

# Pawling

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



SPRING NEWSLETTER 2026

## GROWING GREATNESS

*Supporting growth today while shaping tomorrow*

Pawling Central School District celebrates the milestones and experiences that are helping our students learn, lead and succeed in the 2025-2026 school year.



Dear Pawling Community,

Across Pawling, student success is intentionally cultivated through the dedication and collaboration of our entire school community. This spring's theme, "Growing Greatness," reflects how progress takes root through high-quality teaching, meaningful opportunities and the steady support of an engaged community.

We believe every child has greatness within them, and every adult plays a role in helping it grow. From the bus driver's morning greeting to the care of our custodians and grounds crew, each contribution matters. Our food services staff nourish students, and our school resource officers help maintain a safe environment. Together with our teachers, aides and administrators, this collective effort supports the whole child every day.

The Board of Education remains committed to "Empowering Student Success." We continue to invest in strong academics that prepare students for the future, offering Advanced Placement and college-level courses alongside hands-on BOCES programs. This year, we are especially proud to launch a new elementary literacy program, building strong reading foundations so every student can pursue their passions and take on meaningful challenges.

This work is made possible by the people who give so much to our schools. We are deeply grateful to our faculty, staff, coaches, volunteers and families. Your dedication makes a lasting difference.

Greatness lives in every student we serve, and we are proud to build a community where each child is seen, supported and challenged to grow.

With appreciation and gratitude,

**Zack Graczyk**  
President, Board of Education





## ROOTED IN REAL-WORLD LEARNING: CAREER CONNECTIONS

Pawling High School’s newest senior English elective, Career Connections, brings learning beyond the classroom by blending academics with real-world experience.

Inspired by statewide conversations on preparing students for life after graduation, the asynchronous course developed by teacher Kasey Stecher and Principal Helen Callan requires students to complete 80 hours of work through jobs, service learning or volunteer experiences. The course also includes virtual modules on career exploration and workplace topics like salary equity.

“It’s about helping them discover what meaningful work looks like,” said Stecher.

The program also introduced a senior Career Day this fall, a half-day event that engaged students throughout the grade in conversations with local professionals and Pawling alumni.

Callan sees both the course and Career Day as essential steps forward for the high school.

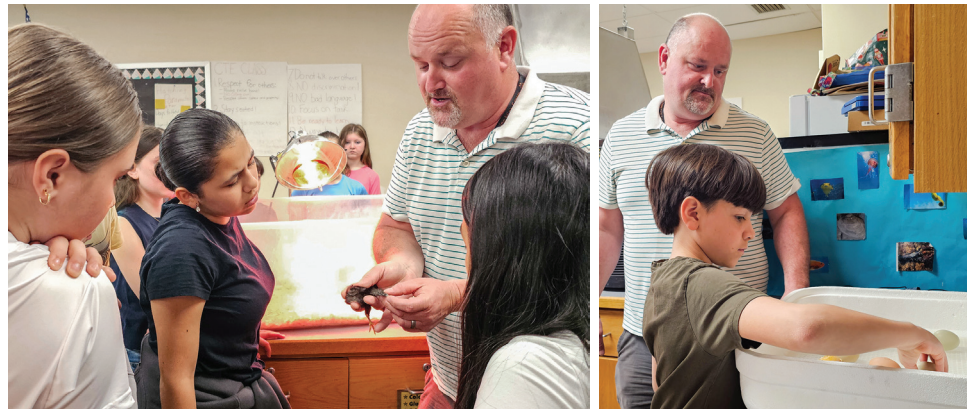
“If we want to continue to provide meaningful experiences for our students, we have to be willing to try new things,” she said. “These programs are the perfect example.”



## NEW ELEMENTARY CURRICULUM SOWS SEEDS FOR A LIFELONG LOVE OF LITERACY

Pawling Elementary is preparing to launch a new literacy curriculum from Benchmark Education this fall, designed to strengthen both reading and writing through a comprehensive, research-based approach.

Currently being piloted by select teachers, the program emphasizes engaging student-centered materials while allowing flexibility for instruction. With professional development planned for the summer and materials arriving soon, staff are building a strong foundation to support student learning and foster a lasting excitement for literacy.



## AGRICULTURE STUDENTS BLOSSOM THROUGH ANIMAL CARE AND STUDY



Scales, fur and feathers have brought Pawling Middle School’s Agriculture and Career/Technical Education classroom to life this spring, as students learn alongside live animals during hands-on lessons.

These adorable additions have been helping students better understand and appreciate life processes, biological principles and the proper care and handling of animals. Students have been making these connections through field trips and class demonstrations using live animals, including – but not nearly limited to – rabbits, chickens, visiting goats and a resident lizard, as well as providing authentic experiences to invest in the animals’ well-being by caring for them directly.

Agriculture and Career/Technical Education teacher Zsolt Vass hopes that this addition to his program will help students reconnect with nature and the local environment.

“As technology advances, our society has become more urbanized and industrialized, causing us to migrate from farms to factories and offices,” he said. “Each generation has slowly lost the chance to make a physical connection with animals and the natural environment – a trend that I would like to reverse for our students.”



## A PARADE IN FULL BLOOM: FOURTH GRADERS GROW A NEW TRADITION

Pawling Elementary School's fourth graders brought a slice of Manhattan magic to the building's hallways as students celebrated their first-ever Thanksgiving Parade this fall. A schoolwide event inspired by the children's book "Balloons Over Broadway," the parade was brought to life through weeks of cross-curricular collaboration.

The idea began with fourth grade teacher Lauren Gonyo, who had taught a Macy's Thanksgiving Day Parade engineering unit in a previous district. With support from Principal Michelle Rivas, the idea quickly expanded into a schoolwide experience.

Teachers collaborated across subject areas, combining English Language Arts, social studies, art and science to help students design and build papier-mâché balloon floats. Their finished creations were featured in a "Thanksgiving Day Parade" through the hallways of the school – much to the delight of the rest of the student body.

Gonyo hopes the event becomes a new Pawling tradition.

"I hope they see how much fun learning can be," she said, "and how we can all come together as a school-wide community for a fun event related to school and the real world."



Elise Malone's Pre-K students combined their transportation unit with Black History Month this February to learn about Garrett Morgan, inventor of the three-position traffic signal. Our littlest learners practiced fine motor skills by cutting and assembling homemade traffic lights – then strengthened their listening and self-regulation skills while playing the classic game "Red Light, Green Light" together.



Darlene Eirish-Schofield's eighth-grade English Language Arts classes are kicking things up a notch for their 20Time projects with a wider array of topics than ever before. A student-centered program wherein 20 percent of ELA classes are spent working on passion projects of their choosing, this year's 20Time projects range from finding homes for shelter animals and helping classmates find jobs to advocating for fellow students' voices and even writing, producing, casting and directing a full musical production!



Lisa Farrand's Dutchess Community College Spanish 5 class brought their advanced language skills to an in-class debate about the ethics of bullfighting this fall – conducted completely in Spanish! As part of their unit on human rights and politics, students stepped into the shoes of animal activists, bull ranchers, matadors, tourists and more to spend a week exploring the cultural, ethical and historical issues surrounding bullfighting before coming together to present their thoroughly researched arguments on debate day.



Senior Baily O'Leary and Junior Nahla Munuo became the first-ever student "ex officio" Board of Education members this year, bringing student voice to our district leadership.



Pawling Elementary School celebrates kindness, responsibility and integrity through the Tiger Triumph Awards, honoring students, staff and even entire classes for exemplary character. Recipients receive certificates and are celebrated over the loudspeaker, creating moments of pride to reinforce making good choices as part of the school's culture.



The brainchild of Pawling Middle School's School Culture Leadership Team – a group of staff, students and parents dedicated to fostering a positive and inclusive school culture – the TIGER Project started two years ago as a way to call out and nurture excellent character traits in students. Now, assemblies are held regularly throughout the school year to recognize the traits of Trust, Integrity, Gratitude, Empathy and Resilience.



### CULTIVATING CONNECTION & KINDNESS WITH TEAM COMMUNITY

Team Community, a group of third- and fourth-grade student leaders, is fostering kindness, inclusion and connection through leadership at Pawling Elementary School. Formed by counselor Jessica Dommu, the group gives students leadership experience and ownership over their school's culture.



In October, Team Community helped lead "Start With Hello" week: a national initiative promoting inclusivity and reducing social isolation. Students organized assemblies, created Promise Pledges, participated in hallway activities and ended the week with a pep rally.

The group also led "Mindful March Wellness Week" this spring, teaching classmates simple mindfulness practices like breathing, gratitude, listening and practicing acts of kindness to build focus, reduce stress and support well-being to better create a positive learning environment.

"Our students are learning that leadership doesn't have to be a big lift," said Dommu. "It can be as simple as including someone or encouraging a friend to take a deep breath."

**I think what we're doing makes a big difference.**

Poppy Anderson, Fourth Grader

## STUDENTS BRANCH OUT AS LEADERS AND CHANGEMAKERS AT VASSAR CONFERENCE

Pawling Middle and High School English as a New Language (ENL) students and members of the Latino Empowerment and Development (LEAD) Club spent a day at Vassar College for the fourth annual Immigrant Youth Empowerment Conference. This year's theme, "Strength Through Organizing," encouraged students to recognize their ability to lead and impact their communities.

Students participated in workshops and activities that celebrated cultural identity and built leadership skills.

"The speaker told us to be proud of who we are," eighth-grade LEAD Club member and senior Nazli Sanchez Lopez said. "I learned to be confident in who I am and to never give up on my goals."

For Pawling Middle School ENL teacher and LEAD advisor Jessica Garcia, the conference reinforced her mission as an educator: "Our students aren't just participants; they're leaders, organizers and community builders who are already making a difference."



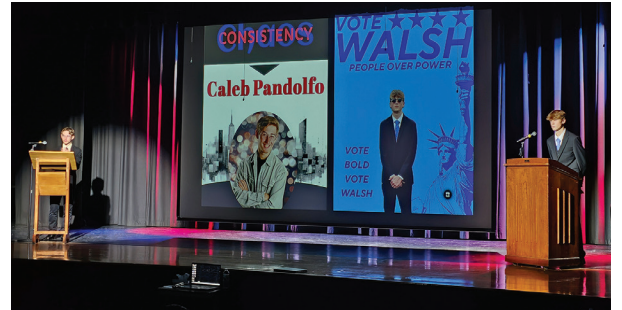
## MOCK ELECTION PLANTS SEEDS OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT

Pawling High School students brought democracy to life this fall through a schoolwide mock election led by Lisa Horn's AP Government class. Building on last year's foundation, the expanded project engaged students in roles as candidates, campaign managers, party leaders, journalists and data analysts, with nearly 70 percent of the school casting ballots.

Campaigns reached beyond the classroom, involving underclassmen and staff, while a 10th-grade math class helped collect and analyze voting data. The experience blended history, media, math and communication, reflecting a strong emphasis on real-world, interdisciplinary learning.

For Democratic candidate Lucas Walsh, the impact went beyond the election itself.

"For a polarizing election, it brought everyone together," he said. "Now we all have something in common and hopefully it inspires people to stay engaged in the future."



Students in the Peer Leadership Club at Pawling High School have been keeping themselves busy this school year from the classroom to the community with a number of projects that focus on service, school spirit and mentorship. Our Peer Leaders' activities have ranged from holiday service projects, lending a hand at community events, working with students across district buildings and fostering a positive school culture this year.

## BLOSSOMING ARTISTS MEET REAL-LIFE ENTREPRENEURSHIP AT FIRST ARTISAN FAIR

Pawling Middle School held its first-ever annual Artisan Fair this December. The event brought together students, families, educators and local artists, featuring 27 vendors – from student-run tables to skilled community artisans – and drew a steady crowd alongside parent-teacher conferences.

More than just a showcase, the fair was a hands-on extension of the school’s choice-based art program. Students stepped into the role of real artists as they designed, priced and sold their own work. They also connected with experienced creators and curious shoppers along the way, building confidence and getting a taste of what it means to turn passion into possibility.

“I hope the fair will become something that my students look forward as they continue to grow as artists,” said art teacher Crystal Walters.



## STRINGS STUDENTS GROW IN HARMONY



Now in its third year, Pawling Central School District’s orchestra program continues to hit all the right notes under the direction of Joseph MacEachen, who teaches string students from grades 3-8.

7th & 8th graders – as well as two advanced 6th grade violists – performed themes from “The Nutcracker” for their winter concert. Meanwhile, Pawling’s youngest musicians are making exciting first steps in their musical journeys this year as they learn about and practice their new instruments. MacEachen said that his next steps will focus on refining their performance pieces so they can showcase their progress to friends and family.

“It’s inspiring to see our elementary & middle school musicians growing together through their hard work and enthusiasm,” he said. “They’re not only developing their musical skills, but also learning how to collaborate, listen and support one another as part of a larger ensemble.”



Pawling student musicians continue to shine, with senior Samuel Fidler performing at the 2026 NYS Band Directors Association All-State High School Band festival and students selected for both the 2026 Dutchess County Elementary and All-County Music Festivals in band and chorus.



Our middle school thespians transported audiences to a world of pure imagination this November with “Willy Wonka, Jr.” – a musical based on Roald Dahl’s “Charlie & the Chocolate Factory.”



From sets and props to lighting design, music and – of course – the performances themselves, Pawling High School’s spring musical, “Once Upon a Mattress,” was a rollicking showcase of our students’ musical, artistic and technical capabilities.



Kindergarten, first and second graders explored color, pattern and contemporary art styles this February to create heart-themed artwork inspired by artists Jim Dine and Romero Britto.



Two Pawling High School artists were recognized at the Dunlop High School Artists’ Competition during the FrOGS Great Swamp Celebration, with junior Evie Jan earning second place and senior Justin Vazquez receiving an honorable mention.



## PAWLING'S WRESTLING PROGRAM GROWS CHAMPIONS ON THE MAT



Pawling High School junior Hudson Garbarino captured the 2026 Section 1 Division 2 Championship title in the 215-pound weight class this winter. The win secured him a spot at the New York State Wrestling Championship at the end of February, where he placed eighth in his weight class and earned All-State Honors – a prestigious achievement at one of the most competitive levels of high school wrestling.

“My teammates put in just as much work as I did and I’m proud of them,” said Hudson. “It’s an awesome feeling to be part of a team that works so hard.”

Coached by Joseph Amuso, Stephen Malone and Paul Bellucci, Pawling’s team placed eighth at the Section 1 Division 2 tournament despite being the smallest school in the division. The team also earned podium finishes from sophomore Ed Garbarino, junior Aaron Villalobos and senior DJ Greenhaw.

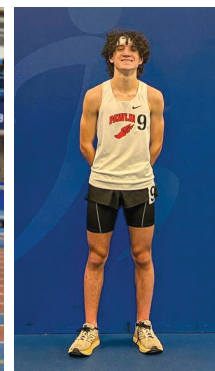
“A wrestling match isn’t just physical, but mental as well,” said Interim Superintendent Anthony DiCarlo. “Our wrestlers have done us proud at Pawling.”

## COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS NURTURE NEW TRADITIONS DURING PAWLING’S 2025 HOMECOMING SEASON

Pawling Central School District celebrated this year’s homecoming with strong community participation and school spirit across a full week of events from September 29 through October 3, 2025. Homecoming week featured spirit days, pep rallies and themed activities across all schools, building excitement leading into the weekend festivities.

The weeklong celebration began with the Dan Purdy Track & Field Invitational followed by athletic competitions, a homecoming dance and a homecoming football game honoring fall athletes at halftime.

Saturday’s inaugural “TigerFest” brought the celebration together with a parade, youth sports matchups and other community events, showcasing collaborations between staff, the athletic department and the district’s support organizations – including the PTA, PTSA and Pawling Tigers Athletic Club – to create this new Pawling tradition.



Described by LoHud.com as an “unsung team that nobody wants to play,” the boys’ varsity soccer team made history this fall – capping their season with 11 wins, four losses and one tie: the best record in over 20 years and the highest Class B seed ever for Pawling.

Berney Bischoff represented Pawling High School at the New York State Special Olympics Winter Games, earning a silver medal in the snowshoe relay and two fourth-place finishes.

Pawling varsity indoor track & field athletes delivered standout performances at the NYS Qualifiers, with Kevin Greco and Caitly Weis setting school records, Elizabeth Walsh earning a personal best, and four students named to the all-county team.

Pawling’s ski team sent three athletes to Sectionals this year – Marcus Auton Smith, Ava Auton Smith and Shannon Gargan – a significant accomplishment for a small team.

Postal Patron

**GROWING OPPORTUNITY**  
*Supporting Every Pawling Student's Path Forward*



  
**Read our digital newsletters and Digital Backpack on the website to stay up to date on news around the District.**

**PAWLING'S NEW SUPERINTENDENT**

The Pawling Central School District Board of Education is pleased to welcome Dr. Elizabeth Kennedy as the district's next Superintendent of Schools, effective July 1, 2026.

With 20 years in public education, Kennedy currently serves as Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services in Carmel and has held roles in school psychology, special education and leadership. Known for expanding student programs and strengthening mental health supports, she emphasizes collaboration, equity and student-centered growth in her approach.

"I am excited to help build on the district's strengths and ensure that every child's potential is fully realized," said Kennedy. "Pawling is such a special community, and I am so pleased to finally be a part of it."

**AI SUMMIT INSPIRES TECHNOLOGY USAGE ROOTED IN SAFETY WHILE BLOSSOMING IN INNOVATION**

Assistant Superintendent for Instruction Dr. Debra Kirkhus secured full scholarships for Technology Director Christopher Quiñones and Project Lead the Way teacher Stephen Malone to attend the Artificial Intelligence Instructional Leaders Summit (AILS 2026) in January, where education leaders explored AI's growing role in K-12 education.

"One of the takeaways was that successful implementation has to begin with strong protections," Quiñones said. "Safety is paramount."

For Malone, the focus was instructional impact. "Teaching needs to evolve," Malone said. "AI can be an incredible tool, but as educators we need to keep learning more so we can open up its possibilities instead of worrying."

The district is now developing guidelines focused on safety, academic integrity and ethical use, along with a secure AI portal to protect student data while continuing to expand professional learning opportunities.

**FEEDING STUDENT GROWTH – AND DISTRICT FUNDING – ONE FREE MEAL AT A TIME**

Thanks to the Community Eligibility Program, all Pawling students received free breakfast and lunch this year. This federal program allows eligible schools to provide meals to every student at no cost regardless of household income. Each meal served brings funding back to the food services department – support that helps improve food quality, upgrade equipment and add staff. In other words: the more meals the district gives away, the more funding it receives.

"We encourage all families to enjoy the free school meals regardless of need," said Food Services Director Lauren Collica. "They're a simple, convenient choice that benefits everyone!"



Pawling High School's Director of Bands and Pawling Middle School Band Director

Alexander Gray earned third place in the 2025 American Prize in Conducting, a national honor recognizing excellence in the performing arts.



Pawling High School has once again been recognized for academic excellence, earning a place among the top 40% of public high schools nationwide in U.S. News & World Report's Best High Schools rankings.

**PAWLING SCHOOLS ADMINISTRATION**

- Interim Superintendent*  
**Mr. Anthony DiCarlo**
- Assistant Superintendent for Finance*  
**Mrs. Marianne Heslin**
- Assistant Superintendent for Instruction*  
**Dr. Debra Kirkhus**

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