

# Minisink Valley Central School

We teach someone you love.

## SPECIAL SAFETY EDITION

### School Safety Initiatives

- Teachers on bus duty at our elementary and intermediate schools are sporting bright green vests these days. This clothing helps our youngest students identify a trustworthy adult to whom they can turn for assistance.
- The roadway to the far right of the elementary and intermediate school traffic circle will now be blocked off for part of the day so that our children can play safely during recess periods.
- A School Resource Officer is now on campus full time. Trooper Andrew Stack, from the New York State Police, spends most of his day at the high school but is available and responsive to concerns anywhere on our campus, the bus garage, or at our Otisville School.
- Each of our schools is conducting safety drills with the assistance of Trooper Victor Pirtle of the New York State Police. Our students need to know what to do in the case of an emergency and the standard “fire drill” is no longer enough. Our students have practiced bomb evacuation drills, and “lock outs” where all doors are locked to keep dangerous persons away from our students. We are just beginning our “lock down” drills which will give the students practice on what to do if there is an intruder in the building.

Board members Shawn O'Connor, Michael Sauchuk, Gina Richichi, Tracy Sutera, Victor Vignola, Vice-president Wayne Hawkins, and President John Lenane break ground for the middle school project.



### PBIS

Minisink Valley Middle School is currently engaged in a New York State initiative called Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS). PBIS is a systems approach to preventing and responding to school and classroom discipline issues. It attempts to develop school-wide systems that support staff to teach and promote positive behavior in all students. By reducing behavioral problems, PBIS creates and maintains safe learning environments where teachers can teach and students can learn. The middle school team is comprised of administrators, teachers, parents and staff who meet regularly to study the discipline data of the school and make recommendations to improve discipline. This year the team has been concentrating on acknowledging those students who help maintain positive school discipline. They have recognized good behavior by issuing “free homework passes,” lotteries for Good Deed Citations, and post cards to parents applauding their children’s positive behavior for acting responsibly, respectfully, safely and timely.

### Spring Into Safety Night

The Minisink Valley PTO is sponsoring a special safety night (April 20, 2005) for parents this spring to help them understand some of the difficult issues our children and young people face. Topics such as child and teen abduction awareness, Internet safety, drug awareness, early childhood and teen depression, and talking with your children about sexual awareness and conduct have been targeted by the PTO as critical issues for parents to consider.

The evening will be organized into two sessions – 6:30 to 7:30 PM and 8:00 to 9:00 PM. Presenters will include professionals on our staff as well as those in the community with specific expertise. Please watch for further information from the PTO.

Dear Friends and Neighbors,

Because we are raising our children in a complicated, often confusing world, we must take extraordinary measures to keep them safe. District-wide and building level safety teams meet regularly to review procedures and facilities and to suggest program improvements. It is not enough for this school district to get a 90%, a 95%, or even a 99% in safety. We must not be satisfied until we can say our schools are 100% safe. We know we have work to do. Recent incidents have made it clear that we need to review policies at the board level and procedures at the administrative level to insure that everybody follows through with the appropriate responses. Please know that your superintendent and your board of education are vigorously tackling these critical tasks.

Described in this newsletter are some new initiatives designed to make our schools a safer place for our children. You'll read about increased security at our elementary and intermediate schools, a new program to detect teen depression at our secondary schools, training in sexual harassment at our middle and high schools, and a special "safety" night for parents sponsored by our PTO.

We will continue to work closely with the New York State Police to shed light on areas of concern. Our school resource officer (SRO), Trooper Andrew Stack, maintains a daily presence on our campus, and Trooper Victor Pirtle, school outreach coordinator, works with us to make real and substantive improvements. In addition, the Zone 2 Commander of Troop F, Captain Steven Nevins, has worked with the school board and the administration to strengthen the working relationship between the state police and the school district.

Test scores are important; providing enriching and meaningful activities and experiences for our students is important. But our first effort must be to ensure the safety of our children. We will not tolerate conduct that jeopardizes that safety. We are aggressively pursuing all legal avenues. Join us in keeping our children and young people safe. Please call me with your questions, concerns, or suggestions.

Sincerely,

Dr. Martha Murray  
Superintendent of Schools

## TeenScreen Program

Every day in the media we read about a promising high school student committing suicide. The story is often the same. There were no warning signs; there was no way to tell. But often these reports don't tell the whole story. *There is a way that parents and schools can catch a child before it's too late.*

The TeenScreen program works with parents and schools to help identify students at risk for depression and/or suicide, often before school personnel or even parents become aware of any outward signs of a problem. Developed by researchers at Columbia University, TeenScreen is a voluntary, evidence-based program. Later this spring we will be reaching out to parents of our seventh and ninth graders to better acquaint them with the particulars of this important effort. (The description of this program is taken from text provided by Columbia University.)

## Save-A-Friend

This twenty-four hour hotline provides our students and their parents with the ability to anonymously report a circumstance that threatens the safety, security, and well being of others, their friends, themselves, or the school. When a potentially harmful or dangerous situation is reported, the appropriate school officials or law enforcement agencies are notified. The Save-A-Friend program operates by providing students with an anonymous toll-free number to a "hotline" facility where a trained staff member interviews the caller. Based on the type of information received, other parties are then notified. The toll-free number is **1-866-219-9706**. Wallet-sized cards have been distributed to all students in the middle school and the high school.

## Student Lifeline, Inc.

This service provides free emergency transportation twenty-four hours a day. A student, who is in a difficult situation due to someone's alcohol intake or other emergency, can take advantage of free emergency rides. Funding is provided through the efforts of the Alcoholism and Drug Abuse Council of Orange County. The sponsors are listed on the back of the Lifeline cards that our students have received.

Both the Safe-A-Friend and the Lifeline programs allow our students to make smart choices in difficult situations. You can support our efforts by discussing these programs with your sons and daughters.

## *Important Notice to Minisink Valley Central School District Taxpayers*

STAR is the New York State Tax Relief Program that provides a partial exemption from school property taxes for owner-occupied, primary residences.

The *Basic STAR Exemption*, for all primary residence homeowners regardless of age or income, will provide a \$30,000+ full value assessment exemption for the school year 2005-06. If you are a new homeowner or have recently moved to a new residence, you must submit your application to your local assessor by March 1, 2005 to qualify for the exemption. You do not need to re-apply if you already receive this exemption and your residence is unchanged.

The Enhanced STAR Exemption is available to taxpayers who are 65 years of age or older by December 31, 2005 and whose total income does not exceed \$64,650. The Enhanced STAR Exemption provides a \$50,000+ full value assessment exemption on your school tax bill. You may need to re-apply each year to receive the Enhanced STAR Exemption.

STAR exemption forms are available at your local assessor's office or may be picked up in the Minisink Valley Central School District's business office. **Complete and submit your application form to your local assessor, along with proof of residency and proof of income** (*required for Enhanced STAR, only*). Your local assessor can advise you of what forms of proof are acceptable.

**STAR applications  
must be filed with  
your local assessor by  
March 1, 2005**

### **Budget Development Process Begins**

Because this community recognizes the importance of a solid education for its youngest members, our schools have always enjoyed strong support. We have begun the process of building a budget which will allow us to move forward academically, address continued growth, and still be fiscally responsible.

The board of education's goal during the development process is to approve a budget that meets the educational needs of our students in a cost effective manner. Every spending recommendation is reviewed and carefully weighed.

The review process includes public meetings to allow for community input and feedback. You are invited to attend the public budget meetings held at 7:30 PM in the board room in central administration:

<b>Public Budget Meeting</b>	Thursday., April 14, 2005
<b>Public Budget Hearing</b>	Thursday, May 5, 2005

*The annual vote is scheduled for Tuesday, May 17, 2005.*

### **Voter Registration**

Anyone who hasn't voted since the May 1999 election, either through the county rolls or through the school district's registration, must re-register with the district clerk in order to vote in future elections. **If you are not sure whether or not you are a registered voter or if you have any questions, please contact the district clerk at 355-5115.**

School District Voter Registration Eligibility Requirements:

- District resident for 30 days.
- U.S. Citizen - 18 years of age or older.
- Must be registered with the school district or with the County Board of Elections.

NYS Counter-Terrorism Zone 4

## Operation Safeguard for Schools from Homeland Security

**If you see someone in or around your school or grounds acting suspiciously by**

- Surveying areas around a school with a camera, binoculars, or video
- Making notes on a map or in a computer
- Asking for information about students, dismissal times, school bus routes, or the school calendar, in person or via phone or e-mail
- Attempting to obtain ID, access cards, or official vehicles
- Loitering in or around the school
- Leaving a suspicious package in a school, on school grounds or in a school bus

**IF you see something, SAY SOMETHING. Don't keep it to yourself.**

Immediately notify the principal, teacher, school bus driver, security, the playground monitor, the local police department or call 1-866-SAFE NYS (1-866-723-3697).

### Sexual Harassment Training

All of our students in the middle school and the high school are receiving training in the critical issue of sexual harassment. They are learning what constitutes sexual harassment, and what to do if they believe they are being harassed. In addition, we are making clear what the school discipline and the legal ramifications are for those students who choose to engage in harassing behavior.

Also, faculty and staff are required to attend one of two sexual harassment training sessions each year. Many received instruction during our November Conference Day. All others will be receiving this training during our March Conference Day.

Visit us at [minisink.com](http://minisink.com)

### Minisink Valley CSD

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Dr. Martha Murray

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### Newsletter

Debbie Roda