

# Community Newsletter

Rush-Henrietta Central School District

Fall 2019

### Senior High School Ranked Among Nation's Top 10 Percent

When *U.S. News and World Report* released its annual Best High Schools in America poll for 2019, Rush-Henrietta Senior High School was in the top 10 percent of the nation's high schools!



"We are pleased that Rush-Henrietta Senior High School is consistently being recognized among the top-ranked schools in the nation," says Superintendent Lawrence Bo Wright. "This

affirms our commitment to a rigorous curriculum, advanced academic opportunities, and equity. Our school community should be very proud of what we have accomplished together."

For the past two years, Rush-Henrietta Senior High School earned a silver ranking in *U.S. News and World Report's* annual poll. This year, the organization changed the methodology used to calculate school rankings for the poll. The new format provides a rating system that is more thorough and easier to understand.

With the new methodology, schools are no longer categorized as gold, silver, or bronze. Instead, they are given a score out of 100, which is calculated using a broader range of criteria. Rush-Henrietta Senior High School scored 90.72 out of 100.

For the 2019 rankings, scores were based on six weighted indicators: College Readiness, College Curriculum Breadth, Math and Reading Proficiency, Math and Reading Performance, Underserved Student Performance, and Graduation Rate.

This is a true team effort and district leaders are intent on making sure the good work being done at the Senior High School continues.

"We want to make sure that all Rush-Henrietta students graduate from our district prepared for college or career success," Wright says. "We thank our teachers, staff members, administrators, and the Board of Education - as well as the community at large - for their support."



## Rush-Henrietta Music Program Named One of Nation's Best



The Rush-Henrietta Central School District has once again been honored with the Best Communities for Music Education designation from The NAMM Foundation for outstanding commitment to music education. This is the tenth consecutive year and the 14<sup>th</sup> time overall the district has been awarded this designation.

The Best Communities for Music Education designation is awarded to districts that demonstrate outstanding achievement in efforts to provide music access and education to all students. To qualify for the Best Communities designation, Rush-Henrietta met criteria concerning funding, graduation requirements, music class participation, instruction time, facilities, and support for the music programs.

"As superintendent, I have become well-acquainted with the outstanding qualities of our district's music program," says Lawrence Bo Wright. "We have many reasons to be proud of our musicians, as well as the leadership of their teachers and our director, Donna Watts. Of course, we couldn't do it without the support of our entire community. Thank you for always having the best interests of our young musicians at heart."

In Rush-Henrietta, 900 students take part in chorus each year. In addition, 700 students are members of the orchestra and 600 belong to the band. Some students participate in more than one group. Many students also perform in musical groups that occur outside of the regular school day. This national award recognizes that Rush-Henrietta is leading the way with learning opportunities for students, including music and the arts as important elements of a well-rounded education.

"Rush-Henrietta has a long and distinguished history of excellence in music education," says Donna Watts, director of music and visual arts. "Our core music curriculum prepares students to participate in additional music courses at the secondary level and to be successful in the performing arts.

"We are able to achieve this level of excellence because of the support of our Board of Education, administration, and our community," Watts says. "Our students are well positioned to achieve at high levels due to the enthusiasm and knowledge of R-H music educators. This award affirms that our resources are well placed to provide opportunities and to support continued learning in music."



#### State Lauds Rush-Henrietta Senior High School



This summer, the New York State Education Department named Rush-Henrietta Senior High School a 2018-2019 Recognition School! This honor previously was known as a Reward School. This is the third consecutive year our Senior High School has been recognized by the state for its outstanding work on behalf of students.

Only 582 individual schools - just 12 percent of those in the state! - were named high-achieving and high-progress schools. Local districts receiving this prestigious recognition include Brighton, Fairport, Honeoye Falls-Lima, Penfield, Pittsford, and Rush-Henrietta! Schools were recognized for high academic achievement, student growth, and graduation rate. Rush-Henrietta was one of only 131 schools identified as a Reward School last year.

Please take a moment to celebrate this important recognition with us! It is a designation that each

community member should take pride in and fully appreciate. The faculty and staff members at Rush-Henrietta Senior High School have done outstanding work to help our students achieve at higher levels. We also know what is being achieved could not occur without strong contributions from the faculty and staff who are in other Rush-Henrietta schools and district buildings. Of course, none of this would be possible without the continued support of our school board and residents. Thank you for helping our students learn and grow on a daily basis!

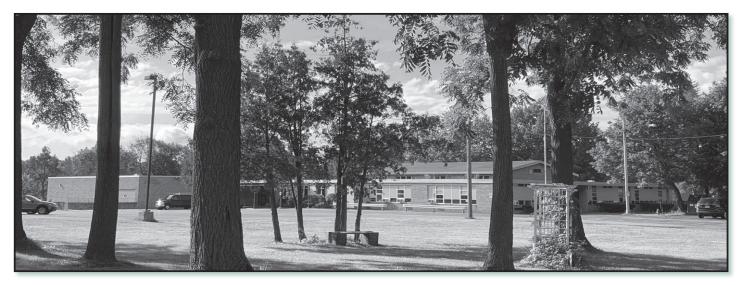
"The teachers and administrators at these Recognition Schools have taken to heart the critical mission of educating the whole child," Board of Regents Chancellor Betty A. Rosa says. "Our priority is fostering equity for our children across New York. These schools serve as models of the levels of performance we seek for all schools to be able to achieve in the future."

#### Video Seeking 'Superhero' Bus Drivers Wins State Award

The Rush-Henrietta Central School District received an Award of Excellence - the highest honor - from the New York School Public Relations Association this year for its "Superheroes Needed" video. Only 10 percent of entries statewide received this recognition. Kristin Dioguardi, director of the Rush-Henrietta Office of Human Resources, was searching for a unique way to recruit new drivers and identified an advertising opportunity at a local movie theater. The award-winning video, which airs

before each showing at Movies 10 this year, was written, produced, and voiced by Travis Anderson and Heather Campo, of the Rush-Henrietta Office of Community Relations, and filmed and edited by Mark D'Annunzio of Monroe One BOCES. The bus drivers featured are John Kuehl, Jim McDowelll, Sharon Outler, and Ganga Sapkota. To view the video, visit <a href="https://www.rhnet.org/superheroes">www.rhnet.org/superheroes</a>. In lieu of applause, the team asks you to share this video with everyone you know. Help us recruit a bus driver today!

## District Provides Update on Good Shepherd Property



This summer, the Rush-Henrietta Central School District's purchase of Good Shepherd church and school, located at 3288 East Henrietta Road, was completed. The acquisition was made possible when our community approved a proposal to purchase the property in 2018.

The Good Shepherd property is located on East Henrietta Road, south of Lehigh Station Road, and adjacent to the Senior High School campus. It includes the former Good Shepherd School and original church. For much of the past decade, the district leased the former school, housing self-funded community programs, such as Universal Pre-Kindergarten, Cub Care, and its adult literacy efforts.

Rush-Henrietta has enjoyed a good working relationship with St. Marianne Cope Parish, which oversaw Good Shepherd. When the proposal was approved in 2018, the district agreed that the parish could operate its campus through June 2022. However, parish leaders announced this fall that the site would cease operations in October. This decision was made solely by the parish. In a letter to members, Sister Sheila Stevenson, pastoral administrator, discussed declining attendance and shared that it was no longer financially feasible to operate a third church.

District leaders fully appreciate the significance of Good Shepherd, and know that it has been a special place in the lives of many Rush-Henrietta residents. The district looks looks forward to using the location to continue serving our community for years to come. The Board of Education will discuss several options for the site. Plans being considered for the original church call for that structure to be renovated in a way that will support school district initiatives and programs. Designs and potential pricing are being researched.

As Rush-Henrietta looks to the future, it continues to examine the possibility of adding another entrance and exit for the high school's west parking lot. It also is studying the potential of new, additional parking for events at Elmer Gordon Stadium and Senior High School athletic fields.

As a reminder, here is what made this opportunity especially attractive: Monroe One BOCES is leasing a portion of the Webster Building, 2000 Lehigh Station Road. Lease payments received from BOCES are being used to purchase the Good Shepherd property.

BOCES is making annual payments of \$341,811 which, with the elimination of \$60,000 in yearly district lease payments for Good Shepherd School, provide the district with an annual funding stream of \$401,811. Given the purchase price of \$1,397,200, the Good Shepherd property will be paid fully by the time the BOCES lease expires in August 2022. The district will pay for the property in less than four years, while gaining strategic flexibility for decades to come.

Community members are invited to share their thoughts about what the district should consider when thinking about the future of the Good Shepherd property by visiting www.rhnet.org/contact.

## District Enhancing Roth Junior High School

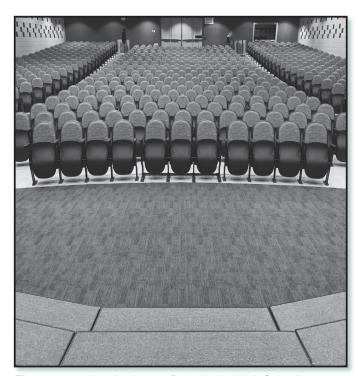
We have an inkling that some of the many improvements the district has made at Roth Junior High School during the past few years may have gone a bit unnoticed. In addition to the standard care we would provide while maintaining any of our schools, the district has made additional enhancements at Roth. The district has:

- replaced all of the windows throughout the building.
- renovated the auditorium, adding new seating, a new curtain, and a new sound system.
- replaced all hallway lights with brighter lighting that creates a more welcoming atmosphere.
- renovated the library, adding new carpeting, student seating, a circulation desk, and more.
- installed new signage with design panels on the front of the building to cover up a graffiti scar from years ago.
- added signage with the school name above the cafeteria to make the main entrance more obvious.
- installed signs directing people so they can more easily locate parking and the main entrance.
- added lighting to the parking lot and created a student drop-off lane at the request of parents.
- replaced old lighting at each exterior door with better LED lighting to help enhance security.
- enhanced the grounds and landscaping, an effort that includes planting additional trees.
- installed new, flexible seating outside the library.
- updated the tennis courts.

In addition, the district is in the process of transforming the old bookstore into a special hangout for freshmen who meet specific criteria. New-look bulletin boards are being custom-built and installed, as well. This year, the district plans to paint parts of the building interior to provide the school with a fresh look. All of these efforts help create a welcoming atmosphere that makes the school more inviting to students.

Roth has served our district well! When it opened in the 1950s, the building was home to all of our K-12 students. In the 1970s, it became one of two high schools in the district. In the 1990s, it was reimagined as a middle school. Today, it is one of Rush-Henrietta's two junior high schools.

As the oldest school in the district, Roth Junior High School has seen its share of changes throughout the years. While some are more obvious than others, all of them are intended to keep Roth a great place to learn for years to come.



The renovated auditorium at Roth Junior High School.



New, energy-efficient lighting has made Roth Junior High School hallways more inviting.



#### Kindergarten Bus Orientation a Big Hit



It was a beautiful night for kindergartners to learn about riding a bus!

A team of 30 caring, dedicated drivers, head drivers, and bus monitors greeted incoming kindergarten students in the weeks before school started. These are the people who help students go to and from school safely each day, traveling more than 1.5 million miles each year.

During this event, kindergartners learned about bus safety and got to go for a bus ride! They visited five informative stations focusing on crossing the street, safely loading and unloading, responding to emergencies on the bus, identifying danger zones, and riding the bus. The event was well attended. Rush-Henrietta had 434 kindergarteners registered to start school and 305 attended, which is an incredible attendance rate of 70 percent! This speaks well of the dedication of our parents, who are committed to educating their students on bus safety.

"This was the highlight of my child's week! He would not stop talking about it all night!" - R-H Parent

#### R-H Using New Mass-Notification Phone/E-News System

Rush-Henrietta is using a new system for sharing information with parents of students quickly and effectively. The Blackboard system offers several advantages we think families are enjoying. It allows us to call more than one parent or guardian per student. This means calls about snow days, important reminders, and other vital information can be delivered to more than one contact per student. In addition, parents with email addresses in

SchoolTool automatically receive the E-News updates from their child's principal and the superintendent. Parents, at the start of each school year, please provide updated phone and email contact information on your child's blue card. If these change during the school year, please notify the main office of your child's school. This notification system is available only to parents and guardians.

## New Facebook Feature Showcases 'A Day in the Life'

Rush-Henrietta recently debuted a new Facebook feature called "A Day in the Life." It offers a behind-the-scenes look at what happens every day in our schools. In October, we visited the Senior High School and Webster Learning Center to provide a glimpse of daily life for high school students. Ranked among the top 10 percent of high schools nationwide by *U.S. News and World Report*, the Senior High School is consistently recognized for its commitment to a rigorous curriculum, advanced academic opportunities, and equity. See the story at www.rhnet.org/dayinthelifeSHS and watch for further installments this school year!



11:20 a.m., Senior High School: The Comet Café is open for staff and students to purchase coffee, tea, hot chocolate, cappuccinos, and lattes during all three lunch periods and fifth block. Run by business students participating in DECA, proceeds from the café are used to support DECA competition fees. It is located in the space formerly occupied by the bookstore and small lounge.

## Webster Learning Center Students Lend a Helping Hand

For the second year, Todd Jones' class at the Webster Learning Center chose to help Begin Again Horse Rescue for Make a Difference Day in October. Students worked hard cleaning the stalls, filling water, and feeding the horses. They also assisted with cleaning the pasture, and were able to feed apples to the horses as a special treat. The class enjoys working with the horses at the rescue, and plans to hold a car wash in the spring to help raise money for them. They also want to return to help with spring clean-up. It was a rewarding experience for everyone. Great job!



Webster Learning Center students volunteered once again at a horse rescue farm in Lima.

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More than 400 boxes of donations - filled with food and personal-care items - were delivered to the Rush-Henrietta Area Food Terminal.

#### R-H Makes a Difference During Annual Food Drive

Thank you to everyone in our school community who donated food and personal care items for the annual Make a Difference Day Food Drive! Through your generosity, the district was able to deliver more than 400 boxes of donations to the Rush-Henrietta Area Food Terminal! Students and transportation employees collected donations from across the district.

and then students, staff members, and community volunteers helped sort and stock the donations at the Rush-Henrietta Area Food Terminal on Saturday, October 26, as part of our community's annual Make a Difference Day. These donations stay right here in our community, providing emergency food and other supplies to our neighbors in need. Thank you!



#### Restorative Practices Aim to Build Relationships, Keep Them Healthy

At a Rush-Henrietta school, 15 students attending physical education class sit on the gymnasium floor, listening intently to their teachers. Each is asked to share a thought with their peers, after being promised their opinions will be listened to in a respectful fashion.

Six students pass during the first round, while nine take the opportunity to share. When teachers offer a second round, however, each student speaks, sharing what is on their mind. This kind of open, honest conversation appeared improbable a few minutes beforehand.

These discussions among students take place during a community-building circle, which is a main feature of Rush-Henrietta's restorative practices initiatives. This effort falls under one of the district priorities, equity and Inclusion. Restorative practices have been used in other regional school districts. In Rush-Henrietta, community-building circles are being used to build and cultivate stronger relationships among students and staff members alike.

Restorative practices also help people repair damage within relationships by encouraging those who caused harm to make amends, and encouraging those who were impacted to demonstrate forgiveness.

In Rush-Henrietta, these methods were implemented as a pilot program in the Senior High School and Webster Learning Center during the 2017-2018 school year. Several staff members were trained in how to use these practices to promote community among students and staff. Since that time, more than 250 staff members have been trained across the district in community-building circles, academic circles, discipline and train-the-trainer trainings.

"People walked away from these trainings feeling renewed and refreshed," says Chris Barker, Rush-Henrietta's Director of Student Management. "Many staff members said it was one of the best professional development



During a community-building circle, the student with the "talking piece" gets to share with peers while everyone else listens. This Rush-Henrietta student is holding a talking piece found in his science room.

sessions they have attended in a long time. We knew this would be powerful for the students. We did not realize how much some staff members needed this for themselves. It's been incredibly helpful."

The feedback from students and staff members continues to be extremely positive. This unfiltered human interaction is allowing for better, deeper, and more honest conversations, and a greater understanding among members of our school community. Providing a safe, non-judgmental environment allows for positive change to occur. In the next few years as the district begins to dive deeper into its equity and inclusion work, community circles will become even more important.

"Attending the training is a life-changing experience," says Nerlande Anselme, assistant superintendent of Student and Family Services. "When people get to know each other on a personal level, it makes it harder to do harm - and easier to repair it. It is important for people to feel heard and know that they have a voice."

#### Rush-Henrietta Outlines Four District Priorities

Each year, after the District Leadership Forum held in August, Rush-Henrietta outlines its top priorities for the next 12 months. This year's four district priorities, approved this fall by the Board of Education, call for an emphasis on the English Language Arts and mathematics

instructional programs. In addition, the district is putting a special focus on special education, equity and inclusion, and mental wellness. The restorative practices story outlined above helps to support these district priorities.

#### School Board Members Deserving of Our Thanks



Meet the Rush-Henrietta Board of Education! These seven volunteers are Mai Abdullah; Nikki LaPlaca; James O'Brien; Diane McBride; Robert Cook, president; Annmarie Strzyzynski; and Jennifer Laird, vice president.

Members of the Rush-Henrietta Board of Education volunteer their time and talents to better our school district and community. We recognized these hard-working board members during School Board Recognition Week in October. This is a time set aside each year to recognize the contributions being made by community volunteers serving on public school boards of education, and to thank them for their leadership.

The Rush-Henrietta Central School District is governed by a seven-member Board of Education elected by eligible voters. The 2019-2020 school board consists of Robert Cook, president; Jennifer Laird, vice president; Mai Abdullah; Nikki LaPlaca; Diane McBride; James O'Brien; and Annmarie Strzyzynski. After being elected as a town justice, Cook has announced his resignation from the board, effective December 1, 2019.

Each board member is a public official who serves a three-year term without pay. They attend twice-monthly meetings and serve as liaisons to individual Rush-Henrietta schools, regularly speaking to parent groups and attending many school and district events. They also take on additional responsibilities. Some actions, such as approving agendas and minutes, are routine. However, they also need to make informed decisions

based on their knowledge of district policies and governmental regulations. To enhance their understanding, they attend workshops and seminars. Their responsibilities also include ratifying contracts with employee bargaining units, studying labor issues, reviewing the negotiations process, and adopting a proposed budget to present for voter approval each May. School board members also select the district's superintendent. The superintendent makes recommendations to members of the Board of Education and implements their decisions.

As part of their duties as elected representatives, members of the Rush-Henrietta Board of Education listen to the public and help connect residents with district personnel to resolve questions or concerns. Board of Education meetings are held twice monthly at 7 p.m. on specific Tuesdays at the Parker Administration Building, 2034 Lehigh Station Road. Meeting agendas and schedules, as well as board member contact information, is available on the district website at www.rhnet.org.

On behalf of everyone in the Rush-Henrietta Central School District, we thank each member of the Rush-Henrietta Board of Education for their service.

#### Pilot Program Provides Livestream of Board Meetings

This year, the Board of Education is piloting the livestreaming of its meetings. Of course, community members are invited to attend the meetings in person. Now, though, meetings also can be watched online at www.rhnet.org/boelivestream. Recordings of past meetings are

available at www.rhnet.org/boelivestreamlist. The merits of the livestreaming initiative will be reviewed at the end of the year. The district would like to thank Rep. Harry Bronson, a member of the New York State Assembly, for securing funds that allow for this year-long pilot.

#### Rush-Henrietta Puts Safety First

For the past few months, some significant construction has been taking place at Crane, Leary, and Winslow elementary schools. This work, which began in July, is expected to last for the majority of this school year.

The goal of this work is to create secure vestibules that will help staff members better know who is visiting our buildings, as well as the reason for their visit. The district first considered these enhancements based on comments shared by community members during the inaugural District Safety Forum in 2018. Other schools in the district have received similar security enhancements in recent years. The district extends its thanks to the school community for its patience while this important work is completed.

On a general note: If you have a safety tip to share that doesn't require contacting 911, please call the District Safety Line at 359-7867. We are always happy to hear concerns and suggestions.



Safety concerns raised by the community during the District Safety Forum are being addressed at Crane, Leary, and Winslow elementary schools.

#### Six Decades Later, Bus Safety Remains a Priority



This photo, taken in the immediate aftermath of a student being hit by a car in 1956, is a stark reminder of the need to be vigilant on the roads, especially today.

In 1956, when he was in fourth grade, Joe Bellanca was hit by a car while getting off the school bus. Fortunately, he suffered only minor injuries, which were cared for at the hospital.

Joe, a 1965 Rush-Henrietta graduate and president of the Rush-Henrietta Alumni Council, recently shared photos taken in the aftermath of the incident. It occurred in front of his home near the intersection of Calkins and West Henrietta roads, just east of the Fastrac convenience store. The photo depicts an old-time view of Calkins Road. Note the undeveloped nature of the road and a neat, old school bus. Joe rode bus No. 16!

These photos were shared on the district Facebook page this fall as part of National School Bus Safety Week in an effort to reinforce the importance of bus safety and thank our bus drivers and staff for the diligence and professionalism they demonstrate each day. Please let this story be a reminder of the importance of the rules of the road as we work together to keep our students safe. In addition to sharing about daily activities and district news and notes, please look for additional district history on the district's Facebook page in the months to come. Please "like" the page and follow us! You can find us at facebook.com/rhschools.

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#### Alecia Mazzo Inducted into R-H Hall of Fame

Alecia Mazzo, a 1985 Rush-Henrietta graduate, is a family court judge who cares deeply about her community.

In 2018, Mazzo was elected to a 10-year term as Monroe County Family Court Judge. She adjudicates matters involving custody and visitation, abuse and neglect, juvenile delinquency, and family offenses, such as domestic violence. She approaches her work with the goal of making decisions that are in the best interest of children.

After graduating from Charles H. Roth High School, she received her associate's degree in liberal arts from Monroe Community College. Mazzo went on to receive a bachelor's degree in political science from the State University of New York at Buffalo.

She then attended Ohio Northern University, where she received her law degree. Admitted to the New York state bar in 1994, Mazzo began practicing law 25 years ago in private practice. At that time, she also served as a pro bono attorney with the Volunteer Legal Services Project. Her work there included representing indigent clients in custody and child-support matters.

Mazzo also served as an attorney for the Monroe County Assigned Counsel Program, as a law librarian for the Monroe County Sheriff's Office, and as a deputy county attorney for the Monroe County Department of Law's Child Enforcement Unit. She also served on the Webster Town Board from 2016 to 2018, until her election as family court judge.

Mazzo, who attended Leary Elementary and Burger Junior High



School, credits a number of teachers for inspiring her to become the person she is today. Specifically, she cites Mr. Capers, Mr. DeCamp, Mr. Sisson, Mrs. Staffeld, and Mr. VanLare.

"It seems that my most memorable teachers brought me exactly where I am today as a judge," she says.

Mazzo lives in Webster with her daughter, Alana. It is our pleasure to welcome Alecia Mazzo to the Alumni Council Hall of Fame!

#### Do You Know a Potential Hall of Famer?

Each summer, the Rush-Henrietta Alumni Council selects nominees for the Hall of Fame! Please start thinking of potential candidates and nominate them by May 31, 2020.

Nominees must be graduates of a high school operated within the towns of Rush and/or Henrietta, including Rush High School or the Monroe Academy in Henrietta. Eligible graduates may have earned diplomas from any of the more recent high schools that served residents of the Rush-Henrietta Central School District, including the Rush-Henrietta High School from 1952 to 1968, the James E. Sperry High School from 1969 to 1987, Rush-Henrietta Senior High School from 1988 to present, or the Charles Roth building during years in which it was operating as a second high school in the district.

Nominees may have succeeded at the local, regional, national or international levels in any appropriate area of endeavor, including academia and education, arts, business, media, public service, philanthropy, medicine, military, science or sports. Anyone may nominate an alumnus or alumna. Nominees must have graduated from Rush-Henrietta at least 10 years prior to their nomination. Self-nominations are not allowed. Incomplete nominations will not be considered; nominators must provide details about those aspects that make the nominee worthy of induction.

Please learn more - and find a nomination form - at www.rhnet.org/halloffame. Thank you for helping us identify potential Hall of Famers!



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Mrs. Jennifer M. Laird, Vice President

Mrs. Mai Abdullah

Mrs. Nichole M. LaPlaca

Mrs. Diane E. McBride

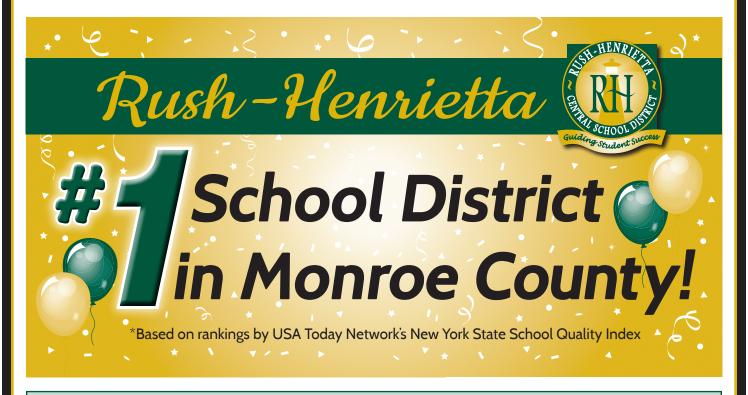
Mr. James C. O'Brien

Mrs. Annmarie Strzyzynski

#### **Superintendent of Schools**

Mr. Lawrence Bo Wright

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facebook.

Our district Facebook page, which can be found at www.facebook.com/rhschools, has been liked by more than 5,000 people since its inception! Please "like" us today and stay up to date on all things Rush-Henrietta!