

HITTING THE BOOKS

Danvers hockey team scores with reading program

Danvers High School hockey players swapped skates for books when they embarked on their annual Danvers Hockey Reading Day in late January. Players visited elementary schools, read to students and answered their questions about being a student-athlete. The visits are intended to remind the younger students of the importance of reading and the commitment it takes to be engaged in school as well as extracurricular activities. Many of the players returned to their former elementary schools to read to students.



Danvers High hockey players, from left, Owen Swanton, Bryce Clark, Cooper Dunham, Seamus Cary, Hunter DeDominicis and Jack Henry.



Drew Godfried reads a children's book to a classroom of young Danvers pupils for the annual Danvers Hockey Reading Day on Jan. 28.

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Here are the basics of the program:

What is it? The Salem News and Gloucester Daily Times partner with local businesses to provide free digital access to our newspapers to anyone within a school in our coverage area at no cost to the school. This access

encourages students to value the vital news coverage being produced by The Salem News and Gloucester Daily Times. They will build awareness and gain critical thinking skills in the process.

Who can participate? This program will benefit teachers, students, and others in the school community.

Where does it take place? You can access our newspaper online. Teachers can

incorporate the program into their curriculums, even having reporters, photographers and editors visit your class.

When can we start benefiting? As soon as we have your commitment to participate in Real News in Schools we will go to work to find a local business who wants to sponsor you. Once we have one, we will work with your IT Department to get the program

up and running.

Why is this valuable?

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Making history

Baker brings home Beverly's first All-State title; Goes claims crown for SJP

By Phil Stacey

» Executive Sports Editor

Joe Baker will go down forever in Beverly High wrestling annals as the young man who delivered the Panthers their first All-State champion.

Braedon Goes, meanwhile, was the latest in a long line of St. John's Prep matsmen to bring home an All-State crown of his own.

Baker made history for the Orange-and-Black grapplers at the March 1 All-State championships at Methuen High, taking down Sawyer Ayotte of Shepherd Hill Regional via a 16-9 decision in the 165-pound title bout.

Goes claimed the 126-pound crown a year after taking third at All-States. The senior from Danvers

bested Catholic Conference rival Nathan Sayers of Xaverian via a 4-1 decision in the final.

The Northeastern Conference's Wrestler of the Year for **Beverly**, Baker was the top seed in his weight class after winning the Division 1 state title the previous weekend. He scored the first of three straight technical falls after taking down Greater Lawrence's Kaelib Reynolds, 20-4 (following a first round bye). He easily advanced to the semifinals with a 17-2 wipeout of Josiah Quincy's Jhayvon Napoleon in his next bout.

A semifinal battle against Bridgewater-Raynham's Luke Driscoll proved to be another blowout victory for Baker, who earned his third TF of the tournament with a 19-3 triumph. He then finished off with the greatest win of his career over Ayotte in the championship to improve to 46-1 on the season and 142-22 in his high school career.

As Beverly's lone representative at the event, Baker helped his squad place 28th overall with 28½ points.

Goes's victory at 126 pounds allowed **St. John's Prep** to finish sixth overall with 97½ points.

Following a first round bye, Goes recorded back-to-back falls over Ryan Gomes of Ludlow High and North Attleboro's Michael Canova in 1:16 and 1:17, respectively. Alex Javier of Somerset-Berkley was his opponent in the semifinals, where he out-pointed Sayers to give the Eagles another All-State titlist.

Two of his Prep teammates also reached the final of their respective weight classes. James Lally, a junior wrestling at 144 pounds, claimed three major decisions, including a 17-4 semifinal domination of Newton South's Nicolas Genin, before Aidan Baum of Milford captured the crown



HECTOR LONGO/Staff photo

St. John's Prep junior Kevin Lally squares up against Aidan Baum of Milford in Saturday's All-State wrestling championships in the 144-pound final.

with a 10-4 decision in the final.

As expected, heavyweight Alex Bajoras reached the final ... where he once again ran into his nemesis, nationally ranked Thomas Brown of Chelmsford, dropping a 5-2 decision. Prior to that, Bajoras had three consecutive falls, including one over Tri-County's Jack Disharoon in the semifinals.

Will Lavallee added a

sixth place finish at 150 pounds for St. John's Prep, which also got a pair of falls from Octavio DeOliveira at 215 lbs.

Kevin Spoon led **Salem** by taking eighth place, highlighted by a 4-1 decision over Ludlow's Ryan Gomes. Connor Buckley (132) and Miguel Arcila (150) had one win apiece for the Witches as well.

Junior captain Liam

O'Brien (132 lbs.) and senior captain Mason Hinshaw (157 lbs.) both battled well for **Marblehead/Swampscott**. O'Brien, the program's all-time leader in victories (142), finished his 11th grade campaign with a 41-7 record, while Hinshaw took home a 40-8 mark in his final high school season.

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Peabody to grant diplomas to former students who failed MCAS

By Caroline Enos

» Staff Writer

PEABODY — About 70 former Peabody Veterans Memorial High School students are now eligible to receive their high school diplomas — despite some of them leaving school more than 20 years ago.

The students attended PVMHS from 2003 to 2024 and met all requirements to graduate except passing the MCAS, or the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System.

With voters approving Question 2 on the November ballot, removing the test as a graduation requirement in Massachusetts, these students are now able

to retroactively receive a diploma, Superintendent Josh Vadala told the School Committee in January.

The district searched through records between 2003, the first year MCAS was a requirement to graduate, and 2024 to identify such students.

Some had already reached out to the district after Question 2 passed to ask about their eligibility for a diploma, and others were still in the process of retaking the test, Vadala said.

The district will have to track down many of these former students and it's possible some have gone on to get their GEDs. In that case, they will still be granted a diploma, he said.

"I expect other districts will be doing this too and that it will become a requirement," Vadala told The Salem News.

The diplomas can be awarded once the School Committee approves new graduation requirements for Peabody students late this winter or early this spring.

The requirements are the same as the ones already in place, minus the removal of passing MCAS.

Students will have to pass required core classes the state has already granted a competency determination. The classes include four years of English, three years of social studies, three years of math, two years of science and four years of physical

education and wellness. They must also complete 40 hours of community service over their four years at PVMHS.

The standard was the same applied to students in 2020 who did not have to pass the MCAS because of learning disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Other graduation requirements could come down the line. Proponents behind Question 2 said research projects, coursework portfolios or other alternatives to testing could be a comprehensive and fair way to determine a student's readiness for graduation in lieu of a test.

It would be helpful for the state to implement any additional requirements

uniformly across the state, Vadala said.

"I see those things evolving over time and I think there will be more hands-on learning type things as part of the curriculum moving forward," he said.

"Our biggest priority right now is making sure the Class of 2025 has everything they need to graduate in June and that we have a nice policy that honors the kids of the past and the ones in the future."

The state hasn't nixed the MCAS completely by passing Question 2. It will still be used to track how well districts are meeting educational benchmarks.

The Peabody School Committee voted to support

Question 2 last fall ahead of the election. The committee said the test is a one-size-fits-all approach that isn't fair to students who don't speak English as a first language or who have special needs, mental health issues or problems at home.

Vadala remained against Question 2, but not for such reasons.

"We're trying to navigate this change in real time," he said. "My opposition to Question 2 was because this (change) wasn't teased out yet and now that it has passed we're left with a little bit of uncertainty of how (graduation policies) will look in the future."

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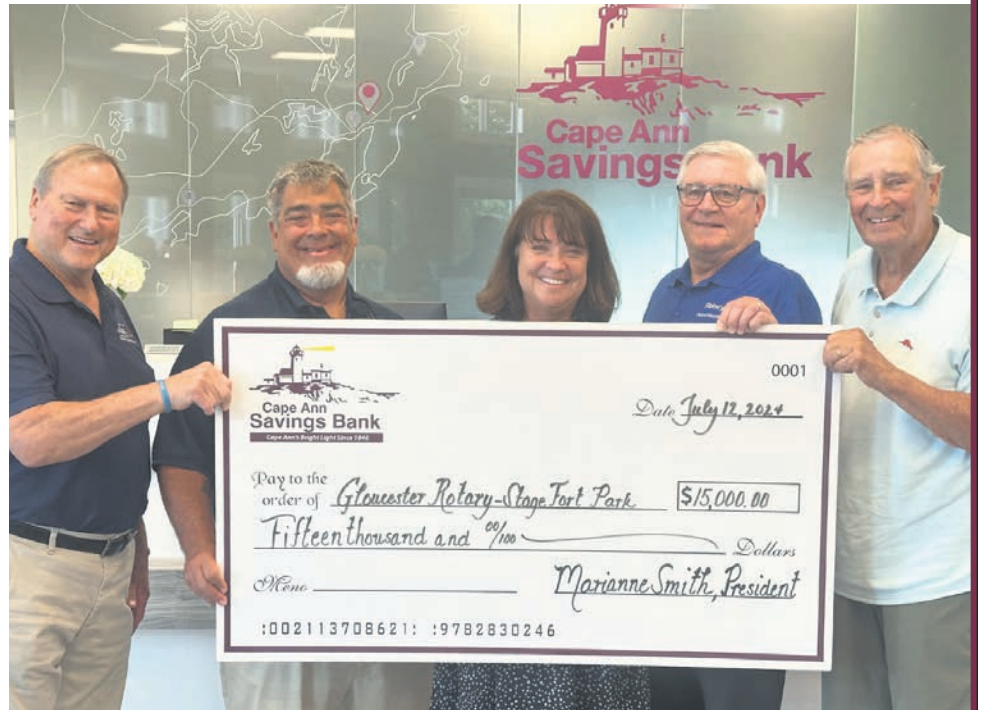
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Schools get \$5.5M for mental health services

By Christian M. Wade

» Statehouse Reporter

BOSTON — Dozens of public schools are getting more state funding to help them expand mental health programs and services for struggling students.

The state Department of Elementary and Secondary Education is distributing more than \$5.5 million to 60 school districts, educational collaboratives and charter schools to improve student access to behavioral and mental health services and support.

The funding can be used to create or expand student support through collaboration with families and educators, and to build local school partnerships with community-based mental health agencies and providers, according to the Healey administration.

“We have a mental health crisis that was only made worse by the pandemic, particularly for students,” Healey said in a statement.

“These grants will help districts connect students with the services they need to be safe, healthy and successful today and into the future.”

Locally, several school districts — including Salem, Gloucester, Haverhill, Methuen and Danvers — will each be getting \$100,000 for expanding mental health services.

The Salem Academy Charter school is getting \$99,260, while the Phoenix Academy Public Charter High School in Lawrence will get \$100,000, according to the Healey administration.

While children were spared the worst health effects of COVID-19, their mental health was a different story. State leaders say the pandemic created a tidal wave of social and emotional health issues among young people that is still rippling across the state.

Lockdowns, school closings and restrictions on social gatherings to prevent the spread of the virus, coupled with a lack of access

How Gloucester will use \$100K to improve students well-being

By Times Staff

A state grant awarding Gloucester Public Schools \$100,000 will continue funding mental health related programs and trainings as the district works to improve students well-being and recover from the long-lingering effects of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“We are proud that Gloucester schools have been awarded this grant for the fourth year in a row,” Superintendent Ben Lummis said via email. “This funding helps us to continue to strengthen the

different levels of support we provide for students in the areas of mental health and social emotional learning.”

Specifically, Lummis said the money will help fund programming in the following areas:

- Dropout prevention and school engagement efforts through in-school programming like the Project Adventure Challenge Course at O’Maley Innovation Middle School and through local partnerships like the Rays program with the Younity Center in

downtown Gloucester.

The Rays program is designed for students who may have been successful at remote learning but who struggle with the return to school, “requiring a quieter environment to do school work.”

- Identifying students in need and helping them get access to support and services sooner through universal screening at the middle and high school.

- Improving access to mental health and substance abuse services in the schools through

partnerships with local agencies and Care Solace.

Care Solace is a free, confidential service for all Gloucester Public School students, staff and their families to connect to mental health and substance use services 365 days a year, 24 hours a day in over 200 languages.

- Training for the schools’ clinical staff on building students’ skills to cope with anxiety, school avoidance, and depression.

Lummis said all of this work is anchored in the district’s three-year Plan for Ongoing Improvement.

to in-person services, exacerbated a mental health treatment gap for children, according to medical experts. Low-income and minority children were disproportionately affected.

In 2022, a coalition of groups including the American Academy of Pediatrics issued a stern warning that

the youth mental health crisis has become a “national emergency.”

A recent SAMHSA report found 12% of adolescents ages 12 to 17 said they had serious thoughts of suicide, 5.3% made a suicide plan, and 2.5% percent attempted suicide in the past year.

Education Secretary

Patrick Tutwiler said the additional funding will help with “healing, stabilizing, and transforming our education system that is still recovering from the lasting impacts of the pandemic.”

“These grants are providing our schools, from North Adams to Dennis, with the funding they need to foster

environments that support healthy social and emotional development in their classrooms and beyond,” he said in a statement.

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DEREK KOUYOUNJIAN/Photo

Gloucester’s Aili Spencer, shown here competing in the long jump during spring track last season, set a new school record of 18-feet-4.5-inches in the long jump at Saturday’s New England championships.

Spencer sets another school record, places 7th at New England’s in long jump

By Nick Giannino

» Sports Editor

Another week, another record-setting performance from Rockport native Aili Spencer.

Representing Gloucester at the indoor track and field New England Championships, Spencer recorded a long jump leap of 18-feet-4.50 inches to break her own GHS program record. Her performance was good for seventh place overall in a stacked field, and just 2.5 inches shy of a sixth place podium finish.

“I was pleasantly surprised by the exceptional day I experienced,” admitted Spencer, who will now compete at Nike

Nationals later this month in both the long jump and sprint medley relay (200 leg).

“Achieving a jump over 18-3 was necessary to qualify for the finals, and I accomplished that. I take great pride in my performance, and I am confident that with this new mindset I can achieve any distance I set my sights on.”

Spencer’s first jump of the day was 18-3, immediately giving her the requisite distance to advance to Nationals. She then fouled on her second jump, but, according to her, “maintained a positive attitude and refused to give up.”

Spencer says her final leap left her in disbelief.

As for securing the new school record in the event — something she’s now done three times in the past month — Spencer admitted it’s a great accomplishment, but her eyes remain set on bigger goals at the highest of stages.

“Breaking records is enjoyable, but it truly matters when there is a meaningful reward involved,” she said. “The fact that I have consistently surpassed my long jumps records for three consecutive weeks has broadened my perspective on my potential to compete at a higher level.”

Spencer will be joined by numerous teammates at Nike Indoor Nationals, which will

take place Friday, March 14, through Sunday, March 16, at The Armory Track & Field Center in New York. Those teammates include the mixed gender 4x400 relay team of Dylan Rochford, Seamus Linehan, Skye Ciolino and Grace Castellucci; the girls sprint medley relay (Spencer, Madison Jewell, Grace Castellucci and Ciolino) and Megan Hurd in the triple jump. Up and comers Samantha Tucker (long jump and 60 meter dash) and Adeline Wood (long jump) will represent Gloucester in the middle school heats.

Sports Editor Nick Giannino may be contacted at 978-675-2712 or ngiannino@northofboston.com.

Consortium plans public meeting on recovery school finances

By Caroline Enos

» Staff Writer

BEVERLY — The future of Northshore Recovery High School remains unclear, but the school's board plans to have a public meeting on the facility's financial state later this spring as it irons out an FY26 budget and looks at cutting some positions.

Outcry came from current and former students last month when Principal Michelle Lipinski confirmed the school may have to close or downsize in the near future in light of financial constraints.

The school opened in 2006 for students ages 14-21 struggling with substance abuse and mental health issues. It operates in partnership with the Northshore Education Consortium.

"The only immediate decision for the FY26 budget is whether, if enrollment stays where it is, we would need to cut some costs," Consortium Executive Director Francine Rosenberg said.

"I think because of those concerns, it's created a lot of anxiety about what this means long-term, and the board has not made any decisions beyond the 25-26 school year," she said.

But that doesn't take a permanent closure off the table down the line, since funding issues stem directly from the school's funding structure. Student tuition paid by sending districts is supplemented by a state grant that has not changed in its amount since the school was founded, Rosenberg said.

Northshore Recovery does sometimes receive more money from the state mid-year based on its enrollment numbers, a funding source Rosenberg said isn't reliable and doesn't always come in a timely manner.

Statutes also prohibit the school from setting its own tuition rates or requiring sending districts or the state to fund transportation for students, she said.

"There is no mechanism for funding for capital needs or infrastructure," Rosenberg said. "The (Consortium) has to assume all of the financial risk, and utilize surplus from our other special education programs to cover the deficit."

Northshore Recovery High School has operated at a deficit each year



In this 2015 photo, Northshore Recovery High School graduate Sarah Cooper smiles as she thanks her parents and is proudly supported by school principal Michelle Muffet-Lipinski.

since it opened, Rosenberg said. With a recent dip in enrollment leaving about a dozen fewer students than normal on the roster currently, at 32 for this school year compared to 55 in 2020, this deficit has grown by an additional \$200,000, she said.

It's unclear why enrollment has dropped, Rosenberg said, though Lipinski told The Salem News last month there have been more referrals to the school recently.

The Consortium's board is considering reducing staff at the school for FY26 to help keep operating costs down. While nothing has been decided yet, there could be a cut between one and three full-time positions from the school, which employs 11 full-time staff currently, Rosenberg said.

These possible cuts wouldn't be under consideration if enrollment was higher, she said.

The Consortium will set an FY26 budget for Northshore Recovery at its April board meeting and let any staff members know if they have lost their job at that point, if it comes to that, she said.

Rather than discuss Northshore Recovery at length at the board's March 5 meeting as originally planned, the Consortium is setting a date for a separate public meeting on the matter to give more time and space

to the topic, Rosenberg said. That date will be announced soon.

The Consortium and the local school districts that help fund its programming are facing budget constraints across the board, Rosenberg said.

Partnering with another organization could bring in new funding solutions for Northshore Recovery, which the consortium is open to, she said.

"What I'm hearing from everybody is that this has been a really wonderful and valuable program, and nobody takes this lightly," said Rosenberg.

She noted there is more support for students struggling with mental health and addiction in public schools today than in 2006. Schools have more social workers on hand, better health centers and more mental health programs, with more money coming from city budgets to grow these programs in-house, she said.

"There are a variety of changing needs, and I think everybody involved wants to be sure that young people in need of services are getting those services," Rosenberg said. "I think the question is whether this is the best way to be delivering those services, and whether the funding structure is there to support it."

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One more chapter

By Caroline Enos

» Staff Writer

What book did someone read you as a child that you still remember today? For me, it was "Uncle Wiggily's Story Book."

I don't remember much about the book itself, honestly. I know Uncle Wiggily was an eccentric rabbit and the book told tales of woodland animals. Beyond that, I couldn't tell you what the rabbit said that made him so eccentric or the plots and characters of any of the short stories.

What I do remember is my dad's deep voice reading those stories to me each night before bed in his aptly named "reading room," the smallest room in our house filled with his books, records, VHS tapes and photo albums.

I remember lounging on my brothers' pile of old bean bag chairs that would bleed foam pellets if I moved around too much, my dad sitting next to me in a well-worn chair that became mine whenever I was sick.

I remember his voice growing hoarse some nights when "just one more chapter" turned into two or three more.

I remember turning 7 and 8 years old, then 9 and 10 and 11 as we made our way through the Little House on the Prairie series and its sequel and prequels, most of the Anne of Green Gables series and other books.

I remember how much I loved that time of day where nothing mattered except a far-off world that I didn't have to work hard to be a part of. Where I could just be.

As an adult, I try to share this feeling with an elementary school class I read to each week through the

Peabody Education Foundation's Guest Reader Program.

From January to June, I visit Ms. D'Entremont's class of fourth- and fifth-graders at the Burke Elementary School in Peabody.

We read books about animals, kids like them, dinosaurs and space. Their favorite author is Jory John, who wrote "The Bad Seed" and other funny stories of food navigating difficult topics.

Much of my visit is spent just talking to the kids. They tell me about their pets, siblings, friends and that time they did something that may or may not be on topic, but I like hearing about all the same.

When we read, they ask questions and tell me if they can't see the pictures. They pick out books from their classroom library for me to read in addition to the ones I bring. I also pass out copies of The Salem News that they can take home to their families.

It's a break in their day that can make a difference. If something is bothering them, they can step away from it. If they need a breather, the stories can provide that.

That's why programs like the PEF's Guest Reader Program are so important.

The program runs from January to June each year. You can sign up to be a reader through the PEF's website each fall (<https://peabodyeducation.org/>), and readers can request a particular teacher or be assigned one.

If there's a child in your life, read to them. The impact will likely stick with them.

School is where you
build the foundation
for the rest of your life.

We can relate.



MOYNIHAN LUMBER

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