress and burnout are increasing
- Mental health impacts academic success
- Nature helps to reduce anxiety and improve focus
- Opportunity to create an outdoor space at HSW

NATURE AND MENTAL HEALTH: THE BENEFITS



Reduce stress levels
Enjoy the calm of nature, helping to lower your blood pressure and reduce production of stress hormones.



Open up creatively
Nature is an endless resource of inspiration. Head outside for a world of opportunities to be creative.



Be more present
Use the outdoors to practise mindfulness, helping you be more relaxed and less anxious.



Improve your mood
Establish a connection with nature to help build positive long-term outcomes for your wellbeing.



Better your physical health
Walking, running, cycling – it all helps release positive hormones that improve our physical and mental health.



Our Vision

- A peaceful, colorful outdoor space
- Mural promoting positivity
- Reset during off periods
- Built by students, for students



Execution

- Applied for grants.
- Received donations from nurseries
- Fundraiser through t-shirt sales
- Organized a candy gram fundraiser
- Purchased paint for our mural



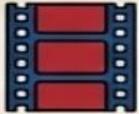
Thank you!



Creating an Outdoor Relaxing Space for Students

- *Ryan Ajit*
- *Ashlynn Renkowski*
- *Leighton Stahl*

America's 250th Birthday - A Year Long Celebration



Videos:

Historical videos leading to the Declaration of Independence shown in class.



Lessons:

Classroom lessons connected directly to the Declaration of Independence.



Student-Led:

School Leadership students bring lessons to elementary schools district-wide.

The Road Ahead: Areas of Future Growth



01



Expand Middle School Capstone

The Civic Research Project currently serves 8th Grade Honors students. Our goal is to bring that rigor and civic engagement to all 8th graders.

02



Scale AR/VR Access

The virtual reality Auschwitz lesson was transformative — but reached limited students. We want to expand immersive technology across more grade levels and content areas.

03



Deepen Community Partnerships

The partnerships we've built with the League of Women Voters, local government offices, and community organizations are among the most powerful things we've done. We want to build more.

04



NYS Profile of a Graduate

We are intentionally evolving our program and pathway opportunities to ensure we're delivering on New York State's vision for what graduates should know and be able to do.

Thank You



*"For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them."
- Aristotle*

On behalf of Mary Connors, our student presenters, and the entire Social Studies team thank you for your time and your continued support of our programs.