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## A look at activities in the Eldred Central School District



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# Eldred Central School District: Growth, Projects and a Strong Future

BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

The Eldred Central School District is making big improvements to its buildings, academics, and community involvement.

### Capital project updates

One of the biggest things happening in the district is the capital project. Even though there were some delays, the project work is moving along well.

The capital project, which totals \$12.73 million, is focused on upgrading school facilities, sports fields, and other critical infrastructure. The district is borrowing \$11.16 million to finance the work, but due to existing debt dropping off, there will be no tax increase for residents. An additional \$1.56 million from reserves is helping offset costs. Construction is planned



The Eldred Central School District is getting ready for baseball season with a newly upgraded diamond, part of the Capital Project.

from 2024 to 2026.

Planned improvements include a new roof at George Ross Mackenzie Elementary School, along with

upgraded sidewalks for safety. At Eldred Junior Senior High School, the district is installing an all-weather football field and track, a

new baseball field, and resurfacing the existing outdoor basketball and tennis courts. The libraries in both schools are also being redesigned to create modern, flexible learning spaces.

“We finished the football field and opened them up for Homecoming”, said Eldred Central School District Superintendent Traci Ferreira about the upper field upgrades. “They actually didn’t get to break ground until June, so an amazing construction and excavating company made sure we hit Homecoming.”

Having Homecoming at the school again was a proud and exciting moment for the community. Ferreira described how the bleachers were full, families reconnected, and students took the field with a new sense of school pride. “We saw people from all

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## School Scene

*‘A look inside the Eldred Central School District’*

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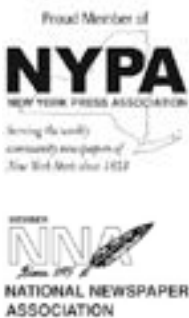
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CONTINUED FROM PAGE 3E

over—alumni, families, community members who hadn't been to a game in years. It felt like Eldred was truly coming together again," she said.

Most of the work is finished, but the track still needs to be done. Ferreira said they decided to wait until May to finish the surface because October weather can be unpredictable. The plan is to have everything done by fall 2025, including a new system that allows games and events to be live-streamed.

#### Academic and literacy initiatives

The district is making a big effort to improve literacy with Dolly Parton's Imagination Library. This program gives free books to kids from birth to age five to help them develop strong reading skills early.

"Studies have shown that if kids struggle with reading by third grade, it's hard to catch up," Ferreira said. "If we can get books into their hands sooner, it can make a real difference."

Parents just need to sign up, and books—available in English and Spanish—are delivered for free. In just five days after launching, 40 children had already signed up, with more expected to join.

#### Financial Stability and Tax Impacts

Business Administrator Caleb Russell said the district is financially stable. "Fiscally, we are no longer on that naughty list," Ferreira added, explaining that the district has strong savings and a good financial outlook.

However, money from the compressor station in the district has caused some challenges. Russell explained that while it helped with taxes at first, it also made the district seem wealthier on paper, which led to a loss in state aid.

"The compressor station added about 10 percent to our district's tax base overnight," he said. "But now, state aid calculations show us as wealthier than we really are, which has led to a loss in funding for transportation, BOCES services, and high-cost student

placements."

For now, Governor Kathy Hochul has said that schools will not lose "hold harmless" funding this year, which helps keep aid levels steady.

#### Sports, Student Life, and Community Engagement

The district is also working to improve sportsmanship at games. Ferreira said that aggressive behavior from fans has been a problem across the country, but Eldred is seeing better attitudes at games.

"We emphasize sportsmanship, and we've seen a shift," she said. "It's okay to win, and it's okay to lose. Our goal is to create a positive experience for everyone involved."

Eldred is also making sure the community stays informed through programs like "The Hive" and the Yellow Jacket News.

Meanwhile, the merger between Livingston Manor and Roscoe has sparked questions about whether Eldred will merge with another district. Ferreira made it clear: Eldred is not merging.

"Right after that merger was announced, people started asking, 'Who is Eldred merging with?'" Ferreira said. "And the answer is: nobody."

#### Enrollment and Housing Challenges

The number of students in the district has remained steady at about 460. Some new families have moved in, but Ferreira said the lack of housing in Sullivan County is a problem.

"Houses that go up for sale often become Airbnbs, leaving little for new families looking to move here," she said. "There's just not enough affordable housing."

Even with these challenges, the district is optimistic. With strong leadership, a clear plan, and support from the community, Eldred Central School District is set up for success.

"Our board, our staff, our families — we're all working together to make this district the best it can be," Ferreira said. "Small but mighty — that's Eldred."

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# What's New at Eldred Junior-Senior High School?

**E**ldred Junior-Senior High School is introducing exciting programs to improve student learning and involvement for the 2024-2025 school year. Eldred Central School District Superintendent Traci Ferreira and Eldred High School Principal Michael Conklin are leading the changes, focusing on academics, student well-being and sustainability.

## New Academic Opportunities

Eldred is expanding its partnership with SUNY Sullivan to provide students with more opportunities to earn college credits while still in high school. According to Principal Conklin, students can now take advantage of these courses to work toward an associate's degree.

Currently, about 20 percent of students are expected to graduate with both a high school diploma and an associate's degree.

The school is also placing a stronger emphasis on STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts, and math) education, with the launch of a coding club that not only enhances student skills but also allows them to mentor elementary students in coding fundamentals.

## Supporting Student Well-Being

To promote leadership and personal development, Eldred has introduced The Leader in Me program for seventh and eighth graders. This initiative, inspired by Stephen Covey's 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, helps students build essential life skills like teamwork, goal setting, and problem-solving. Ferreira said that the program empowers students to take initiative and develop leadership qualities that will benefit them beyond the classroom.

In addition, the school recognizes student effort through the Shining Star Awards, which highlight students who demonstrate perseverance and commitment, even if they do not achieve honor roll status. This initiative aims to celebrate all student accomplishments and encourage a positive school culture.

## Going Green

Eldred's composting program, known as Eldred Waste Warriors, continues to make strides in sustainability. The school recently received a competition grant from Sullivan 180 to support the initiative, and administrators are optimistic about securing additional funding. Before launching the program, staff and students spent a year measuring waste output to establish a baseline. Now, with ongoing monitoring, the school is working to significantly reduce its carbon footprint and minimize landfill waste.

## Listening to Students

To ensure classes align with stu-

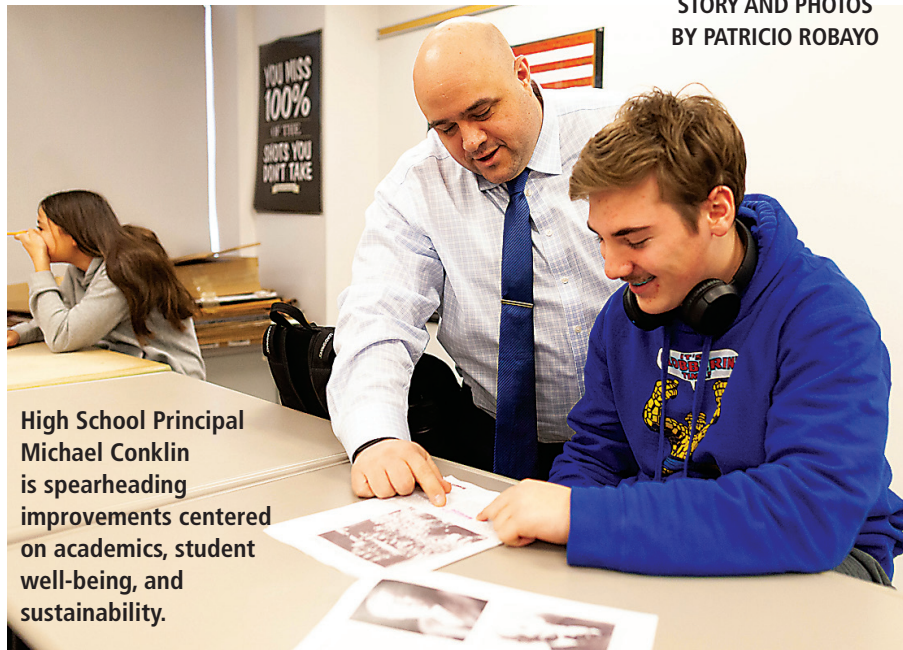


Cell phones at the high school are stored in these wall pockets to help students stay focused during class.

dent interests, the school allows students to influence their course schedules by selecting electives that match their passions and career goals. Conklin said that the goal is to create an academic environment that caters to students' needs and prepares them for the future.

## Using Technology Wisely

To improve accountability and classroom management, the school implemented Smart Pass, an electronic hall pass system that allows teachers and administrators to track student movement in real time. This system replaces traditional paper passes and helps prevent potential issues related to excessive hall use.



High School Principal Michael Conklin is spearheading improvements centered on academics, student well-being, and sustainability.

A new cell phone policy now requires students to place their devices in designated pockets at the front of the classroom during lessons. Ferreira explained that this approach is intended to teach responsible technology use rather than ban phones altogether. By allowing controlled access, students learn to balance their screen time while maintaining focus during instructional periods.

## Clubs and Activities

Extracurricular activities at Eldred are thriving, with clubs such as art, gaming, fishing, and book clubs seeing active participation. The art club, in particular, has been enhancing the school's environment by creating murals and other visual projects.

School trips also remain a high-

light for students. This year, seventh graders attended the Ashokan Field Campus for an immersive learning experience in nature and sustainability. Meanwhile, ninth graders are preparing for their upcoming trip to Washington, D.C., and seniors are looking forward to their end-of-year excursion.

## Looking Ahead

Eldred's commitment to student success remains at the forefront of its initiatives. Conklin said that all these programs are designed with students in mind, ensuring they feel supported and prepared for the future. With ongoing efforts in academics, sustainability, and student well-being, Eldred Junior-Senior High School continues to foster a dynamic and engaging learning environment.

Congratulations & Best of Luck to all our Eldred Athletes & Cheerleaders for a successful season.

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# What's new at George Ross Mackenzie Elementary?

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

There are a lot of exciting changes happening at George Ross Mackenzie Elementary School in the Eldred Central School District.

## Building Leadership

The "Leader in Me" program has been in place for about three years now, and it has helped unify the school community. Eldred Elementary Principal Michael Carpentieri explained that previously, different programs operated separately, but now they work together more effectively. This shift has encouraged both student and teacher leadership in ways that had not been seen before.

One of the biggest changes is the introduction of student jobs for 5th and 6th graders. These stu-



George Ross Mackenzie Elementary School in the Eldred Central School District is experiencing many exciting changes.



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dents now take on roles such as hallway monitors, classroom receptionists, lost and found managers, and greeters who welcome students each morning. The goal is to foster a sense of responsibility and ownership in the school environment.

Carpentieri noted that these changes have led to a noticeable shift in the school's culture. He mentioned that students are taking on more leadership roles and that behavioral referrals have decreased.

Additionally, the school launched the "Beginning Buzz," a short Monday morning assembly that is now fully managed by 6th graders. This gathering includes discussions about the weather, a focus on the habit of the month from the "Leader in Me" program, and recognition of students for acts of kindness and academic achievements. Initially started by the staff, the assembly quickly transitioned into a student-led initiative.

### Outdoor Classroom and Basketball League

Another major addition to the school is an outdoor classroom, made possible through a grant secured by Sullivan 180. Teacher's aide Heather Tice played a key role in coordinating this project, which provides a new learning environment that connects students with nature.

Carpentieri highlighted how the outdoor classroom offers students an alternative space for learning and engagement.

In addition to this, the school is collaborating with the PTA and gym teacher Todd Keast to establish a new basketball league. While students already had access to Little League baseball and AYSO soccer, this initiative aims to provide them with an athletic opportunity during the winter months.

### Enhancing Communication

School Counselor Michelle Gallo said that another significant shift

has been in the way students and teachers communicate. The school is focusing on changing the language used in interactions to reflect leadership values. Even the bulletin boards have been redesigned to showcase student achievements and leadership efforts.

Gallo stressed that the goal is to empower students by giving them a voice. She explained that students now have the opportunity to express what leadership roles they feel best suited for, rather than simply being assigned tasks.

She also highlighted the impact of these changes on student confidence. According to her, students are now taking greater ownership of their actions and learning. She recalled a moment when a typically shy student took on a leadership role by guiding younger students, standing in front of their peers, and giving directions. Watching them step out of their comfort zone and embrace their role as a leader, she said, was a rewarding experience.

The school also sends out annual surveys to parents for feedback. Carpentieri shared that the responses have been overwhelmingly positive, though the school continues to work on increasing community engagement as a key goal for the year.

### Culture shift

Overall, the changes at George Ross Mackenzie Elementary School are making a significant impact. The "Leader in Me" program is providing more leadership opportunities for students while strengthening the school culture. With initiatives like the outdoor classroom and basketball league, students now have even more ways to get involved.

Carpentieri added that these changes are not just about implementing a program, but about fostering a long-term cultural shift within the school. The goal is to continue building on these efforts to make a lasting difference.

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