



# Pocantico Hills Highlights

A monthly newsletter of information and updates about the  
Pocantico Hills School community  
April 2024

## ***Congratulations to 2024 TELL Award winners, Alana Winnick, and Marina Lombardo***

Two district staff members received awards from the Lower Hudson Regional Information Center for innovations in educational technology at a special ceremony on April 10.

Educational Technology Director Alana Winnick was honored with an Outstanding Innovative Leader Award and third grade teacher Marina Lombardo was a recipient of the Outstanding Innovative Teacher honor at this year's TELL Awards. TELL stands for Transforming Education through Leadership and Learning. The event is presented by the LHRIC's Technology Leadership Institute.



TELL Awards are “bestowed upon districts and individuals nominated by their colleagues and peers for demonstrating innovation and best practices and having implemented systemic change in teaching and learning.”

“I want to extend my heartfelt congratulations to Alana and Marina,” said Superintendent Rich Calkins. “They are both deserving of this honor and

have integrated technology into our district and classrooms in unique and inspiring ways.”

“Tonight, we are here to honor educators and leaders who have made significant strides in reshaping education throughout the integration of technology,” said Dr. Ellen McDonnell, LHRIC Executive Director at the ceremony. “It’s clear that these individuals will continue to lead the way towards a more innovative and inclusive educational landscape for generations to come.”

During the special awards event, colleagues introduced the recipients and a video presentation played before recipients stepped to the stage to accept their award.

Ms. Lombardo dedicated her TELL award to her students stating, “Over the years, I’ve been so fortunate to teach and learn from so many inspiring students, each bringing their unique passions, interests, assets, experiences, goals, wonders and curiosities into our classroom. This award truly belongs to them as they are the driving force behind my work.”

Ms. Lombardo was nominated for the award by her colleague, Ms. Winnick.

“Marina is a passionate educator who is committed to leveraging technology to enhance learning outcomes and prepare students for their future,” Ms. Winnick wrote in her nomination. “Her dedication to her students and her pursuit of professional growth make her an excellent candidate for the educational technology award.”

The two have worked together to introduce Ms. Lombardo’s students to Artificial Intelligence, creating prompts for writing assignments and more.

“Marina’s forward-thinking approach not only identified specific writing needs, but also bridged the gap between computational thinking practices and writing,” Ms. Winnick said of the project in her nomination form for Ms. Lombardo.

“This pioneering experience laid the foundation for introducing AI as a purposeful tool in the classroom, setting the stage for further integration of technology in the district’s curriculum,” she said.

In another project, Ms. Winnick explained how Ms. Lombardo created a TED talk unit in her lesson called “Let Me Tell You a Story,” which she said was “a culminating writing unit that highlighted narrative, informational, and persuasive writing. This project showcased Marina’s commitment to real-world applications of writing skills and her dedication to interdisciplinary learning.”

In her own work, Ms. Winnick has overhauled the use of technology at Pocantico, beginning her career here during the pandemic, which required extensive, and fast, updating of technology that was suddenly being used in a new way. This included one-to-one devices for all staff and students, a flexible learning environment with two-in-one teacher devices, document cameras, interactive whiteboards with wireless touch displays, audio enhancement in classrooms, and more.

Since then, she has increased innovative technologies including Artificial Intelligence and coding initiatives in grades 1-8, 3D printers, laser etchers, virtual reality, robotics, and more. She has made accessing instructional tools a breeze by implementing Classlink’s Single Sign On, Onesync, and OneRoster, which automates network account creation and access to instructional platforms and allows users to log into everything with a single click through a designated portal – making learning easily accessible to even our youngest learners.

She has also implemented digital hallway informational display boards, a data dashboard making data-informed decisions easier for our administration, and much more! Alana was instrumental in helping to create the Tech Titans, a group of middle school students who push into classrooms to assist younger students with programs such as coding and digital citizenship.

“At Pocantico, we empower our teachers to become technology leaders,” Ms. Winnick said in her video. “You have experts in your own building; empower them. Have teachers and students teach each other and build a community where everyone is learning and growing from one other.”

Personally, she continued her work by hosting a podcast and authoring a book, which has earned her recognition as a leader in the educational use of AI, in the state and beyond. Additionally, she serves as the Hudson Valley Director for the New York State Association for Computers and Technology

(NYSCATE) and was recently awarded the Tech & Learning’s Innovative Tech Director Award for the Northeast, named Magic School’s AI Educator of the Year Finalist, and has been accepted into the EDSAFE AI’s Women in A.I. Fellow Program.

In her acceptance speech, Alana thanked “the administration, staff, board of education, and community for fostering an environment that encourages innovation and growth.” She went on to say “None of it would be possible without your support. Your belief in me and your willingness to allow me to spread my wings have been instrumental in my journey. I am deeply grateful for the opportunities you have provided me and for the trust you have in me. It's an honor to work alongside each of you.”

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## *Young playwrights see their work come to life*

“The end!” announced the actress to thunderous applause. However, it might just be the beginning for some young playwrights.

April 8, 2024 was a special day for third graders Ipsa V. and classmate Aiyden S., they had an opportunity to see the plays they wrote come to life thanks to ARC Stages in Pleasantville.

The entire third grade traveled to the theater where they were in for a theatrical surprise. The field trip was a culmination of a very special project. The class had just completed a unit on writing plays. Working with the theater group as part of its Vision and Voices Playwriting Program, students are introduced to the many elements of a play and work with theater staff over several months to write their own work. The finished plays are submitted to the theater and several are selected to be performed live.



“I enjoyed it,” Ipsa said of learning how to write a play. “We got to use our imaginations.”

Ipsa wrote “The Fantastic Friends Flying Quest,” which told the story of Lily, an owl, who was having trouble learning to fly until her friend, a mountain goat, helps her.

“Mine is about ice melting” explained Aiden, about his play “Ice Melting,” which tells the story of an ice cube who is in trouble until a friend helps it out.

“I got to use my mind,” Aiyden said. “I just enjoy making a play and making it funny.”

The two were excited to see their work shown on stage.



“Each year we do it a little different,” said teacher Marina Lombardo, adding that the unit has been part of her class for five years. “Last year we focused on Social Emotional Learning and had the whole class study that concept. This year students had agency to think of characters, setting and theme.”

Her class, she said, is also working on writing computer code based on their plays so that each work will be turned into an animated show.

“We’re taking it to another level,” Ms. Lombardo said.

Ms. Lombardo said she hopes her students developed a better understanding of what it is like to write for others who may see their work performed or view it as a computer program.



“Each year it gets better and stronger, the older kids reflect on it,” she said.

The Vision and Voices program works with 12 local schools and includes second graders through high school aged students. The program incorporates visits to the schools, often performing for them, and also working with students in their classrooms to help them put their plays together. The student work is then celebrated with the Vision and Voices Playwriting Festival, where students see their work performed at the theater.

The Pocantico students were joined by second graders from the Bedford Road School in Pleasantville to watch the student selected plays be performed.



ARC Stages Artistic Director Stephanie Kovacs Cohen welcomed students as they arrived. While they waited for the performances to start, she and her staff played a game with students, where they pretended to be different characters who lived in outer space and had an opportunity to bring their characters to life on stage.

She said that this year there were more than 500 plays submitted from the 12 schools the theater works with.

“We celebrate every single playwright,” she said. “They were so fabulous,” she said of variety of shows that had been selected.



## ***Joy Scantlebury recognized by industry group***

ENL teacher Joy Scantlebury lends a lot of support to her students and in return, she gets a lot of support from her peers.

Recently she was named the Member of Month from the New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, or NY TESOL.

“A classmate told me I had to be a member even before I finished grad school,” Ms. Scantlebury said. “It will guide you and be a great source of support,” she was told.

Ms. Scantlebury said it was all true.

“It keeps you current and shares best practices so we can provide the best instruction for ENL students,” she said.

For years she has attended NY TESOL conferences, which she has been attending for 20 years, and returns to her work invigorated.

In addition, she has sat in on webinars and has been part of special interest groups and has presented twice at the organization’s annual conference, including once with her colleague, third grade teacher Marina Lombardo.

“It’s a pleasure to be a part of this organization,” she said. “It helps one grow as an educator.”

She also appreciates the support she receives after meeting with fellow members.

“You realize the questions you have and other people have the same questions,” Ms. Scantlebury said. She said too it’s helped her make friends among her colleagues and fellow teachers.

“I am very proud to be a member because it’s a phenomenal organization,” she said. “I’m honored to receive this recognition from an organization I hold very dear to my heart. Whenever I am in a NY TESOL space, I feel like I am home.”

Ms. Scantlebury has been serving as the ENL teacher at Pocantico for 16 years and said the number of students in the program has steadily increased.

“We’re here to make sure our students are supported in learning English, but also maintain their native language,” she said. “It’s cultivating both languages.”

April is National Bilingual/Multilingual Learner Advocacy Month.

“It’s nice there is a month that celebrates this,” Ms. Scantlebury said. “There are so many studies that explain the importance and benefits of being multilingual.”

Each Member of the Month is posted on the organization’s website. You can see the write up on Ms. Scantlebury at <https://nystesol.org/memberofthemoth.php>

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## ***Pocantico Geography Bee to send five students to regional competition***

It was a crowded field at the 2024 National Geographic Geography Bee. Sixteen students in grades 5 through 8 participated in the competition testing their knowledge of geography. The field was narrowed down to five and a school champion was named.

As the contestants answered questions, they were cheered on by classmates in the auditorium. When





all was said and done the top five students, Zoe A., Savannah D., Yusuf F., Matthias B. and Shreyan T. were named to the Pocantico team that will compete at the Tri-State Geo Competition to be held later this spring at the Hackley School. Yusuf was named the school champion.

Eventually, there were two contestants left. They were tasked with answering the question “Which former Portuguese colony that borders the Democratic Republic of Congo, in South Africa is home to the Kahuzi-Biega National Park and is known for its rich wildlife and ecosystem?”



Yusuf and Matthias both answered Angola, which was correct. They remained tied and another question was presented to them.

Principal Adam Brown, who served as the events emcee, asked them “Which large Japanese island houses Tokyo and is the largest of the four main islands?”

The audience remained quiet while the contestants wrote down their answers on a dry erase board.

When they flipped their boards around for the judges to see, there was one correct answer revealed, “Honshu,” and Yusuf was victorious!

Mr. Brown told the audience that he knew the two talented students at the end would do well, but he was getting nervous as he was running out of questions.

Participating students took an online quiz to qualify for the Bee. The top 16 scorers were selected to compete. During the competition everyone was allowed one incorrect answer, a second incorrect response would cause them to be dismissed.

Throughout the afternoon competitors were asked such questions as “How many countries are in the United Kingdom,” “What type of leaf is on the Canadian flag,” and “What country is home to the most islands?”

Mr. Brown thanked all the students who participated and noted they “were already winners.”



## ***The tadpoles are here! The tadpoles are here!***

*Second graders will observe the amphibians before returning them to their natural habitat*

“Class pet! Class pet,” chanted the second graders in Nancy Occhicone’s class as a representative from the Teatown Lake Reservation Nature Preserve set up a special tank. This will be the temporary home of two large tadpoles.

In a neighboring classroom, that of Katie Bryce, a similar set up was put in place.



“I have never seen such large tadpoles,” marveled Ms. Bryce.

The tanks, and their amphibian residents, are all part of the second graders study of the lifecycle of frogs.

The bullfrog tadpoles were brought to the classrooms by Associate Director of Education Programs Marie Roache from the Ossining based center. She spoke with each class about the guests that will be residing with them and

who will be returned to the nature preserve ponds when the classes visit later in the spring.

Ms. Roche discussed with each class how frogs are amphibians and how they eventually live in and out of the water.

Students answered questions about what it means to be cold blooded, to undergo metamorphoses, what frogs eat and how it changes as they develop from tadpole to adult frog.

“They have to keep their skin moist,” said one student.

“They live on land and water,” noted another.

“They lay their eggs in the water,” said another student.



“You seem to know everything about frogs,” Ms. Roche told the students.

The tanks include rocks and a bubbler. The classes will be responsible for feeding the tadpoles and changing the water, with the help of their teachers, of course.

Ms. Roche had students stand up in front of the class holding photos of each stage of a frog’s life, from an egg to a froglet to an adult frog.

Bullfrog tadpoles, Ms. Roche explained, remain in the tadpole stage for two years. Eventually their tails will be absorbed into the main part of their body, they will grow four legs and their gills will disappear as lungs develop.

## *A Message from the Superintendent*

There is always so much to celebrate at Pocantico, and I would like to offer my congratulations to our two TELL Award winners! Educational Technology Director Alana Winnick was honored with an Outstanding Innovative Leader Award and third grade teacher Marina Lombardo was a recipient of the Outstanding Innovative Teacher honor. They are both so deserving, and I appreciate their many contributions to our students and district.



We also have to celebrate our third-grade students Ipsa V. and classmate Aiyden S., they had an opportunity to see the plays they wrote come to life thanks to ARC Stages in Pleasantville and their classmates were there to see it too. I also want to thank ARC Stages for their wonderful partnership in helping make this unique project so meaningful to our students.

Congratulations also go out to ENL teacher Joy Scantlebury, she was recently named the Member of Month from the New York State Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages, or NY TESOL.

A huge shout-out to our music department, Pocantico was very well represented at the 2024 NYSSMA Solo Festival, with 75 of our middle school students participating!

And finally, way to go to our five finalists of the National Geographic Geography Bee! Five students, Zoe A., Savannah D., Yusuf F., Matthias B. and Shreyan T. were named to the Pocantico team that will compete at the Tri-State Geo Competition to be held later this spring at the Hackley School. Yusuf was named the school champion!

*Rich Calkins*  
*Superintendent of Schools*





## ***A Peek at POCO:***

**BRAVO!!** Over half of our Middle School student population represented Pocantico at the NYSSMA Solo Festival at Horace Greeley High School in Chappaqua during the last weekend of April! They were among 1,213 Student Solos Registered, and there were 75 Pocantico Student Solos. Band Director Mike Murray and Choir Director Sheila DePoala couldn't be prouder of the efforts of our student musicians who took the risk and put themselves out there for feedback and continued musical growth!







*It was a beautiful day when the after-school Garden Club took a field trip to Stone Barns! They enjoyed the fresh air, taking some time to write in their garden journals about the natural world they observed and got to meet some happy cows!*



*First graders had an out-of-this-world experience earlier this week when they visited the Hudson River Planetarium to enhance their Sun, Moon and Stars Unit in Science!*

## ***Upcoming Events***

May 9, Board of Education Meeting, 7:30  
May 21, Annual Budget Vote, 7 a.m. to 9 p.m.  
May 24 and May 27, School Closed for Memorial Day

For more information visit our website, [www.pocanticohills.org](http://www.pocanticohills.org)

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