

Niagara Falls Your Public Schools



WINTER 2024

Community Newsletter

Volume 10 Issue 2

Niagara Falls Schools' rich history honoring Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. expands

The District brings in 2024 with MLK Award nominations, special events

The Niagara Falls City School District (NFCSD) is proud to start 2024 with birthday celebrations for a man who changed the course of our world and lives, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. This year, the District celebrated the Dr. King holiday with the kick-off of its MLK, Jr. annual awards nomination process for the Spirit of Dr. King Award, Civil Rights Achievement Award, Youth Civil Rights Achievement Award, and the Tiffany-Nalls Ford Civil Rights Achievement Award. The awards process opened on Friday, January 12, 2024 and will close on February 23, 2024. Please visit our website, www.nfschools.net for nomination forms.

The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration honorees continue the work of Dr. King with respect to: social justice, empowering others, economic justice, non-violence, leadership, and diversity and inclusion.

Nominees may be individuals, organizations, agencies, or businesses that have demonstrated leadership in one or more of these areas.

Civil Rights Achievement Award:

Individual - Adult or Business/Organization
Exemplifying one or more of the following:

- Leadership in community-building
- Advocacy for educational excellence
- Accomplishments in furthering economic opportunity
- Promotion of social justice
- Achievements in advancing cultural awareness

Niagara Falls High School Choir performs at the 2023 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Awards.

Niagara Falls High School Youth Civil Rights Achievement Award:

Individual or Student Group/Club/Organization

Exemplifying one or more of the following:

- Leadership in community-building
- Advocacy for educational excellence
- Accomplishments in furthering economic opportunity
- Promotion of social justice
- Achievements in advancing cultural awareness
- Must be a current student or students enrolled at Niagara Falls High School

Spirit of Dr. King Award:

Individual - Business/Organization

Exemplifying one or more of the following:

- Leadership in community-building
- Advocacy for educational excellence
- Accomplishments in furthering economic opportunity
- Promotion of social justice
- Achievements in advancing cultural awareness
- Sets an example consistent with that of Dr. King in personal conduct, volunteer work, charitable efforts, or promoting the dignity of others.

Tiffany Nalls Ford Civil Rights Achievement Award

Individual

This high honor is presented to a community leader who exemplifies what it truly means to serve people. This honoree answered Dr. King's call to live a life filled with justice and love.

The awards will be presented at the NFCSD Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration on April 16, 2024, 6:00 p.m. at Bloneva Bond Primary School. This community celebration will include readings, music, a speaker, and much more. Details to come soon.

Be sure to save the date!



Niagara Falls Schools staff member Gail Clark performs a spoken word piece at the 2023 Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Awards.



Under the spell of Fitzmagic and Stevie

Two of our most beloved former Buffalo Bills visit Hyde Park

"The best day at school ever." That's not a bad way to sum up Wednesday, October 25, 2023, at Hyde Park Elementary, when two of the most beloved former Buffalo Bills players paid a visit. Bills players Ryan Fitzpatrick and Stevie Johnson rocked storytime when they read Stevie's new children's book, *The Legend of FitzMagic*—Mr. Nomadic, to two preK-3 and preK-4 classrooms before reading to a large crowd of K – grade 6 students and teachers assembled in the gym.

In anticipation of the Buffalo Bills-Tampa Bay Buccaneers Thursday Night Football (TNF) game the following evening, October 26, staff, students, and teachers were decked out in their Bills gear. The whole gym was a sea of blue, red, and white, and everyone had big cheers for the Bills and even sang the

"Shout!" song. The Niagara Falls High School Wolverine Cheerleaders got the crowd going with exciting cheers and jaw-dropping stunts. In keeping with the Buffalo Bills Foundation's Huddle for Hunger Campaign, Amazon (TNF airs on Amazon Prime) presented a \$25,000 donation to FeedMore WNY to support community nutrition programs.

Each student received a Bills-branded backpack with a copy of Johnson's book and healthy snack items.

Fitzpatrick and Johnson were very generous with their time. They stayed for quite a while after the pep rally/book reading to meet and greet and sign autographs.

Hyde Park shared the national Thursday Night Football spotlight with the Buffalo Bills as Amazon presented a video of the day's

events during the Thursday Night Football pregame show.

Huge congratulations and thank you to Hyde Park Principal Diane Ostertag and her staff for putting together a well-thought-out and beautifully executed event.

More photos pgs.4&5





From Niagara Falls City School District Superintendent Mark Laurie

Our accomplishments in Fall 2023 were many, and more success is on the horizon for the Niagara Falls City School District (NFCSD) in 2024. A constant review of our programs and the implementation of cutting-edge strategies keep us surging ahead, aiming for excellence and offering an excellent educational experience for students. We have concrete evidence that our learning methodology is working well when we see a jump in our graduation rate from 66% in 2019 to 85% in 2023. An increase of 19% is something to celebrate. We anticipate that the graduation rate for the Class of 2024 will continue this upward trend, as high school graduation for all students is the mission behind everything we do from pre-K 3 purposeful play to college-credit bearing artificial intelligence (AI) classes taught straight from Stanford University.

The District started the year honoring the great civil rights leader, the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. We officially celebrated Dr. King's birthday on January 15, 2024. The District is proud of the many creative ways our schools and students honor Dr. King each January and all year long.

As something new this year, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. District awards nomination season is a part of our Dr. King celebrations. The NFCSD's MLK, Jr. Awards season runs through February 23, 2024. You can find plenty of information on how to nominate an individual or group/organization for an award, by visiting the District's website, www.nfcschools.net. There you will find a link to the awards criteria and nomination forms.

These prestigious awards will be presented at a celebration of Dr. King's life that the District is proud to host on Tuesday, April 16, 2024. The event will occur at Bloneva Bond Primary School at 6:00 p.m. Be sure to save the date! More information about the event will come your way shortly.

Highlights:
September – December 2023

The extended school day for NFCSD elementary students received high praise. With dismissal time moved to 3:20 p.m., the students enjoy extra time for important subjects such as art, music, STEM, and physical education classes.

Niagara Falls High School expanded two courses and added five that are proving to be popular with students (enrollments are noted):

- African American Studies – 29 students
- Career and Financial Management (CFM 1 and CFM 2) – all students in grades 9 and 10 take these required courses
- Advanced Theatre Studies with African American History Unit – 18 students
- Jr. Law Enforcement – 7 students
- Education Pathway courses - 38 students
- Preparing for the College Environment - 20 students

The NFCSD completed safety assessments at all of its buildings under the STOP School Violence Act. As a result of these appraisals, the District has completed all suggested changes.

Eight Niagara Falls High School Wolverine teams qualified as Scholar-Athlete teams for the fall sports season.

NFHS sophomore Torianne Franke competed in the New York State Championships in diving. Three Niagara Falls High School girls softball players received college scholarships: Ava White (St. Peter's), Isabella Maynard (Ithaca), and Emilia Marra (PennWest Edinboro). NFHS started a girls' wrestling program in partnership with Niagara Wheatfield.

The new partnership between NFHS and Stanford University has been exceptional. Stanford is providing a group of seniors with an introduction to artificial intelligence (AI) course. Two hundred students enrolled at Stanford are taking the same course. The class includes elite university instruction on coding, building databases, designing websites, and using artificial intelligence tools. Students earn college credits through this program that they can use at any college in the country.

We anticipate that the graduation rate for the Class of 2024 will continue an upward trend. High school graduation is the mission behind everything we do from pre-K 3 purposeful play to college-credit bearing artificial intelligence (AI) classes provided by Stanford University. Our students are staying in school to graduate because we are keeping them engaged and challenged. Individualized learning sends students the message: you are unique, you are important, stay in school because we are going to help you have a truly fulfilling life.

Helping kids through their own experiences

Men Standing Strong Together relates to students “because they’ve been there”

“Men be strong together and act like men. And do it in love.” Corinthians 16:13. Gloria Dolson, one of the founders of Men Standing Strong Together (MSST), said that scripture inspired a small group of individuals to form a group that would put that idea into action.

Dolson said their philosophy is to approach young Black men and provide an example of what they could be. Sometimes, the youth act out; it is often because there was no father in their lives. Or the child was abused. MSST has members who have experienced the same abuse; those men are there to show love and concern to a child without a dad. They provide an example of how a clean, happy life is possible after a rough childhood.

MSST has been very active since it was formed in 2019. Dolson said the accomplishment she is most proud of is being involved in renaming Niagara Street School to Bloneva Bond Primary! Instead of being named after a street, this beautiful school is named after the first Black woman to serve on the Niagara Falls City School District Board of Education.

MSST unites with the Niagara Falls City School District students by hosting fun events in neighborhoods. Last year's Community Youth Fun Day brought out over 500 volunteers, including NFCSD staff. MSST hosts free movie nights at Harry F. Abate Elementary on

Friday evenings. Dinner is served free to all who attend the event; the movie is shown on the big screen in the Abate Auditorium. Afterward, a raffle for the students and parents features VISA gift cards, Tops gift cards, and gas gift cards - gift cards for items struggling families need. And checkmate! MSST's Philip Gibbs has started a chess club.

Trust is an issue with young Black men. Dolson said frequently they don't trust authority because they believe authority doesn't understand the struggle of their backgrounds. MSST is here to help - to provide solid role models and to lend a listening ear to the youths who desperately need one.



Members of MSST after a successful “A Charlie Brown Christmas” movie night at Abate on Dec. 15, 2024

Honoring the District's Finest Graduates

At its Board of Education meeting on Thursday, November 16, 2023 the District inducted the 2023 NFCSD Distinguished Alumni class: Gerald DeMunda, Class of 1966, Niagara Falls High School; James Vaccarella, Class of 1943, Trott Vocational High School; and Viola M. Vaughn, Ed.D., Class of 1965, Niagara Falls High School. Friends and family of each honoree attended the ceremony and were very touched that their loved ones were being so remembered.

Gerald DeMunda sacrificed for his country less than two years after graduating from Niagara Falls High School. Always a leader, DeMunda had a chance to demonstrate his leadership skills as captain and quarterback of the Gaskill Junior High School football team. His football prowess and leadership abilities carried over to his days at Niagara Falls High School where he was captain and quarterback of the football team all four years he attended the school (freshman – senior). But gridiron dreams and game winning passes had no place after high school. Things got serious, fast.

He joined the Marine Corp. only weeks after graduating in June 1966. Lance Cpl. Gerald DeMunda was deployed to Vietnam at the height of the conflict. According to his friends and family at the time, duty and service to his country were essential to him, so in January 1967, he proudly traveled 10,000 miles away to Southeast Asia to fight for freedom for people outside his country.

Corporal DeMunda was injured in March 1967 and was sent to Japan for knee anterior cruciate ligament (ACL) reconstruction. He stayed in Japan until September 1967, when he returned to Vietnam. Two months later, on November 26, 1967, DeMunda was killed in action by a gunshot wound to the chest. The Niagara Falls High School hero was only 20 years old. His deployment to Vietnam had been scheduled to end in December 1967, one month after his death.

Posthumously, Corporal DeMunda was awarded the Purple Heart and several military medals for bravery and successful combat missions.

James Vaccarella played three sports during his time at Niagara Falls High School (NFHS), though he was unable to go to college or join the workforce upon leaving high

school. A call from his country prevented that, and less than a year after his NFHS graduation, Vaccarella was drafted for military service in World War II. He spent two years in the army and 19 months on the front lines as a combat medic in the 305th Division, serving under Gen. George Patton.

During the War, Vaccarella liberated a concentration camp in Austria. Vaccarella took on that gut-wrenching duty where he saw many of the atrocities inflicted upon the camp prisoners and bravely led the survivors to freedom.

Combat medic Vaccarella fought in one of the most famous battles in world history, the Battle of the Bulge, in 1944. During the battle, James retrieved many soldiers who had significant injuries, saving their lives. Vaccarella earned a Purple Heart after being injured in the process of pulling a wounded soldier out of harm's way.

For his bravery and skill while serving in the armed forces, especially during the Battle of the Bulge in WWII, our Niagara Falls High School graduate James Vaccarella deserves a Distinguished Alumni honor.

Vaughn spent several years traveling back and forth to Africa with her husband and five grandchildren before settling there permanently. When she learned that the school pass rate was low for girls and young women in the part of rural Senegal where she lived, she felt compelled to act. The low pass rate for girls was traced back to girls and young women being kept home to work. Once they begin missing classes, the girls started failing exams, and many failed out of school entirely or dropped out.

Seeing this breach in the education of young women, Vaughn worked tirelessly to create WHEPSA – Women's Health Education and Prevention Strategies Alliance. Adding the phrase 10,000 Girls to the title represents the goal the young women in the program set for the number of their peers they want to reach.

10,000 Girls combines education and employment for girls. The education program gives girls a place and time to study and provides books and school supplies. All of the tutors in this program are teachers who volunteer their time. 10,000 Girls has a student pass rate of 92 percent.

The employment and training arm of 10,000 Girls is for girls who have failed at school or never attended. They each learn a trade of sewing or baking and the students run a pastry shop and a sewing workshop. Their handmade dolls and household linens are exported overseas and sold, and the earnings are split between the girls and the education program.

Viola's efforts were recognized when she was named a CNN Hero in 2008.



Generations of James Vaccarella's family accept his Distinguished Alumni Poster as a great honor.

Viola M. Vaughn has dedicated her life to learning. Years after graduating from Niagara Falls High School, Vaughn furthered her education in the Ivy League by earning her Doctor of Education Degree from Columbia University's prestigious Teacher's College. Vaughn is no stranger to Distinguished Alumni awards; Columbia's Teacher's College also awarded her their Distinguished Alumni Award.

Photographs by Dan Cappellazzo



Members of Gerald DeMunda's family gather around his Distinguished Alumni poster. Copies of each Distinguished Alumni poster will be placed in every District school. The Board also presented each family with a poster of their loved one.



NFCSD Board Member Nick Vilardo is joined by fellow members of the Niagara Falls High School class of 1965 to celebrate their classmate, Viola Vaughn.

Stevie Johnson and Ryan Fitzpatrick's visit to Hyde Park Elementary





UB WISE (Women in Science and Engineering) STEM Outreach Program

The NFCSD STEM programs K-12 are continuously engaging students in inquiry, literacy, science, engineering and technology to help solve problems like scientists and engineers. This year, one of the highlights was at Niagara Falls High School, where female students in STEM classes taught by Kate Johnston and Madison DalPorto engaged in the (State University of New York at Buffalo) UB WiSE STEM Outreach Program. This initiative aims to inspire and engage female students by promoting a career path in STEM. Collaborating with undergraduate women STEM majors as mentors, it helps young women in high school explore the exciting opportunities in STEM!

Our students engaged in 6 weeks of mentoring and building relationships with UB female STEM Majors. As a culminating activity our students attended the UB STEM Outreach Program Campus Day at UB on Friday October 27. They engaged in STEM activities,

toured the camps, saw the Gaming Room called Level Up, visited the libraries and listened and asked questions of a panel during lunch. This day will be followed in the Spring for an on-campus day which will be focused around students' current major/career interests.

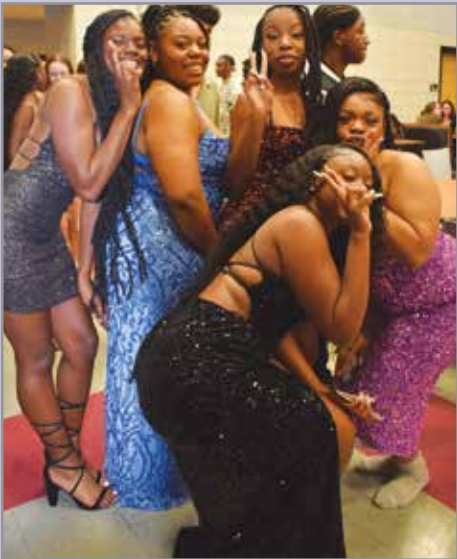


The Joseph Jacob Elementary Run

was a major success on October 12, 2023! Participation was huge and the weather was perfect. Pictured here are the sixth-grade girls from GJ Mann who made the mile run: Left to right: Caroline Evans, Gia Wrobel, Ella Magnuson, Milani Bell, Aniya Bradberry, and Sofia Neri



HOME COMING



The Diary of Anne Frank -

Presented by the Niagara Falls High School
Proscenium Players November 2, 3 and 4, 2023



January 2024

For an updated list of school events log on to www.nfschools.net

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
	1 New Year's Day – No Staff/No Students	2 Return from Winter Recess	3	4	5	6
WINTER RECESS						
7	8 6:00 p.m. – NFHS PEG Meeting	9	10	11 5:30 p.m. – BOE Review Meeting	12	13
14	15 Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday No Staff/No students	16	17	18	19	20
21	22	23 Regents Exams Start	24	25 5:00 p.m. – Hyde Park PEG Meeting 5:30 p.m. – BOE Review Meeting	26 Superintendent Conference Day – Elementary/Prep A.M./P.M. Professional Development Regents Exams End	27
28	29	30 DPC - 5:15 p.m. 5:00 p.m. – HJK PEG Meeting	31			

February 2024

For an updated list of school events log on to www.nfschools.net

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
				1	2 20-Week Marking Period Closes	3
4	5	6	7 Last Day for Teachers to Enter Grades	8 5:30 p.m. – BOE Review Meeting	9	10
11	WINTERFEST SPIRIT WEEK					17 7:00 p.m. – Winterfest Dance
	12 6:00 p.m. – NFHS PEG Meeting	13	14 	15	16 Winter Pep Rally	
18	19 President's Day – No Students/No Staff	20 SCD – NFHS AM/PM Professional Development	21	22 7:00 p.m. – NFCS D Choralfest 5:30 p.m. – BOE Regular Meeting	23	24
25	26 CogAT Testing Opens	27 5:00 p.m. – HJK PEG Meeting 5:15 p.m. – DPC Meeting 5:00 p.m. – Hyde Park PEG Meeting	28	29		

March 2024

For an updated list of school events log on to www.nfschools.net

SUNDAY	MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
					1 CogAT Testing Ends	2
3	4	5	6	7 Hyde Park Cap & Gown	8	9
10	11 6:00 p.m.- NHFS PEG Meeting	12	13	14 5:30 p.m. – BOE Review Meeting 2nd Marking Period Closes (Elem.)	15 SCD – All Levels AM/PM Professional Development 3rd Trimester Opens (Elem.)	16
17 	18	19 5:15 p.m. – DPC Meeting	20 5:00 p.m. – HJK PEG Meeting	21 5:30 p.m. – BOE Regular Meeting (Superintendent's Recommended Budget) 7:00 p.m. – Hello, Dolly! Last Day to Enter Grades	22 7:00 p.m. – Hello, Dolly! CES Student of the Month Celebration	23 1:00 and 7:00 p.m. – Hello Dolly! – Senior Night Presentation following the 7:00 p.m. performance
24 	25 No Teachers/No 10-Month Staff/No Students	26 March 26 – 29, No Teachers/No 10-Month Staff/No Students Report Cards Printed	27	28 Report Cards Mailed	29 No 12-Month Staff	30
SPRING RECESS						

HFA - Abate School
CES - Cataract Elem.
HJK - Kalfas School

GJM - Mann School
BBP - Bloneva Bond Primary
GPS - Gaskill Prep

LPS - LaSalle Prep
CEC - Comm. Ed.
PAC -Performing Arts Center at NFHS

NFHS – Niagara Falls High School
BOE - Board of Ed.
SCD -Superintendent’s Conference Day

UPK- Universal Pre-Kindergarten
NFT- Niagara Falls Teachers
DPC- District Parent Committee



2022-2023
Board of Education
www.nfschools.net



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THE PUBLIC IS WELCOME
at all Board of Education Meetings.