



# BUDGET VOTE: MAY 19

by **THE WARD  
MELVILLE  
KALEIDOSCOPE**

On May 19, nearly 40,000 Three Village residents will have the opportunity to vote on a budget and fill positions on the Board of Education. We'd be shocked if 4,000 went to the polls.

Abysmal turnout is nothing new for our district, or for any local elections. In a world increasingly filled with social media and round-the-clock punditry, we too often forget that we are not spectators of society: we are participants. And participating doesn't just mean voting for a president every four years, although rising cynicism threatens even this most basic civil duty. It involves taking initiative, learning about one's community, and actively seeking to improve it.

We rarely realize how much impact local governance has on our lives, distracted by media diets saturated with news from Washington and vacuous political speculation. The federal government can certainly expand health coverage or start a war, but municipal officials and school board members

also have immense power. A Board of Education member can raise standards, push students away from resume-padding and towards intellectual curiosity, inspire teachers to go beyond basic curricula, and foster a tight-knit, collaborative environment. They can also ban books and promote anti-intellectualism, restrict student liberties, impose narrow pedagogical philosophies, and enact wasteful spending policies.

We do not suggest that any candidate profiled in this edition fits either of these descriptions; it is not our place to do so. We only seek to emphasize the importance of this month's election. Voters can send a clear message about what they want from our schools. They

can introduce new ideas on how to confront our rapidly-changing world. And, perhaps rarest of all, they can directly impact how their tax dollars are collected and spent.

Despite our non-partisan nature, we do wish to make one recommendation: we urge all of our readers to vote for the proposed budget. It is not a perfect document, and it will certainly not satisfy everyone. Nevertheless, it addresses many of the community's needs, and given the difficult fiscal situation the district finds itself in, this was not guaranteed. Furthermore, we simply cannot afford to reject this budget. The defeat of a bond in January has only added stress to the district's finances, and much of the present

difficulty can be traced back to the failure of a budget vote in 2021.

We recognize that some members of the community may be dissatisfied with the district, and that they may have legitimate objections to the current state of affairs. But voting down the budget won't fix anything; it'll simply punish students like ourselves. Instead, we encourage these citizens to get involved beyond the ballot box. Attend Board of Education meetings, have conversations with district officials, participate in and organize community events, and maybe even run for the Board. It takes effort, but the possibilities are endless. Because that's how you effect change: by building, not by destroying.

**Find us online:**



*Read the Kaleidoscope at  
[kscopenews.com](http://kscopenews.com)*

**Scan to visit:**

\*Read this edition online at [bit.ly/kscopemay26](http://bit.ly/kscopemay26)



## Register to Vote!

...for the Three Village CSD budget vote on **Tuesday, May 19**

**6:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m.**

**@ Ward Melville High School**

Please enter Ward Melville at the North Side entrance.

### Voter Requirements and Qualifications

- Be at least 18 years of age
- Be a resident of the school district for at least 30 days prior to May 19, 2026
- Be a citizen of the United States
- Be a registered voter with the Suffolk County Board of Elections

Qualified voters may register at the North Country Administration Building @ 100 Suffolk Avenue in Stony Brook between 8:30 a.m. and 4:30 p.m., Monday – Friday.

Qualified voters may also register with the Suffolk County Board of Elections to vote in all municipal elections relating to their address.

A Public Information Meeting/Budget Hearing on this vote will be held on Wednesday, May 6, 2026 at 7:00 p.m.

For early/absentee ballot registration, visit <https://www.threevillagecsd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp>

uREC\_ID=606928&type=d&termREC\_ID=&pREC\_ID=1164699

For more voter registration information, visit [https://www.threevillagecsd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC\\_ID=606928&type=d](https://www.threevillagecsd.org/apps/pages/index.jsp?uREC_ID=606928&type=d)



## Three Village Budget Vote Set For May 19

by MICHAEL RETAKH,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

On April 15, the Three Village Central School District Board of Education formally adopted a budget proposal of \$245 million for the 2026-2027 academic year, sending it to voters for final approval on May 19. To cover the necessary costs, the tax levy was raised 4.54% to \$187 million, matching the maximum set by the state-mandated tax cap. Few overall changes were made from the 2025-2026 budget, but rising external costs such as healthcare and other employee benefits forced cuts to certain areas.

Even so, these cuts are smaller than those implemented in last year's budget, largely due to the unusually high tax cap, the calculation of which relies on several variables. First is the levy growth factor, which is equal to the rate of inflation but is limited to 2%. Therefore, although inflation decreased from 2.95% to 2.63%, this did not affect the tax cap. In fact, the smaller difference between the rate of inflation and the 2% levy growth factor made it easier for the district to combat price pressures.

The most influential component in the tax cap increase is the tax-based growth factor, which is determined by the amount of new construction within the district's boundaries. Deputy Superintendent Jeffrey Carlson explained, saying, "Most of the time, it's maybe 0.1% or 0.2%. That's what we've seen lately. This year, it's 1.19%."

Finally, the cap was further raised by an additional \$1.5 million earmarked for capital projects, which, along with repayments for earlier bonds, "are known as exclusions from the tax cap," Carlson said. Essentially, these costs are not restricted by the state, so additions to them have the effect of raising the tax cap.

The district has justified the doubling of capital funds by pointing to the failure of the bond vote in January, with Carlson stating, "For some of our buildings, we need to get the work done: the roof's not going to fix itself. The bond failed. So OK, and that's fine, but we still need to do the work." Specifically, the funds will go towards repairing the deteriorating cupolas of Setauket and Minnesauke Elementary Schools and R.C. Murphy Middle School, fixing remaining flood damage in Nassakeag Elementary School, and improving the safety and

functionality of the Ward Melville High School swimming pool.

Despite the high tax cap allowing for greater flexibility, there was some difficulty in absorbing rising costs. Healthcare benefits increased by 12%, or more than \$4.5 million, since last year, a trend driven by spiking pharmaceutical costs. In an attempt to offset some of the larger expenses, the district has made some slight changes to its policy, including by reducing copay coverage for GLP-1 weight loss drugs.

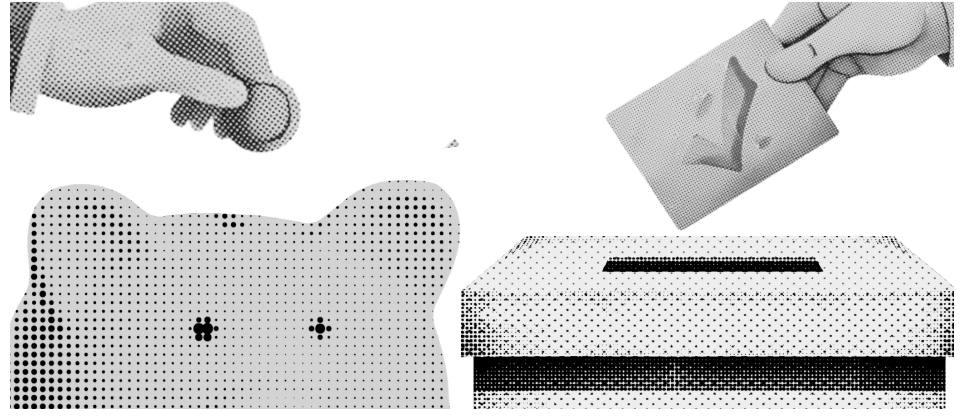
Throughout the budget drafting process, several administrators also raised concerns about the size of the fund balance, which Carlson described as a "rainy day fund." During the COVID-19 pandemic, the account was significantly depleted, and withdrawals to fix a collapsing roof in Setauket Elementary further compounded the issue. As a result, the fund balance, which contained \$24.9 million in June 2019, decreased by 60% to \$10.1 million by 2025.

Despite allocating money to begin rebuilding the reserves, Carlson clarified that this spending will be limited: "There's a school of thought among my counterparts in other districts that the more there is in fund balance, the better. But if I told taxpayers here that we had \$100 million just sitting in the back, they'd think, 'Wait a second, you're taxing me a lot more than you need to.' And that's a valid point."

A further issue was the small amount of state aid. Legislators in Albany have not yet finalized their budget despite an April 1 deadline, but the governor's proposal only includes a 1% aid increase, or approximately \$300,000. Carlson expressed some optimism that this would be revised to 2% by the legislature before passage, but administrators and the Board of Education could not assume this when crafting their proposal.

This continues a long-term decrease in aid for Three Village. In the 2009-2010 academic year, the state provided nearly 20% of revenue; this has now decreased to just over 15%, representing a difference of approximately \$9 million. Given the community's general affluence, this alone is not a major issue. However, when combined with the state's restriction on taxation, it places pressure on the district and similarly well-off areas.

"There's wealth in Three Village, but we can't tap into it because of the tax cap. So we're limited as to that," Carlson explained, quickly clarifying that he didn't "mean that as a criticism of the tax cap." In other words, districts used to remedy shortfalls in state aid



by increasing taxes slightly more; since the implementation of the tax cap in 2011, they have been unable to do this.

Carlson also noted the challenges brought by high rates of inflation over the last several years, and in particular the difference between those rates and the levy growth factor (which is capped at 2%). If the 2% ceiling did not exist, the district would have \$26.5 million in additional revenue for the current budget proposal alone.

To contend with this changing fiscal landscape, Three Village administrators have begun to shift the ways in which they allocate funds. Carlson said, "My counterpart in the Half Hollow Hills School District, in her budget presentation, wrote 'Start Saying No.' That's what we've had to start doing here too."

It is not just non-essential furniture and technology replacements that are being eliminated. In fact, Carlson suggested that even requests for additional aids in classrooms are unlikely to be granted. (He made a clear exception for one-on-one assistance.) However, perhaps the hardest-hit category is that of co-curricular activities. Last year, approximately \$1 million was earmarked for after-school clubs; in the current proposal, this figure is just over \$800,000, representing a 20% cut on top of previous reductions.

District administration maintains that extracurriculars remain a priority, with Carlson saying, "We want to provide as much opportunity for the students as possible with those clubs." Nevertheless, he acknowledged the shortfall and suggested that smaller student groups find ways to merge. Another cost-saving measure would be to reduce unnecessary field trips, although Carlson did not specify how this standard would be evaluated.

Further cuts were seen in administration. The roles of Executive Director of Personnel and Assistant Director of Instructional Technology were eliminated, which, together with a streamlining of department chairs across the three secondary schools, has led to a total reduction of nine administrative positions. The district also curtailed spending on various contracted services, supplies, and

equipment by 25%.

However, the largest savings came from a large wave of retirements. "We're seeing 21 teacher retirements this year; 10 years ago we might have had two or three a year," Carlson explained. Perhaps more important is the fact that 18 of the retirees will not need to be replaced, a consequence of significant declines in enrollment over the last two decades.

When compared with the 2025-2026 budget, this proposal is perhaps notable in what it does not contain: a major change. Last April, board members approved a plan for a district-wide restructuring while, after vigorous debate, blocking a proposed change to school start times in a 4-3 vote. This year, the restructuring is essentially complete. And there was no discussion of start time changes or a contentious proposal to provide security guards with firearms.

There is also an additional proposition on the ballot this year to raise funds for the Long Island Museum. However, district officials stressed that this is entirely independent of the school district, and that the Board of Education did not even have the option of refusing to put the question to voters.

Despite the relative lack of controversial measures, opposition towards the budget is still expected, especially given the concerted effort to defeat the bond vote in January. (If the budget fails, spending will likely have to be reduced by \$8.1 million, requiring steep cuts to certain areas.) In response, Carlson, together with Superintendent Kevin Scanlon, are hosting a series of public budget presentations to educate the community about the proposal and answer any questions voters may have.

If anyone is unable to attend these sessions, Carlson wants them to remember that the district "truly has the taxpayer in mind when we put the budget together. I know people don't believe that, but we do." He also reminded all residents of the district, "Vote what you think is best for you and your family. Not because somebody online told you, 'Here's how you should vote.' But we want people to vote. This is the main thing. Please come out and vote."

## Ward Melville Expands Course Offerings

by SARAH WU,  
SCIENCE EDITOR

Next school year, Ward Melville High School will expand course offerings to include three new Advanced Placement subjects — AP Human Geography, AP Cybersecurity, and AP Business with Personal Finance. Students will also have the opportunity to participate in newly expanded Career and Technical Education (CTE) graduation pathways. Together, these additions reflect the school's commitment to offering students both college-level academic rigor and practical preparation for future careers.

One of the new courses, AP Human Geography, will give students the chance to examine how people, cultures, and environments interact on a global scale. History Chairperson Christina Cone said the class helps students explore “why people live where they do, how cultures develop, and how global patterns shape everyday life.” She added that it is “a great choice for students who want to push themselves with college-level work while building skills that go

beyond memorizing facts, such as analyzing patterns and making connections across topics.” The course will cover subjects such as population changes, migration, urban development, and access to resources, with an emphasis on real-world issues.

Ward Melville's Business Department is also expanding with the addition of AP Business with Personal Finance, a newly-created course set to launch in the 2026-2027 school year. Chairperson Ilene Littman said the department moved quickly once the College Board released curriculum guidelines. She described the school's new Bloomberg Finance Lab — which will be installed in the library over the summer, and where classes will take place — as “the perfect marriage” for introducing the material in a more professional, industry-based setting. In addition to offering college credit, the course will give students the opportunity to earn a Bloomberg Market Concepts certification credential.

Another major addition is AP Cybersecurity, which will introduce students to digital security, ethical online behavior, and the growing role of technology in everyday life. According to the program of study, students will study common threats and

as much as gasoline or diesel-powered ones — will likely be passed along to the consumer.

Theoretically, Three Village could seek waivers to purchase non-electric transportation as late as 2029. However, this would not solve the issue, as all school buses in New York State must be electric by 2035. In fact, this makes such waivers less reasonable: “Do I want to buy a gas or diesel bus in 2028 or 2029 that, starting in 2035, I can't use?” said Carlson. Furthermore, because transportation is not considered an exclusion to the tax cap, difficult decisions may have to be made going forward.

There is also a possibility that the state will mandate offering full-day pre-kindergarten to all children in several years. Currently, the district uses a lottery system through which only some of those who sign up can actually participate in the Pre-K program. If the state implements its policy, all would be able to enroll. Not only would this mean having to pay more staff and fund other aspects of the program, but space must also be considered.

There has already been some discussion about closing or repurposing a building, most likely Nassakeag Elementary School or the North Country Administration Building, to contend with declining enrollment. Several months ago,

vulnerabilities, how those factors combine to create risk, and how risks can be mitigated through a defense-in-depth strategy.

With regard to the school budget, Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services Brian Biscari said the changes will have limited financial impact. “The only costs associated with the addition of the AP courses are the textbooks,” Biscari stated. “We did not add any additional staffing.” In fact, even the purchase of the Bloomberg Terminals was revenue-neutral, the result of a district employee's connection to JP Morgan Chase.

He said the same applies for the graduation pathways. While the district did need to purchase kits for the Pre-Engineering CTE program, it already had the materials needed for the new automotive pathway. Biscari added that those investments “allowed us to have the engineering class, AP Cybersecurity, affiliated with SUNY Stony Brook,” giving the students the opportunity to earn college credit.

The introduction of these AP courses coincides with the expansion of the district's CTE graduation pathways, which are designed to give students more structured opportunities to build specific career-oriented skills during their high school career.

the School Closure or Repurpose Committee was formed to explore the issue, and they suggested that no such action be taken at this time. The Board of Education accepted this recommendation in a 6-1 vote, with Vice President Karen Roughley being the only “No.”

With the potential for universal full-day pre-K, the district would have to find a place for hundreds of additional students. As a result, Carlson said, “I think [a school closure] is definitely not going to be feasible if we have to do full-day pre-K for all kids, because we just won't have room for them.” Nevertheless, the Long Term Planning Committee will continue to keep its options open.

Independently of the state, the district is also considering several changes that would have a major impact on future budgets. Carlson said that “we would love to change the start time. Unfortunately, it costs a lot of money for additional buses.” As a result, the issue was not considered for this year's budget, but the proposal may be implemented several years in the future. (Carlson did not provide a more specific timeline, stating that there are too many variables to make a concrete decision so far in advance.)

There has also been some community discussion about introducing armed guards to bolster

Biscari noted, “As a district, we are responsible for getting our students ready for their futures.” He added that the CTE programs will help prepare students for various careers through “collaborative partnerships” with local businesses. As New York State graduation requirements change, making it possible to demonstrate proficiency without taking certain Regents exams, these pathways are becoming especially important. Biscari said the district is “trying to get ahead of the curve” by establishing certain programs based on student interest.

Biscari also emphasized that the school recognized a need to expand AP offerings beyond traditional subject areas. “We have not had any AP courses in our Technology Department or our Business Department,” he said, adding that some students who are focused on their GPA might have been reluctant to take lower-weighted classes in those departments. By adding AP-level options in business and technology, the school hopes to attract more students while strengthening those programs. Biscari remarked that “the Board of Education has set a goal to increase our offerings” for CTE pathways, though whether or not the classes run will ultimately depend on student demand.

security, but Carlson made clear that this was not currently under strong consideration. “A lot of people have very strong feelings on that, both for and against. ... I don't even know if the Long Term Planning Committee will take that issue up.” Nevertheless, he specified that many details would have to be considered for such a policy, including who would be armed, where they would be stationed, and what the day-to-day rules for armed guards would be.

Despite these potential constraints on future budgets, Carlson expressed optimism about the long-term fiscal situation. A large wave of 21 retirements saved money this year, but Carlson said that “we're going to continue seeing these high numbers for the next 10 years.” This isn't based on any retirement incentive, but rather on age, years of service, and the cyclical nature of teacher hiring in the district.

The Long Term Planning Committee was only formed this year, but it is already addressing some of the major issues confronting the Three Village community. Perhaps its first true order of business is to decide whether to propose a reduced bond in October to cover some of the items in the failed January bond. Beyond that, however, it will be sure to play an important role in the district's budgets for years to come.

## Long Term Planning Committee Begins Work

by ALLIE HARRISON,  
OP-ED EDITOR

The current budget proposal may have been finalized last month, but preparation for future years has already begun. Recognizing the changing fiscal situation, district administration moved to form the Long Term Planning Committee earlier this fall, both to better anticipate upcoming policy changes in the next five to 10 years and to monitor important trends such as decreasing enrollment.

A major challenge is to contend with impending state mandates. Perhaps the most formidable is a new requirement to transition to electric buses. Deputy Superintendent Jeffrey Carlson, who also serves as the chair of the committee, explained, “All new school bus purchases starting next year have to be electric vehicles. Now whether somebody's for it, against it, I don't care. My concern is how we pay for it.” Even though the district does not directly own buses, the large cost increase — electric buses currently cost three to four times

## Interview with Karen Roughley

by EMILY KRAL,  
STAFF WRITER

Karen Roughley has served on the Board of Education since 2023, including as its vice-president since 2024. Before becoming a trustee, she volunteered for many organizations within Three Village while working in investment banking. She is seeking a second term of three years.

Below are some excerpts from *Kaleidoscope's* interview with Roughley: the full interview can be found at [bit.ly/kscope-roughley](https://bit.ly/kscope-roughley), or by scanning the QR code below.

***Kaleidoscope:* You're running for reelection for the Board of Education. Why do you want to continue to be on the board, and what do you hope to accomplish if you're elected to another term?**

Karen Roughley: I wanted to run for the board because I've been very involved with school since my oldest was in kindergarten, and I just want to give back to what the school gave me. That's my most important thing: to make sure that everybody's able to get everything that they ever wanted out of school, and that we try to do the best that we can within our budget constraints.

**What do you believe has been your greatest success so far in being on the board?**

The greatest success has to be the school restructuring. That went exceedingly well, and it's been worked on for years.

On a probably less exciting note, we started a policy committee for the board. We have hundreds of policies, and they need to be updated and maintained to follow all the new state laws. Some of them haven't been changed since 2009, which is not a good thing. So we created our policy committee, and we have been trying to go through all of the policies. We've now put them on a three-year rotation [for review]. From a housekeeping standpoint, I'm very proud that we started that, and we are being pretty successful in that.

**Enrollment in Three Village is down significantly since its peak nearly 20 years ago. How will you address this issue and the resulting financial difficulties?**

It is an extreme issue, and they've been monitoring it for years. I will say that over the last four or five years, our enrollment in this district has stayed pretty status quo. We are getting pretty stagnant, which is great because

that helps a lot with budgeting and staffing. But until that happens across all grades, they're constantly looking at staffing implications and the classes that are being held.

However, even though enrollment is decreasing, a lot of the district's needs have been increasing. We've added multiple extra counselors, guidance counselors, and psychologists. Our ENL program has increased. A lot of people don't understand or notice that.

**You were the sole member of the board to have voted against accepting the School Closure or Repurpose Committee's recommendation to not take any major action at that time. Can you please explain your decision?**

Even prior to being on the board, I supported repurposing a school: the numbers are low enough that we could combine at least two of the elementary schools together. That being said, that's my opinion. As a board member, you need to stand behind what the vote is, so whatever goes forward, I'll be 100% in sync with my other board members.

**In recent years, extracurricular activities, athletics, and clubs have faced significant funding cuts. Would you seek to reverse these cuts in another term or are you willing to continue them?**

I'm not aware of any significant cuts. (Editor's note: In the current budget proposal, the board recommended decreasing co-curricular funding from \$1 million to \$800,000.) We have been looking at our clubs that have less than 10 or 15 attendees, and seeing if we can combine some of them. After all, we are paying for an advisor for each of those clubs. But I don't know of any cuts to their actual individual budgets.

**New York State has recently enacted a statewide cell phone ban for students this year. Do you support this policy?**

It was well overdue to have some sort of ban. It's important for the kids nowadays to learn how to interact and socialize face-to-face, rather than texting each other or looking at their phones while sitting at the lunch tables. I think from a mental health standpoint and an academic standpoint, it's a great step forward.

**Last year, you voted to remove the start time change from the 2025-2026 budget. Can you please explain your decision and whether you would be open to reconsidering it in the future?**

I'm very supportive of start times, but the issue we came across last year was the budget. Our



Photo courtesy of Karen Roughley

budget cycle last year was very difficult, and it would have cost about \$1 million to implement start times. The only way that we could do that was by letting go of staff and increasing the elementary class sizes. To me, what's more important is keeping the elementary class sizes smaller. If we could afford it and keep it fiscally sustainable for years to come, then I would absolutely support putting that into the budget.

**What do you believe should be done to combat AI usage?**

Our technology department recently gave a fantastic presentation on our goals going forward for AI. I'm not aware of any issues going on with AI in the high school or middle schools. Of course, there's always something going on, but nothing widespread.

**What's your position on the potential introduction of armed guards into the district's security system?**

This is a very passionate subject for many people in the community. We talked about it for quite a while, but there was an issue with our civil service test: we couldn't hire our own guards because they did not take the civil service test, and we didn't know about that. So we had to put everything on pause to see what is going to happen with that.

**How do you believe the district is currently addressing the needs of children with individualized education programs?**

Three Village is one of the top special education schools on Long Island — we have a very good program. People move here to the district for this reason. Now there's always going to be kids that fall outside what a program does, but Three Village is very good about modifying it for those children. We're very flexible here.

Both of my kids went through the special education program, and I've had tremendous success. My older daughter's in college now, and my younger one is graduating this year. So I have complete faith in them doing what's best for the kids.

**What do you say to voters who feel upset with the status quo of the district, whether because of high taxes, cuts to certain areas, or for any other reasons?**

I don't feel the district is in a status quo, because I think it's been changing. We've had the restructuring, we've been adding programs, and I think we're going on a great trajectory. Programs are going to be cut, and for the people that are affected by those cuts, it's hard. But I think the bigger picture usually benefits more kids than not.

Taxes are difficult. We all pay taxes; they're very high. It's our job on the board to keep them as low as possible, but we still need to run our school and give our kids the best that we can for their success.

**In January, voters rejected the bond proposal. What was your reaction?**

We didn't anticipate it. We were hoping it was going to pass, but we knew it was a very large number. We wanted to show every single thing that needed to be fixed, and everything that was on the bond report needs to be fixed. Our buildings are old, so we need to put the money in to fix our schools.



## Interview with Jeffrey Kerman

by ZAINA KHAN,  
NEWS EDITOR

Dr. Jeffrey Kerman is a long-standing member of the Board of Education, serving from 1995 to 2001 and continuously since 2011. In the past, he has served as president of the board, and he is seeking re-election for another three years. Outside of the district, he has practiced dentistry for nearly 50 years.

Below are some excerpts from *Kaleidoscope's* interview with Kerman: the full interview can be found at [bit.ly/kscope-kerman](https://bit.ly/kscope-kerman), or by scanning the QR code below.

### ***Kaleidoscope:* Why are you running for reelection, and what do you hope to accomplish if you are elected to another term?**

Jeffrey Kerman: I want to be on the Board because Three Village School District did wonderfully with my two sons. They both graduated with honors from Ward Melville and both continued on to American University, graduating with honors. They both have very good jobs now. It was a very good district, and I want to keep it that way. That's exactly why I am running.

### **With your extensive experience on the Board, how have your priorities for the district changed since you first began serving? What issues have become more urgent in recent years?**

My priorities have not really changed. It's just that you have to think a lot more now about the budget and what it costs to do everything. For instance, take the topic of later school start times and how we canceled it. We canceled that because it was going to cost the district an extra \$1,014,000.

### **Would you be willing to reconsider that decision if the topic comes up again?**

Yes, I am always reconsidering. It was necessary because it was supposedly healthier for the students, which is interesting to know. As I said, both my boys went there early in the morning and they did very, very well. But I understand the science behind it.

### **Enrollment in Three Village is down significantly since its peak nearly 20 years ago. How will you address this issue and the resulting financial difficulties?**

We have actually been discussing closing a school. We had a committee on it, and the committee did not recommend closing a

school this year. We followed their advice, but we still listen to what's going on. We may just repurpose the school rather than close it. By repurposing, I mean that we can put the Three Village Academy and pre-K there. Hopefully, we can expand our pre-K program so that everyone who wants to send their kids to pre-K can do so, and for a full day, not a half day only. All that stuff is very important to look into and to keep that way.

### **If the issue resurfaces, would you vote for repurposing a school?**

As long as it works, yes.

### **What is your reaction to the failure of the bond vote in January?**

It's a problem. Of course, the bond is a very economical way for us to spend money because we get 66% of it back from the state. That bond was going to be used to restore a lot of our buildings, especially the very old cupolas that are falling apart. We've had other problems in the elementary schools like Setauket Elementary School. The roof came down in the auditorium so we had to rebuild that. Nassakeag was flooded with that huge rainstorm that we had in August 2024.

### **What's your position on the potential introduction of armed guards into the district's security system?**

I'm mixed. I support them only being outside the schools and not with a gun in the schools. There are crazy people out there!

### **New York State enacted a statewide phone ban for all students during all periods this year. Do you think this policy was helpful towards students, both in and out of an academic context?**

I agree with the pocketing of the cell phones so that the students are not totally addicted to them. Maybe they'll actually go to classes and learn what's supposed to be taught in their classes.

Another problem is AI. I see in the newspapers that kids are actually having AI write their essays. That's not the way you learn. You have to be able to do it yourself. You may use AI for an idea or something, but don't have it do your work for you. Because unless you do the work, you don't learn what we're talking about.

### **What do you believe should be done to combat AI usage in Three Village?**

There is very little that the board can do. We've already done it by pocketing the cell phones while you're in school. The problem is that we have no control over what they do at home. If they use



Photo courtesy of Jeffrey Kerman

AI for that stuff at home, then it's a problem. That would probably be more on the parents than on the school board.

### **Communication is key in shaping school policy, yet many constituents often feel that the Board is not transparent enough. How do you believe the Board can better communicate with and involve parents and students in district decision-making?**

We just started the Ask Three Village website where you can ask questions about anything you want about the district. That was just started maybe three weeks ago. Again, we're looking into what you're talking about so that we can help everybody else and they can ask the questions and get answers. We've sent out this stuff through emails to the district, so it's up to people to read it.

### **What do you say to voters who feel upset with the status quo of the district, whether because of high taxes, cuts to certain areas, or some other reasons?**

What I feel is that we are trying to maintain the greatness of our school district. Sometimes, you have to do things that may not be so popular with your electorate, such as raising taxes. For instance, we have a lot of construction to do that was supposed to be done with the bond. Because of that, the taxes have to go up a little bit.

But look at what's going on in the South Country School District. The South Country School District is proposing to raise taxes about 14% this year. That's a lot of money, but it was because they did not monitor their spending; they actually overspent last year. We don't do that. Our assistant superintendent of finance, Jeff Carlson, is fantastic, so we always maintain what we're supposed to do.

### **Extracurricular activities, athletics, and clubs have faced significant funding cuts over the past several years. Would you seek to reverse them in another term?**

Always, because both my boys were athletes. They played varsity soccer, varsity tennis, and varsity lacrosse. All those things are important to maintain. As I said, kids are not just in school to learn their ABCs. They're also there to learn how to react with other kids and that type of stuff. That's what clubs and sports are for. All those things are important, so we should keep them all.

### **Do you have any other comments about the board or the upcoming election?**

There are three spots available, and only three of us are running. That is interesting, because I've always had a competitive election in the past. It's relaxing to not have to worry about that. But I would still come out and talk to *Kaleidoscope* anytime.

We also had a meeting with the Three Village Civic Association so that they could meet with the three candidates. More importantly, it was a budget presentation to try to ensure that our budget passes. Because if our budget doesn't pass, then it becomes a problem. In that case, we would have to decide whether to put the same budget up, which is a big problem, to lower the budget, which is a big problem, or to just go to contingency, which is an even bigger problem.



## Interview with Kerri Golini

by MICHAEL RETAKH,  
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Kerri Golini has worked in Three Village Central School District for over two decades, most recently as chairperson of the World Languages and English as a New Language Departments. She is running to replace Vincent Vizzo for her first term on the Board of Education.

Below are some excerpts from *Kaleidoscope's* interview with Golini: the full interview can be found at [bit.ly/kscope-golini](http://bit.ly/kscope-golini), or by scanning the QR code below.

### ***Kaleidoscope:* Why are you running for the board? What do you hope to accomplish?**

Kerri Golini: I chose to run for the Board of Education because I have dedicated nearly 30 years to this district, and I have truly valued that experience. While I was ready to retire, I wasn't ready to fully step away. I believe that this district is made up of exceptional people, and I would like to continue to work alongside them to ensure we provide a high quality of education that defines Three Village.

I don't have an agenda, and I truly just want to help in some of the decision-making. I believe that, with my experience of being an educator specifically in Three Village, I could be a valuable member. I have experience in the classroom and as an administrator, and I can share about that experience with my fellow board members.

### **Enrollment has been declining significantly. What are your ideas to best address it and the resulting financial difficulties?**

I don't have a solution. Without being on the board already, I think I would have to have access to the information that the other board members have to come up with ideas of how we could approach it. I know there were conversations about closing buildings. I would like to give a thoughtful response to that, but I just don't have enough information yet.

### **One of the effects of the budgetary difficulties has been cuts to extracurricular activities. Would you seek to reverse them?**

I support clubs and activities. I think they're extremely important. Obviously, we go to school to learn and that is the priority, but there's so much that can be learned outside the classroom.

Eventually, if the money's there, I would like to reverse the cuts. I would love for all students to have the opportunity to create

a club, but I think we have to be fiscally responsible.

### **One of the most controversial board decisions in recent history was the refusal to move start times later last year. Do you support a start time change, and would you push for one when you get on the board?**

No. In an ideal world, students would be able to start later, but I'm not confident that the change in start time would result in more rest for students. If your day includes all these activities, a part-time job, and some socialization with your friends — your day is 18 hours, you're only getting six hours of sleep either way.

Also, it's a lot of money for that change in start time. Personally, I have two children who went through Ward Melville that started early, and they're healthy and thriving post-college.

### **This year, New York State enacted a statewide bell-to-bell cell phone ban for all students. Do you think this policy was helpful to our students?**

Absolutely. I was thrilled when that happened. I know there's a lot of positives with the devices, but I've seen a lot of negatives. So I'm absolutely in support of the ban. I think it's great for students to not have their phones on them all day long while they're in school.

### **We've recently had some issues with both students and teachers using AI. Do you believe there is anything the board can do to limit inappropriate AI usage?**

I think we need clear, neutral guidelines that identify what is considered acceptable versus inappropriate. I think we need to provide guidance to students and staff on how AI works, including its limitations and its issues. I think maybe we could incorporate AI literacy into the curriculum. Teachers, because they're older, probably need professional development.

### **What is your position on a potential introduction of armed guards to the district security system?**

I support it. I think it would be a huge deterrent, and I do believe that it's the only way that a shooter is going to be stopped if that was to occur in our school. Obviously, a lot of thought has to go into how we have armed guards.

### **Would you support armed guards only outside school buildings or inside them as well?**

I would be fine with both. But I don't think every security guard needs to have a gun on them.

### **You weren't on the board last**



Photo courtesy of Kerri Golini

### **year, but what is your position on the district restructuring?**

I think that the restructuring has provided our sixth and ninth graders with more opportunities for electives. Personally, as a parent, I like the other configuration for social and developmental reasons.

### **Recently, we've seen trends, including in Three Village, of students chasing achievements instead of deeply engaging with interesting subjects. What could you do as a board member to push students towards genuine intellectual curiosity?**

It's not something I can answer at the moment, because I think it requires some research. But this is an important problem. I do appreciate the district's strong academic environment: it served my children very well. I think recently it may have gone a little too far. For example, kids are cheating because they just want the grade instead of the actual learning.

### **What do you say to voters who are upset with the district, whether because of high taxes, cuts to certain programs, or other reasons?**

I do believe taxpayers deserve transparency. I would like the community to be confident that we're prioritizing what matters most: strong classrooms, essential programs, and long-term student success. Maybe we need to make it easier to understand the budget. We need to eliminate inefficiencies that might exist. We need smarter planning, so we can reduce unnecessary cuts while being responsible with taxpayer money.

### **What do you think the board can do to better communicate with people and involve parents, students, teachers, and other stakeholders in decision-making?**

For the budget, the superintendent and assistant superintendent do presentations. I don't know if everyone's showing up to listen. That might be part of the problem.

I do think that sometimes, if you just read the board presentation, things might not seem clear, and they just have to be explained further. The in-person dialogue is helpful. Maybe we do something different, where it is more of a dialogue and people feel more comfortable asking questions.

### **Is it a concern for you that you are running unopposed? Do you want to see more people running for the board?**

I'm very happy that I'm running unopposed because I would imagine it would be more stressful otherwise. I'm also happy because I think the focus now will be the budget, not the candidates.

However, it is a little concerning that no one else ran. People are busy — I couldn't do this if I was still working — so I understand. But I would hope that more people would be more interested.



## Clubs Travel to Conferences and Competitions

by LUCIANA HAYES  
and JULIETTA MCKEE,  
STAFF WRITERS

Certain clubs at Ward Melville are built around their weekly meetings, gathering together to enjoy some shared downtime. Others look further and focus on helping the Three Village community. A select few, however, aren't confined by classrooms or borders: after preparing for months, they travel hundreds of miles to participate in elite competitions.

In January, the Ward Melville Iron Patriots robotics team was presented with their game, after which they had approximately six weeks to design, manufacture, and assemble a functional robot. This season, the game involved shooting dense foam balls known as fuel into their alliance's hub, a rectangular prism with an opening at the top. In doing so, the robot would have to traverse underneath a metal bar, over a bump, or both. Additionally, robots could be built to climb a tower for additional points.

From March 11 to March 14, the Ward Melville Iron Patriots robotics team attended the Finger Lakes Regional Competition at the Rochester Institute of Technology, where they ranked 19th in qualification rounds. This eliminated them from the playoffs, but they were still able to compete after substituting for a team whose robot was damaged. However, their luck did not continue, and they lost their playoff match.

The following week, they attended the FIRST Long Island Regional at Hofstra University. Out of 48 teams, the Iron Patriots ranked 13th in qualification, securing a spot in the playoffs. They were able to play several matches, but they were eliminated after losing two.

Despite the results, captain Aditya Kumar reflected positively on the season, saying, "Competitively, it's a lot of luck, and we got unlucky. Even so, everyone had a ton of fun. ... There's a lot of upward momentum for next year." Kumar also noted that the Rochester trip was a new experience for the team: "This was the first time we went upstate to Rochester. It was expensive but really fun, and

a completely different experience than usual. There were 50 teams we'd never seen before, and a lot of people could see what other teams were doing and learn from them."

At the same time as the Long Island Regional, Ward Melville's Science Olympiad team competed at the New York Science Olympiad Division C State Tournament in Syracuse. The team faced a challenging tournament, achieving their worst result in more than a decade, placing sixth. Captain Amartya Das explained that there were "some unforeseen challenges at States, which led to relatively poor performance as compared to previous years," adding that those issues were tied to Build and Tech events. Even so, he said the season was also "a year of change" because the team worked to accommodate the 9th graders, which was an "overall successful" effort.

Das emphasized that the trip still had clear benefits for the team, noting, "The team did gain experience from the tournament, and people are excited to continue and do more SciO." Looking ahead, he said the team hopes to "recalibrate next year and refocus on preparation to take back our title."

That same weekend — adding to headaches caused by the scheduling conflict between the robotics and SciO tournaments — the Ward Melville Model United Nations team traveled to Manhattan to represent Indonesia at the National High School Model United Nations Conference. To prepare, the club practiced debate strategies, extensively researched their topics, and wrote detailed position papers. Across ten committees, Ward Melville delegates discussed topics ranging from the rise of protectionism to the safeguarding of children in international adoptions.

A highlight of the conference was the appearance, albeit virtually, of former Massachusetts governor, Utah senator, and presidential candidate Mitt Romney. He gave a short speech about the continued importance of civility and compromise, followed by a question-and-answer session about the current state of international politics. Michael Retakh, the Secretary-General of the Ward Melville club, said, "Even though it wasn't as exciting as last year when [former president] Biden was there in-person, it was still very interesting to hear Romney speak. I'm grateful to NHSMUN for

making it happen."

After three days of intense debate and performance, Retakh and his co-delegate Alexander Gembinski were honored with an Award of Merit, marking the first time since 2023 that Ward Melville has been recognized by the conference. "We didn't go in with the expectation of winning," Retakh clarified. "It was a nice surprise to get the award, and I hope it motivates future Ward Melville delegates to work hard and contribute to their committees."

Reflecting on the trip, Model UN president Julien Maurer said, "It went very well. We had a strong group who put a lot of research into Indonesia. They did a great job preparing for debates and being outspoken about their issues in committee." Maurer also highlighted the conference experience beyond awards, saying, "The opportunity to be in New York City for three days for such an international conference was definitely memorable, and, as always, it was an absolutely wonderful experience."

That same stretch of early March also marked a historic showing for Ward Melville's DECA chapter at the New York State Career Conference, held from March 4 to March 6. After months of preparation, the team delivered one of its strongest performances to date. In previous years, the chapter typically sent between 10 and 14 students to the International Career Development Conference, DECA's highest level of competition: this year, that number surged to 24 qualifiers. Even more impressively, three teams earned first-place finishes in New York. DECA president Alexandra Potekhin reflected on the accomplishment, saying, "I couldn't be prouder of what our team achieved this year. Everyone put in an incredible amount of effort leading up to States, and it really showed in our results."

Building on that momentum, the team traveled to Atlanta, Georgia, from April 25 to April 29 to compete at ICDC, where Ward Melville students continued to stand out on the international stage. Valentina Trajkovic earned a top 20 finish worldwide on the Marketing Management Team Decision Making exam, while partners Bianca Chu and Rachel Scott placed in the top 20 overall for Travel and Tourism Team Decision Making. Beyond the competition, members described the trip as both exciting

and memorable, with visits to the Georgia Aquarium and the World of Coca-Cola adding to the experience. "It wasn't just about competing," said member Jeren Chi. "We all bonded a lot as a team."

DECA was not the only Ward Melville club to advance to a higher level of competition. On March 30, the Ward Melville Mock Trial team became the Suffolk County Mock Trial Champions after an hourslong competition against the Northport team. Mock Trial Coach Doug Elliot, who also taught English at Gelinis Middle School until retiring several years ago, spoke about the team's performance by saying, "Our team had a genuine commitment to improvement this year, and we saw our performance peak at the exact right time in the run for the county championship."

This year, students worked for months on a criminal case involving robbery and larceny, preparing arguments as both the prosecution and the defense. Following three rounds of trials, the team made it to the playoffs as the second seed. After four more playoff trials, the Ward Melville Mock Trial team was crowned County Champions, continuing their undefeated season.

"Last year, we didn't make the playoffs," explained Madeline Galeotafiore, one of the senior captains on the team. "That was disappointing, especially since we were coming off a big win from the year before. Because of that, we seniors gave our last season everything we had."

As a result of their championship, the Ward Melville Mock Trial team will be traveling to Albany to compete at Mock Trial States from May 17 to May 19, 2026. Galeotafiore said, "I'm so excited to be back at the State Finals up in Albany for the second time in my Mock Trial career."

Despite speaking positively about their experiences, club leaders repeatedly voiced one major concern: the cost of such competitions. With some trips approaching \$1,000 per student, it is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain participation. Retakh explained, "We had some students who were very enthusiastic about going to NHSMUN 2026, but then they couldn't afford it. It's really unfortunate that the district can't help us, and it's frankly disheartening to see them cutting club funding by another 20% next year."



**RISTORANTE  
PIZZERIA  
CATERING**

2194 NESCONSET HIGHWAY  
STONY BROOK, NY 11790  
(631) 751-1600

SUNDAY - THURSDAY: 11:00 AM - 10:00 PM  
FRIDAY - SATURDAY: 11:00 AM - 11:00 PM

## New Director Arrives at Emma S. Clark Library

by SARAH CHERLIN and ALEXANDRA COTLET, COPY EDITOR and CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER

On January 20, Theresa Liguori officially began serving as the new director of Emma S. Clark Memorial Library. After years of experience in library management at the University of Denver, as well as serving as the Chief Public Services Officer for the Denver Public Library, Liguori's move to Three Village was motivated by a desire to directly serve and engage with a community. Through the plans and goals she has established in just three months, her passion for building a space that brings the Three Village community together and preserving local history is abundantly clear.

As director, one of the most prominent aspects of the job that Liguori has come to appreciate is the unique nature of the library and the community it serves. In an interview with *Kaleidoscope*, she emphasized the library's expansive "highly circulating collection" as well as its historical roots—Emma S. Clark is one of the few libraries across the nation that has remained continuously open since the 1800s. "We preserved and still preserve our history, but we try to create, expand, and blend with what the community needs," Liguori stated. "For me, this was an opportunity of a lifetime to be in this little gem of a location."

Much of Liguori's typical day revolves around collaborating with her team and continuously finding ways to improve the library and its service to the Three Village community. She begins her mornings by walking through the building, ensuring that the environment is clean and the library is ready to open. From there, she meets with her staff and begins to review the library's newsletter, staying up to date with all the upcoming activities in the building. She stressed the importance of working with her team and the library's board in her daily routine, explaining, "Our board is very involved with the work we're doing. Our buildings and grounds [committee] are helping us revamp the cafe. We have an investment committee and we have a personnel committee, so I've been getting involved with them a lot."

Currently, Liguori's daily work also includes adapting to her new position and the numerous

responsibilities that come along with it. "Right now, a lot of my day-to-day work is getting on-boarded because my role is new. I didn't have an opportunity to transition with the previous director, so I'm getting up to speed," she said.

Even while adjusting, Liguori has been working to address issues facing the library. She noted the rise in popularity of digital "e-books" as a major concern for Emma S. Clark. Specifically, the impermanent nature of purchasing an e-book is detrimental to libraries: it leaves them without an actual collection or any proof of ownership while still charging high costs. "I think, nationally, everybody's looking at this because it's costing a lot of money. ... In the end, we don't have anything to say that it's ours. And that does affect the community, because you're paying taxes that are going toward something that's only ours for a little bit," she said.

To address some of the challenges caused by the rise in e-books, Liguori has been engaging with advocates from the Suffolk County Library System. She explained, "I met this week with somebody from SCLS who's working with the state, and we talked about how we could lobby with the legislators and get in front of them." Liguori also highlighted the power of uniting with other libraries across Suffolk County to benefit the community, adding, "The Suffolk County Library System pulls us all together. They advocate for us, and we buy through a consortium with them—we purchase as a collective, and we get things at a discount."

As for the future, Liguori is currently concentrating on setting up a roadmap for the next several years. In crafting a strategic plan, which is expected to be completed by the end of the year, she has to take into account the requirements from the community and the overall budget situation. "We're looking at creating some strategy and long-term planning, and then the budget ties into that," she explained.

The process involves many considerations, both old and new. For example, Liguori mentioned the ever-present problem of space allocation: she wants to create a dedicated space for teenagers without affecting existing collections and common areas.

On the other hand, the library is currently reckoning with new technologies, most notably artificial intelligence. Liguori highlighted the importance of using AI resources responsibly and finding the place for it within libraries. "Everybody has access to it now, so how do we use it responsibly,



Photo courtesy of Theresa Liguori

and what is our role in that?" she asked.

Liguori is also excited about managing the variety of programs Emma S. Clark has to offer. Among her favorite initiatives is the annual Helen Stein Shack Book Contest, where middle and high school students are invited to write picture books. The winner receives a cash prize, recognition from local government officials, and even an opportunity to have their book bound and be featured in the library's collection. "They're just beautiful books," Liguori explained. This event takes place between October and January, culminating with an awards ceremony in the spring.

The library also places a strong emphasis on community service and engagement. Students have contributed thousands of service hours through initiatives such as assembling the library's seed collection, thereby allowing patrons to borrow and grow plants at home. Seasonal programs, including a small beachside library at West Meadow Beach, further extend the library's reach beyond its walls. In addition, Liguori pledged to maintain annual events established by her predecessors that aim to bring the community together, such as summer reading programs and live music performances.

In fact, she is actively working to expand such outreach. The library recently established a new partnership with the Long Island Museum, allowing students to enjoy additional tour experiences and visit exhibits about everything from horse carriages to video

games. Liguori is also looking to develop the "Library of Things," a program that lets patrons borrow board games, sewing machines, musical instruments, and more. In particular, she is working on adding a video game console to the program, although this requires developing reasonable policies for borrowing such devices. These programs are a direct reflection of Liguori's desire to connect the library to other institutions in the area.

Importantly, Liguori expressed that the library caters to all stages of one's life. As an example, she brought up the "Senior Bus," which organizes activities, brings elderly individuals to the library, and even offers delivery services for those who are unable to come to the library themselves. "All ages, cradle to grave, really is what we do here," Liguori emphasized. In addition, Liguori showed a particular enthusiasm in maintaining the legacy of the local area. She would like to create an archival space at the library where historical documents, yearbooks, local records, and possibly even past print editions of *Kaleidoscope* could be accessed by the general public.

At the end of the day, Liguori's philosophy involves both creativity and legacy. Whether it be through increased programs, the incorporation of modern technology, or the preservation of the past, her philosophy embodies a desire to make Emma S. Clark Memorial Library a more vibrant institution that is open to all. As she settles into her position, her priorities remain unchanged.

## Ward Melville Seniors Choose Colleges

by **BELLA LI,**  
STAFF WRITER

Every year on May 1, Ward Melville becomes filled with college merchandise as seniors finalize their commitments to certain schools. However, Decision Day is not only a celebration for any particular university, nor does it serve only as the beginning of the final days at Ward Melville for those graduating in June. In fact, it is the culmination of a months-long process to determine one's future.

Attending college is a pivotal experience for a high school graduate, offering opportunities to benefit both academically and personally. However, deciding where to commit to is far from simple. Every year, after an often grueling application season, students are admitted to multiple schools, each with its own strengths and weaknesses. As a result, choosing the right one becomes an extremely complex decision.

With tuition costs nearly

doubling over the last 30 years and continuing to soar, affordability has become a major concern. According to a survey conducted by Carnegie Higher Education, 51% of graduating seniors state that scholarships and financial aid are a key consideration when committing to a college. Students must ensure that they can afford not only tuition, but also additional expenses like housing, textbooks, and daily living costs.

"Cost was definitely a major factor in where I applied to college and committed, especially since I am considering applying to medical school," said Ward Melville senior Lily Huang. "It feels impractical to spend hundreds of thousands of dollars on an undergraduate education when higher education would be a better place to invest that money for my goals."

Beyond the initial cost, students must also consider the type of aid they receive — whether it includes grants, scholarships, or loans that must be repaid. For students who plan to pay their tuition themselves, this often means taking out student loans: as of 2025, more than 42% of young adults reported having student loan debt.

Naturally, students also take

into account the relative strength of various departments and majors. For those who wish to pursue a specific career path, it is imperative to choose a school with a strong program in that field. "At the end of the day, I wanted somewhere with a strong business program," remarked one Ward Melville senior. Moreover, selecting a college with a strong academic reputation and more rigorous coursework can prepare students who wish to attend graduate school.

On the other hand, many students are still unsure about their future plans. As a result, flexibility becomes an important factor. "I'm interested in several fields," said another senior. "I don't want to be locked into something right away."

The quality and availability of teachers and faculty also plays a crucial role. Students with supportive and well-experienced professors can gain mentorship and guidance that leads to success. Senior Michael Retakh explained, "I'm interested in math, so I went over lists of faculty to see their different research areas and status in their fields."

Location is another major consideration for incoming freshmen. Students must examine how

a college's location aligns with both their academic goals and lifestyle preferences. That includes everything from general climate to the all-important urban-suburban divide.

On average, colleges in urban areas have more internship opportunities and job openings, and they can offer a more diverse cultural experience. However, such schools also come with an unavoidably higher cost of living, which factors into housing, food, and transportation expenses.

Furthermore, location affects travel and personal independence. A college far from home may offer more opportunities for personal growth, but a closer college would make it easier to visit family. "When I was applying, I was mainly focused on East Coast schools. Even though I'll be going to California, I'm excited for the change of pace," said Retakh.

Beyond location, academics, and cost, there are an infinite number of factors that high school seniors could consider when making this consequential decision. But once they commit and wear their sweatshirts on May 1, they'll hopefully know that they made the right choice.

**C**

# CULPERS 1778

## A REVOLUTION ON DINING

### PRIME STEAK SEAFOOD COCKTAILS

212 Main St, East Setauket NY, 11733  
(631) 355-7037  
Monday: Closed  
Tuesday-Sunday: 4-10 PM

## Sweating to Success

by **ARIEL BASSIS,**  
SPORTS EDITOR

For many students, varsity sports are defined by the games, crowds, stats, and final scores. However, for athletes at Ward Melville High School, those moments only represent a small portion of a much broader athletic experience. Behind every match is a physically and mentally demanding routine, a constant act of balance with personal lives, and a culture shaped by both pressure and purpose.

During the season, a typical day for a varsity athlete extends well beyond the final bell, regardless of the sport. Baseball pitcher and senior Thomas Poor explained that their days are “usually about four to five hours longer than normal,” adding that the routine can be “exhausting.” Despite this, Poor also noted, “There’s always a strong sense of reward at the end of the day that makes it worth it.” Football quarterback Hudson Philbrick, a junior at Ward

Melville, described his average day during the season, saying, “We hit a lift from 2 to 2:45 p.m. Then our practice is usually from 3:10 to 5:45, but it sometimes goes until 6.” Philbrick added, “I get in bed by 9:30 and sleep from 10 to 6:15 a.m. to make sure I get eight hours of sleep.” That level of dedication leaves little room for downtime. As a result, the act of balancing academics, athletics, and personal responsibilities becomes a part of the lifestyle. While the structure of their routines can be difficult, it also reinforces discipline and consistency — qualities that define varsity-level competition.

Game days introduce an even higher level of commitment for these athletes. While the schedule may remain similar, the mindset shifts. Poor explained, “There’s a stronger sense of competition. “The games, and especially who we’re playing, are on my mind all day.” Junior Grady Ghiz, a varsity golfer, echoed this concept, saying, “On matchday, the attitude is different going in, and it depends on who we are playing. Everyone is in their own little zone, working

on what’s important for the round before we tee off.” Mental preparation for these varsity athletes remains a shared experience.

Alongside the intensity that inherently lies in varsity sports comes an unavoidable pressure within the culture. While some athletes feel most stressed during games, others experience it through managing and maintaining expectations. Ghiz pointed out, “You have to keep up a consistent performance, since there’s always the possibility of losing your starting spot. It’s important to win your match and shoot a good score.” At the same time, however, he emphasized that most of these pressures can be alleviated by “controlling the controllables” and focusing on preparation. For Philbrick, his greatest challenge comes from “trying to balance everything. All of what’s going around you on top of school and work can be really tiring.” This act of strict balancing from a variety of fields becomes a defining part of the varsity experience for these athletes.

Beyond routines and expectations, varsity sport culture

also shapes how athletes view themselves. “A big part of my identity is tied to baseball,” Poor said. “When the team is doing well, I feel like I’m doing well, and when we’re struggling, it affects me too.” Philbrick noted that he shares a passionate connection with football, “Everything I am comes from the sport of football. It has taught me accountability, respect, hard work, and responsibility. I truly don’t know where I’d be without it.” For Ghiz, his history of connection runs even deeper. “I was born into a golf-loving family, so it’s been with me for a while now. As soon as I could walk, I had a plastic golf club in my hand.”

Despite the demands, the pressure, and the time commitment, student-athletes continue to invest themselves fully in their sport. Varsity culture cannot be defined by a single moment or final score; instead, it is built through the progress, pressure, and personal growth that comes with being a part of something larger than oneself.

## A Look At Unique Extracurriculars

by **PRANAV MUKHI and**  
**ALEXANDRE MAURER,**  
STAFF WRITERS

Ward Melville High School’s atmosphere may appear to be defined by academic rigor. Ranked among the top public high schools in New York and the nation, it is often praised for its strong academics and high AP participation. Yet beneath this surface lies an aspect of student life filled with creativity and originality extending beyond the classroom.

Art is a notable area in which Ward Melville students express their imagination. Senior Maria Gavrilov, the current president of the school’s National Art Honor Society chapter, offers a prime example of such activity. Even during her time at Gelinus Middle School, she quickly joined the Junior Honor Society and contributed to the background animation for the school musical “Matilda.”

At Ward Melville, she explored a wide variety of courses in the art department and continues to be inspired by the visual and artistic development of video games. Recognizing Gavrilov’s talent, her ceramics teacher, James Swierupski, encouraged her to participate in the “Long Island’s Best” Art Competition at the Heckscher Museum of Art. Gavrilov submitted “The Keys to the Whole,” a mixed medium piece which

incorporated acrylic on wood, valves of instruments, and spare keys. Out of 402 entries and 84 selected final artworks, Gavrilov won first place with the “Best in Show” award, receiving a monetary prize and a banner displayed at Ward Melville. Reflecting on her experience, Gavrilov appreciates that she was “pushed to share art.”

Next fall, Gavrilov will attend the Ringling College of Art and Design in Sarasota, Florida. She plans to explore video game character design, a broad field that presents many opportunities and allows her to pursue her greatest interests. Gavrilov encourages young students interested in art to “keep drawing” and to share their work with others.

Wendy Tong is another exceptional artist at Ward Melville. While the COVID-19 pandemic limited her opportunities to study art during middle school, she began taking classes at the Atelier at Flowerfield during the summer after ninth grade. After moving up to the high school, Tong took multiple advanced art courses, including Studio Art, Sculpture, and AP Drawing and Painting. In particular, the AP classes motivated her to draw every day.

Tong describes her art style as realistic, and she generally employs bright colors. She finds relationships and interpersonal dynamics fascinating, frequently making them the subject of her award-winning artwork. During Tong’s junior year, she won two Silver Keys from The Scholastic Art and

Writing Awards, the country’s most prestigious recognition program for creative students. During her senior year, she added two additional Gold Keys, which Scholastic gives to the top 5 to 7% of entries, to her collection. Tong plans to attend the Rhode Island School of Design to pursue a Masters of Fine Arts. She encourages anyone interested in a similar path to find something that inspires and motivates them to draw.

Many students also express their creativity through mediums such as photography. Junior Aidan Williams discovered his passion for sports photography through an unexpected turn of events. Initially, he was recruited by a friend to help fix the football team’s replay system for a football game against Walt Whitman High School. “I was just there to fix the camera setup,” Williams explained. However, before arriving at the game, Williams asked if he could bring his own camera along to take photos. When he showed the photos to some of the players, they complimented his work and encouraged him to continue. Williams stated, “Looking back now, they weren’t that great, but at the time it was crazy. That’s what got me going.”

Williams now photographs many of Ward Melville’s sports teams and is a member of the Section XI Student Media team, granting him access to go on the field or in the press box during certain games. As his work load has expanded, Williams has committed significant time to

photography. Both shooting and editing can be slow processes, making time management one of his top priorities. Balancing photography with schoolwork remains a challenge for him, especially when he has multiple games to shoot during the sports season. In the future, Williams hopes to continue sports photography in college on a more professional level.

Beyond the arts, other students at Ward Melville flex their creativity and problem-solving in different ways. Austin Chen and Jinxu Zhu, both juniors at Ward Melville, are co-founders of RenewByte Solutions, a non-profit organization dedicated to repairing donated electronics and distributing them to those in need. Donations are first received at Saint Gerard Majella Roman Catholic Church in Port Jefferson. The devices are then assessed for their condition, with unrepairable devices sold on eBay. (These proceeds go toward buying additional devices to donate).

Entirely self-taught, Zhu learned the technical side of repairing electronics through watching Youtube videos and following tutorials from websites such as iFixit. Zhu stated, “When I watched those videos, I realized I could use these skills to help my community.” Meanwhile, Chen manages logistics and finances for RenewByte by conducting outreach and setting up community events. Within just 6 months since the start of their operation, RenewByte has donated 19 devices to the local community.

## A Race To the Starting Line

by LILY HUANG,  
COPY EDITOR

American universities expect students to prepare for college applications vastly differently from peers in other countries. Instead of recruiting applicants mainly based on academic performance, the majority of U.S. institutions have adopted a “holistic” review of prospective students. On top of grades and standardized testing scores, additional key components of an application include awards, extracurriculars, demonstrated growth from personal experiences, life circumstances, and even the applicant’s personality.

While it is true that these criteria can measure a student’s ability to balance academics with other endeavors, determine a cultural fit for specific campuses, and account for systemic inequities in a country with such disparate educational systems and opportunities, I and many of my high school peers have found that the resulting expectations have snowballed completely out of control.

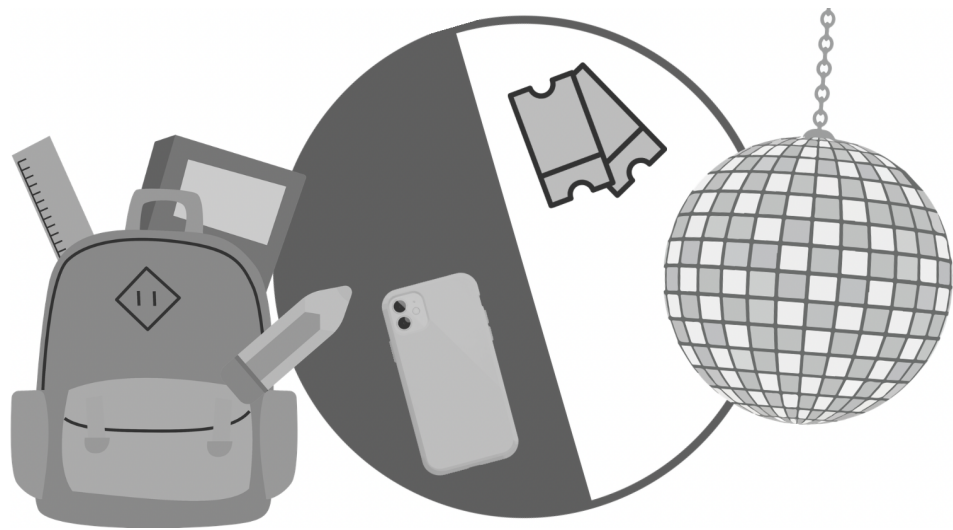
Over the past several decades, the population of applicants has significantly increased while admitted class sizes at top colleges have remained relatively stagnant. Acceptance rates at such schools consequently decline year by year. Meanwhile, the

academic and extracurricular bar for the “standard” accepted applicant has only skyrocketed.

Worse, however, is the fact that this bar is little more than educated guesswork — most universities are infamously opaque about their admissions criteria and incredibly protective over their images of prestige. Even broad decision-making factors aren’t disclosed, and acceptance rates are kept (often artificially) low even as the number of incredibly high-achieving applicants appears to increase.

Unfortunately, these conflicting trends have made college admissions culture unhealthily competitive. More than ever, there is an intense pressure on high schoolers to get ahead in order to be a viable candidate for their desired universities. To aspiring students, the aforementioned “holistic” considerations read as an overwhelming checklist to reaching the bare minimum held by admissions offices.

The constant discussion surrounding college applications online has only exacerbated the toxic culture of comparison and competition. Instead of the limited number of in-school peers to contrast yourself with, social media creates an intimidatingly limitless pool of kids around the country with perfect grades, their own organizations, national awards, impactful career-oriented experience, and a fully-fledged plan for their future. Combine this with



fearmongering college admissions “guides” that spout thousands of contradicting pieces of advice, and an unrelenting, impossible-to-ignore message quickly emerges: you’re either ahead of the game or not in it at all.

As a result, high schoolers feel obligated to center our lives around curating a profile that will shine in the heaping pile of applications. Students push themselves beyond their limits as they take on multiple college-level courses per year to maximize their course rigor and GPAs, forfeiting the time to study subjects of true interest deemed to be less eye-catching. Activities such as leading clubs, conducting research, and establishing nonprofits have evolved from authentic passion projects to include disingenuous resume-boosters hoping to stand out from the crowd. But since these endeavors have led time and time again to success, it is hard to place the blame for these a dime a dozen efforts completely on the player.

Clearly, the bigger culprit is the college admissions game.

It must be asked why colleges have come to expect kids to conduct years-long research and publish papers, establish and coordinate entire organizations, or speak to what fields of study we want to dedicate our entire lives to. It is completely backwards that universities expect high school students to already have the skills and experience that should be developed throughout higher education. Ultimately, the state of our college application system — the heightening expectations, the exhaustion, the competition, the constant feeling that somehow more should have been done — positions universities as the finish line instead of the first big academic stride into our futures. This attitude has detrimentally encouraged us to sprint towards empty accomplishments and forget there is still so much to learn about our interests, about our world, and about ourselves.

## The Death of School Spirit

by REBECCA MALZ,  
CHIEF FINANCIAL  
OFFICER  
and CAROLINE QIAN,  
ARTS AND  
ENTERTAINMENT  
EDITOR

Every year, the student government organizes the junior prom, an exciting night that offers a brief respite from the stresses of junior year. However, out of more than 450 juniors, fewer than 100 purchased tickets this year.

Worse, that lack of interest extends far beyond these large events, with many school clubs also reckoning with declining participation and a dearth of enthusiasm. Take, for example, the Yearbook Club. Editor-in-Chief Greta Anselm, a senior, noted that “the club used to have around 30 committed students each year. Since I’ve joined, that’s been decreasing, and it has also become incredibly difficult to convince people to

join.”

Students are becoming dangerously apathetic about seemingly everything, and especially their non-academic lives. But this isn’t just a trend at Ward Melville alone: other high schools mirror this student inactivity. Many students across the nation opt out of participating in school events for a variety of reasons, including school-induced stress and burnout, our society’s fixation on conformity, and social media’s rampant “cringe culture.”

Students, on average, have several hours of homework each and every day. Add on chores, sports, part-time jobs, and caretaking responsibilities, and it’s easy to see why most students routinely plod through the hallways in utter exhaustion. In this state of fatigue, the possibility of a nap is far more appealing than spending extra hours volunteering for a club or attending a fundraiser.

Another issue that holds many students back from attending school events and displaying school spirit is the pressure to conform. An anonymous Ward Melville sophomore affirmed this,

stating, “It’s kind of uncomfortable to go to events alone, [whereas] when everyone goes to an event, the chances of getting made fun of are lower because it’s deemed a ‘normal’ thing to do.”

This is a prevalent mindset amongst students, and social media only exacerbates it. On social media, much of the popular “humorous” content consists of filming individuals without their knowledge, with the comments usually poking fun at their mannerisms, outfits, and speech. Being constantly flooded with this type of content can quickly instill a fear of participation in young adults. Even expressing a simple and harmless opinion publicly can seem daunting. Anselm noted that she’s noticed that “a lot fewer people are excited or even willing to answer questions for the yearbook.”

Decreasing school spirit is a complex problem that may seem overwhelming to fix. Even so, Ward Melville’s student government frequently attempts to tackle this issue. Junior Kelly Song, a member of the club, recalled the “Quarterzip and Matcha” spirit day from this fall. Inspired by the

viral social media trend of people wearing quarterzips while sipping matchas, the student government offered a limited number of Starbucks gift cards to students who wore their own quarterzips to school.

“It was one of the most successful spirit days of the school year with overwhelming participation,” said Song. This reflects an important idea: students are more likely to engage with some sort of incentive. It doesn’t have to be monetary, but anything relevant and exciting may provide enough encouragement to get people involved.

The modern high school student faces a crushing workload, toxic social media culture, and extremely little free time. It is no longer easy or appealing for high school students to attend events. Providing small incentives that all high schoolers love has the potential to draw them to participate. And once they start, they’ll be more likely to continue engaging without needing incentive or fearing judgment.

# Crossword Puzzle

by ANNIE HUANG,  
STAFF WRITER

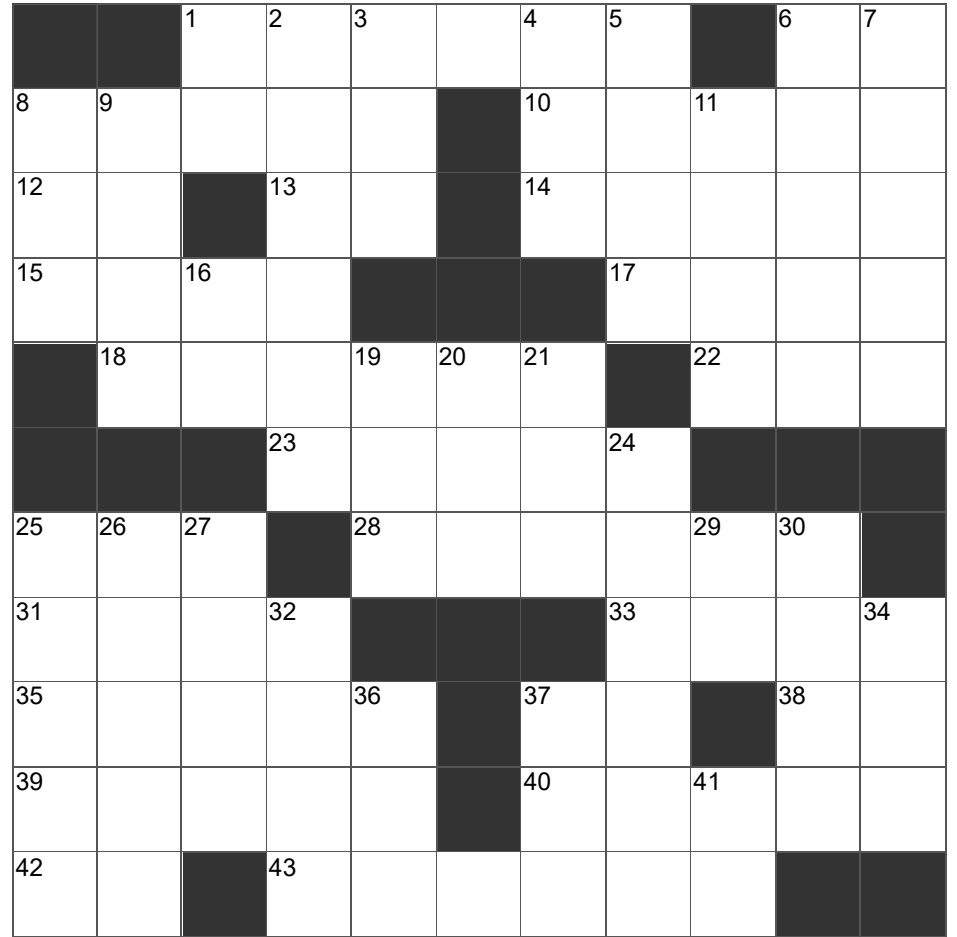
## ACROSS

1. Horse's run
6. A name of God
8. Without anyone else
10. Substitute
12. Male pronoun
13. Popular gaming slang (often typed in a hurry)
14. Subject
15. Holy aura
17. Black Friday offering
18. Compressed wood fuel
22. Confederate general
23. Go off script
25. [Not a typo]
28. Setting
31. Man or Wight
33. Soulmate, in text slang
35. Pituitary, for one
37. \_\_\_ dente
38. Doctor
39. Follower of a major Indian religion

40. Rapper behind *To Pimp A Butterfly*
42. Bathroom necessity, abbr.
43. Formally withdraw

## DOWN

1. Oldest continuously-played board game
2. Country in Southwestern Africa
3. Limb used for walking
4. Choose
5. Advantages
6. Napoleon's fate, twice
7. French high school
8. Sound of relief
9. \_\_\_ of faith
11. Iridescent gemstone
16. French article
19. Unhealth cholesterol, abbr.
20. Chess rating system
21. Tourette's symptom
24. Slow, emotional song
25. Occipital sense
26. Long Island airport location
27. Tribe
29. \_\_\_ and behold
30. Actress Stone
32. Concludes



34. Singer of "Summertime Sadness," abbr.
36. Owed or expected
37. Type of beer
41. First-person pronoun

# KALEIDOSCOPE 2025 2026

Editorial board

**Editors-in-Chief**  
Michael Retakh  
Alexandra Potekhin

**Copy Editors**  
Lily Huang  
Sarah Cherlin

**Chief Financial Officers**  
Alexandra Cotlet  
Rebecca Malz

**News Editor**  
Zaina Khan

**Science Editor**  
Sarah Wu

**Arts & Entertainment Editor**  
Caroline Qian

**Sports Editor**  
Ariel Bassis

**Op-Ed Editor**  
Allie Harrison

**Advisor**  
Mr. Oatis

**Business Advisor**  
Mr. Arico

REACH EVERY THREE VILLAGE FAMILY

## YOUR AD HERE

CONTACT KSCOPEWM@GMAIL.COM



# Congrats, Grad!

**Celebrate YOUR senior and all their hard work with a personalized shout-out in our June paper!**

Whether you're a proud parent or close friend of a Ward Melville Senior, put the spotlight on them with a dedicated spot in our June newspaper.

Photos, personalized messages, graphics, and more are available!



EMAIL KSCOPEWM@GMAIL.COM FOR FURTHER QUESTIONS.