INSIDE THIS ISSUE:
- No Cell Phone Mandate
- Alumni Spotlight
- Meet Janet Orwick

Titan Herald

TACONIC HILLS CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

www.taconichills.k12.ny.us OCTOBER 2025

Stay Charged. Stay Curious!

Dear Taconic Hills Families, Students, and Community Members:

Welcome to a new school year! Each fall brings fresh energy and excitement, and this year our theme is "Stay Charged. Stay Curious." This theme allows us to keep "Raising the Bar" for ourselves and our learners while also reminding us of the balance we strive for in education. We must keep our energy focused on what matters most, while also keeping our curiosity alive as we prepare our students for a world that is changing faster than ever.

At Taconic Hills, we believe that every day, in every way, everyone counts. Every student, every staff member, and every family plays an important role in shaping our school community. One of the most powerful ways students can show that they count is by being present, every day, on time and ready to learn. Attendance is more than a number; it is a habit that builds responsibility, resilience and connection. Each day of school provides an opportunity to grow, build relationships and learn.

Together, we are committed to ensuring that our students are not only academically prepared but also ready to use their imagination, curiosity, and critical thinking to solve problems, create new ideas, and adapt to challenges.

This is why incorporating the New York State Portrait of a Graduate into our curriculum and instruction is a must. It is not optional; it is essential. Our students must graduate with the skills to think critically, communicate clearly and confidently, act responsibly, and contribute meaningfully both locally and globally. We want them to be reflective, recognizing their strengths as well as the areas where they want to grow. This kind of preparation will serve them not just in school, but in life.

We also know that true learning can only happen when students feel safe, supported, and cared for. That is why social, emotional, and mental well-being remain a top priority. This year, we are adding a social-emotional screener to help us identify student needs earlier and provide support before a crisis develops. This tool will complement the extraordinary work of our counselors, social workers, and teachers, giving them another way to meet the needs of our students effectively.

As superintendent, I am deeply proud of the dedication of our staff and the resilience of our students. I am equally grateful for the support of our families and community, whose partnership makes our work possible. Together, we will continue to stay charged and stay curious as we prepare every student for success.

Here's to a school year filled with energy, curiosity, and growth. Let's commit to making every day count because at Taconic Hills every day, in every way, every students' day and future counts.

With gratitude,
Lynnette Brunger, *Superintendent of Schools*



Dr. Elsa Kortright-Torres

Meet Our New Assistant Superintendent

Dr. Elsa Kortright-Torres was appointed the Assistant Superintendent for Academic & Instructional Leadership for the Taconic Hills Central School District in July of this year, following the retirement of Dr. Sandra Gardner.

Dr. Kortright-Torres comes to Taconic Hills with over 25 years of experience in education. She began her career in the classroom and has since served in a variety of leadership roles, including Assistant Principal, Principal, Administrative Assistant Superintendent, and most recently the Executive Director of Teaching & Learning in the Hudson City School District.

Fluent in Spanish, Dr. Kortright Torres's personal and professional background allows her to bring unique insight and support to our growing population of English as a New Language (ENL) learners.

Since joining Taconic Hills, she has already been actively collaborating with administrators and faculty, building strong relationships, and laying the foundation for a smooth transition into her new role. We are confident that her leadership, vision, and commitment to student success will guide us forward, and we look forward to all that we will accomplish together in the coming school year and beyond.

ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT:

Dr. Imelda Muller Named Astronaut Candidate

Taconic Hills 2009 graduate, Imelda Muller, has been selected as one of NASA's newest astronaut candidates, launching her on a path toward space exploration. Muller, who grew up in Copake Falls, credits her roots at Taconic Hills High School as the start of a journey that has taken her from Columbia County classrooms to the global stage.



Dr. Imelda Muller

After graduating from Taconic Hills, Muller pursued a bachelor's degree in Behavioral Neuroscience at Northeastern University and went on to earn her medical degree from the University of Vermont College of Medicine. She joined the U.S. Navy, where she trained as an Undersea Medical Officer and served at the Navy's Experimental Diving Unit, overseeing groundbreaking research in diving medicine and supporting high-risk operations. Along the way, she earned commendations for her leadership, clinical excellence, and teaching.

Muller's medical career continued at Johns Hopkins University, where she was completing her anesthesia residency when NASA announced her selection in 2025. She began astronaut training this fall, a rigorous two-year program preparing candidates for missions to the International Space Station, the Moon, and beyond.

Outside of medicine and military service, Muller has long been passionate about endurance sports, scuba diving, and outdoor adventures. She has competed as an elite triathlete on the U.S. Military Endurance Sports team and represented the Navy in national competitions.

Her story is one of perseverance, service, and inspiration — a reminder to Taconic Hills students and families that big dreams can take root in a small community and reach all the way to the stars.

Partnering for Pupil Success: Meet Janet Orwick

We are pleased to announce that at the August 27 , 2025, Board of Education meeting, the Board unanimously approved the appointment of Janet Orwick as a consultant guiding the PPS Office.She will be working with Taconic Hills for the 2025-2026 school year.



Janet Orwick

Orwick brings over 30 years of experience in education having served as a teacher, instructional coach and director of special education. She brings a positive attitude, deep expertise, patience, and a passion for making sure every student gets the education they deserve to feel and find success.

Together, we have started a careful review of our special education programs to make sure we are meeting all state requirements and giving students the best support possible. Part of this work includes preparing for a state review of how we plan for students' transitions after high school, which will take place later in October. In addition, Orwick will be creating a PPS Handbook for staff that outlines policies and procedures, as well as a Case Manager Resource Guide to support staff in serving students and families. A full report on our progress will be shared with the Board in April 2026.

Once a new Director of Pupil Personnel Services (PPS) is hired, Mrs. Orwick will be working side by side with them to make sure the transition goes smoothly. Janet's leadership has already had a positive impact on the district as she diligently works with students, families and staff. We are grateful for her expertise and commitment to Taconic Hills.

School Breakfast Powers a Titan Strong Day

Breakfast is the best way to start the day at Taconic Hills! Eating in the morning helps students feel more awake, think faster, and stay ready to take on the day. Every student at Taconic Hills receives free breakfast every morning—yes, free! Each meal includes fruit, along with smart food choices like whole grains, lean protein, and low-fat milk, all designed to fuel the brain and provide lasting energy with less sugar.

Breakfast is served every day from 8:00 AM to 8:10 AM and eaten in the classroom. Students in grades K–12 pick up breakfast in the cafeteria, while Pre-K students have meals delivered directly to their classroom. A convenient breakfast cart is also available at the main elementary entrance for students who are dropped off and need a quick grab-and-go option.

From breakfast sandwiches to fruit to cold milk, there's something for everyone. Starting the day with a healthy meal sets students up for success—because breakfast is truly brain fuel!



Less Screen Time, More Class Time



This school year, our district continues to put student learning first by implementing Governor Kathy Hochul's Bell to Bell Personal Electronic Device Ban, now a law for all New York State schools. This mandate was created to tackle one of the biggest challenges in classrooms today: cell phone distractions. Studies show that students check their phones an average of 80 times per day, pulling their attention away from learning and limiting engagement in class.

To support this initiative, our district has taken several steps to make the transition smoother and more positive for students:

- **Yondr Pouches:** Students in grades 7 through 12 are expected to secure their cell phones and electronic devices in Yondr pouches during the school day. This way, students keep possession of their devices, but cannot access them until dismissal. Students in Grades 6 and below are expected to keep their personal devices in their lockers during the school day.
- **Code of Conduct:** Our district's Code of Conduct reflects the new mandate, and teachers, staff, and administrators are working together to ensure consistency across all grade levels.
- **Face-to-Face Interaction:** With devices out of reach, students are able to engage more fully with peers and teachers, build stronger relationships, and practice valuable social skills.
- **Games and Activities:** To make sure students still have fun, healthy options during lunch and free periods, we've added activities like board games and group games in the cafeteria.
- **Focus on Learning:** From the first bell to the last, this mandate helps ensure students are fully present, ready to collaborate, and actively participating in their education.

We understand this is a change for students and families, but by creating a school environment free from personal electronic distractions, we're helping every student succeed academically, socially, and personally.

COFFEE TALKS

WITH SUPERINTENDENT BRUNGER



Beginning this year, the District is pleased to introduce Coffee Talk with Superintendent Lynnette Brunger, an opportunity for families and community members to engage in meaningful discussions on important educational issues directly with the Superintendent. These sessions will be held at 5 PM, prior to Board of Education meetings, and will feature coffee and light refreshments for attendees. Each coffee talk will be centered around a specific theme and will be held several times throughout the school year, offering an ongoing opportunity for conversation and community engagement.

DATES & TOPICS:

- October 15: Safety & Emergency Drills, Bus Behavior Expectations
- January 21: Attendance
- March 18: EV Buses

Welcome New Staff!

Chrystal Albright, Teacher Aide
Amber Bauhoff, Jr/Sr High Art Teacher
Tiffany Bonk, Elementary Special Education Teacher
Chad Davey, Jr/Sr High Social Studies Teacher
Kayla Friscia, Elementary Teacher
Jashton Gieser, Jr/Sr High Art Teacher
Katelee Juliano, Jr/Sr High Nurse
Kathleen Mayhew, Bus Attendant
Jessica Roberts, Jr/Sr High Clerk Typist
Emma Sarnacki, Jr/Sr High English Teacher
Mara Smith, Teacher Aide
Erin Storm, Teacher Aide
Christopher Tramel, Jr/Sr High School Counselor
Elizabeth Yorck, Jr/Sr High Special Education Teacher
Grayson Van Wie, Jr/Sr High Full Time Substitute

Have a question and not sure where to start?



Visit our district website to view the chain of command and connect with the right person.



Charged Up for the School Year

Taconic Hills students have been riding our new electric school buses since the end of last school year, and the transition continues strong into this fall. The buses have been running efficiently on all in-district routes, even in varying weather conditions, and are proving reliable for daily transportation.

Students and drivers are noticing the difference: quieter rides, smooth acceleration, and cleaner air at bus stops make the daily commute more comfortable and enjoyable. Many students are experiencing an electric vehicle for the first time, turning their regular trip to school into a small step toward a greener future.

We'll continue monitoring performance throughout the year, gathering data on range, reliability, and overall efficiency. Early results are promising, showing that our electric buses are delivering a safer, smoother, and more environmentally friendly ride for the entire school community.

JOIN THE PTO!

The Taconic Hills Elementary PTO (Parent Teacher Organization) serves students in Pre-K through 8th grade and is dedicated to building strong connections between parents, the school, and the community. We offer many ways for families to get involved, whether it's through weekly activities, seasonal events, or special projects. Volunteers play an important role in making each school day brighter for our students, and we'd love for you to be part of it!

PTO meetings are typically held on the first Thursday of each month at 2:50 PM in Room E146, and all parents and guardians are encouraged to attend.

Discover more about how you can join in and see all the fun things we do for our kids by visiting:

https://taconichillspto.ptboard.com

Wondrous Weekly Winners

Titan Strong Certificates have become a beloved staple at Taconic Hills! Inspired by CASEL's Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) framework, these certificates celebrate students and staff who demonstrate excellence in Self-Awareness, Self-Management, Social Awareness, Relationship Skills, and Responsible Decision Making.

Titan Strong winners are recognized for a wide range of actions, including showing leadership in the classroom, excelling in coursework, or lending a helping hand to a peer in need. Certificates are awarded every Friday, shining a spotlight on the positive impact our Titans have on the school community.

By recognizing these everyday acts of kindness, leadership, and responsibility, the Titan Strong Certificates continue to encourage a culture where social and emotional growth is just as important as academic achievement.



8 Man Football Team Tackles the Season with a Strong Start

The Taconic Hills Titans are making history this fall as they begin their first season of 8-man football. Transitioning into a new format is never easy, but both coaches and athletes have adjusted seamlessly. Their hard work and determination are already showing results, as the Titans hold an impressive 3–1 record to open the 2025 season.

"The players have shown what hard work and individual improvements can accomplish. Many of our players have been a part of the Varsity Football Program for 2–3 years and the strides they have made have been terrific. Our Senior Leadership has been evident and the hunger from our younger players has propelled our success. We look to keep things rolling and finish the season on a high note," said Head Coach Joshua Piper.

From the sidelines, it's clear that this group of athletes is motivated, enthusiastic, and eager to prove themselves. The drive to win has been evident each week, fueling both individual growth and team success.

Adding to the excitement, Taconic Hills football has earned honorable mention recognition from the New York State Sportswriters Association—a testament to the program's progress and potential in its inaugural 8-man campaign.

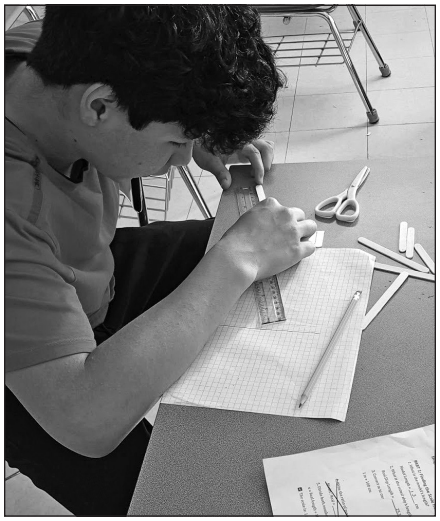


With strong momentum and a resilient team spirit, the Titans are setting the tone for a bright future in 8-man football.

Summer Bridges Students Chart the Hudson







As part of their learning about the Hudson River and its importance to the area, students in the Summer Bridges Program mapped the river, its landmarks, and built model cargo ships to explore water displacement. We are proud to offer Summer Bridges for students transitioning from middle school to high school—a chance to learn, make new friends, and build social connections.

Volunteers Needed! The District is seeking volunteers for our Stories Across Generations program! Senior citizens and elementary students are invited to come together after school to share stories, build friendships, and work on creative projects inspired by the books they read. If you'd like to make a lasting impact and be part of this special program, please contact the Office of the Assistant Superintendent at 518-325-2807.

Taconic Hills
CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
Lynnette Brunger

POSTAL PATRON

The Taconic Hills Board of Education meets regularly on the third Wednesday of each month at 6 p.m. Meetings are open for the public to attend and are also streamed on YouTube.

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www.taconichills.k12.ny.us

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct 13: . . . . . Columbia / Indigenous Peoples Day, District Closed
Oct 15: . . . . . Board of Education Meeting 6PM
Oct 17: . . . . . Senior Walkthrough 6:30PM & Homecoming Football Game 7PM
Oct 18: . . . . . Pumpkin Run Grades PK-6 10AM
Oct 21: . . . . . Community Flu Clinic 3:30PM - 4:30PM
Oct 24: . . . . . Trunk or Treat, Pow Wow, Touch a Truck Event 4PM-6PM
Oct 30: . . . . . American Red Cross Blood Drive 8:30AM-2:30PM
Oct 31: . . . . . Last day school tax payments accepted at THCSD
Nov 4:. . . . . Grades PK-6 Picture Day
Nov 7:. . . . . End of 1st Quarter Marking Period
Nov 10:. . . . . Superintendent's Conference Day, School Closed
Nov 11:. . . . . Veterans Day, District Closed
Nov 13:. . . . . Fall Athletics Awards Ceremony
Nov 14:. . . . . High School Drama Club Performance of Macbeth 6:30PM
Nov 15:. . . . . High School Drama Club Performance of Macbeth 2PM & 6:30PM
Nov 19:. . . . . Board of Education Meeting 6PM
Nov 24:. . . . . Parent Teacher Conferences 5:30PM-7:30PM
Nov 25:. . . . . Half Day for all Grades, Parent Teacher Conferences 12PM-3PM
Nov 26-28:. . . . . Thanksgiving Recess, District Closed
Dec 6:. . . . . Winter Arts & Crafts Festival 10AM – 3PM
Dec 9:. . . . . High School Winter Concert & Art Show 6:30PM
Dec 16:. . . . . Jr High School Winter Concert & Art Show 6:30PM
Dec 17:. . . . . Board of Education Meeting 6PM
Dec 22-Jan 2: . . . Winter Recess

Stay Connected with the Taconic Hills App

Keep up with everything happening at Taconic Hills! Download the Taconic Hills app to receive news, events, and updates right at your fingertips. Simply scan the QR code to download today!