

Spring Issue

June 2023

Wye River Upper School CONNECTIONS



Graduation Issue



20 YEARS
of Changing Lives

Reflections from the Assistant Head of School



Assistant Head of School, Nicole Sophocles



“I love speaking with our alumni who come to visit at graduation and hearing about how well they have transitioned to life after high school.”

Greetings Wye River Community,

As we wrap up another school year, we excitedly look to the future, honor the amazing accomplishments and growth of all of our students (especially our recent graduates), and reflect on the successes and challenges of the current year. What went really well? What can be improved upon? What can we add to our repertoire of adventures and authentic learning experiences?

I find it important to always make time for reflection in order to enact change, and to also take the time to fully recognize a highly successful student moment, a wonderful event, and our kind community. This year's graduates are off to new learning experiences to study in diverse areas of interest (Towson University, Delaware College of Art & Design, AACC, Beacon College, Landmark College). They have interests in the digital arts, the environment, carpentry, animal welfare, and business. They have all forged their own path to success and I am confident they will continue to do so with great success. I love speaking with our alumni who come to visit at graduation and hearing about how well they have transitioned to life after high school. Our alumni have a lot to contribute towards reflecting upon our program, ensuring we are offering students the academics and skills to tackle what comes next in their path.

This year brought a true return to all of our traditional events, inviting guests back into our building and traveling for our usual out of school curricular experiences. Students cheered on now graduate, Ty W. as he voted for the first time, while speaking to politicians and learning about the voting process at several polling sites. We celebrated our diversity and learned about culture and history with school wide trips to the National Museum of the American Indian and the National Museum of African American History and Culture. We begin new traditions here at school involving culture, the environment and quarterly student leadership trips (they made bread and cheese this year!) and reignite former traditions such as blue and white games, Corsica River Day, and the senior trip.

All of this brings great joy and inspires us to continue building upon the foundation of our school program to create more experiences and opportunities for our students to be successful and build their skills.

Happy Summer! Relax and Refresh and take care of yourself,

Warm Regards,
Nicole Sophocles

Inside

Graduation

In The Classroom

Developing and Sustaining
Community Culture

Alumni Spotlight

Wye River Currents



Congratulations, CLASS OF 2023!

by Katie Lillard, Director of Admissions

The atmosphere within the Armory Building was lit with optimism and camaraderie at this year's graduation, perfectly matching the personalities of the Class of 2023, described as "the kindest group of seniors we've ever had," by Assistant Head of School, Nicole Sophocles. The crowd gathered within the gym was overcome with joy on May 23rd in celebration of Rammy, Alexandra, Emily, Chase, Ripley, Lizzie, Kels, Chris, and Ty, who graced the gym stage one last time to receive their high school diplomas from Head of School, Stephanie Folarin, and Board of Trustee Chair, Alexa Seip. Gathered in support among family were alumni students, board members, and former classmates, Daria and Geneya Milana, who traveled all the way from Hawaii to congratulate their friends.

2023 graduation speaker and board member, Tom Mendenhall, addressed the Class of 2023 with pearls of wisdom to live by in what he referred to as "Tom's Laws", gained through his first hand experience navigating life and a successful career with a learning difference. Mendenhall urged our graduates to be the best versions of themselves, to take personal responsibility for every choice, to acknowledge failures and apologize for wrongdoings, to follow the golden rule and do unto others as you would have done to you. He stressed the importance of understanding one's strengths, believing in your abilities, and nevering giving up. "Find your niche, do something that you love, and do it well." These sentiments were echoed by guest alumni speaker, Chloe Tong Allen '10, who celebrated our students' abilities to see and do things differently, noting that "thinking differently is more than okay, but a

powerful strength" that can be used to find new and unique solutions to any challenge.

The Class of 2023 have overcome many challenges in their tenure at Wye River, and leave equipped with the tools that they need to shape their reality as young adults. Undoubtedly, these bright individuals will continue to positively affect those around them with their determination and heart.



Chase J receives the Environmental Inquiry Award from science teacher, Martha Sullivan.



(from left) 2023 graduates, Rammy A, Ty W, Lizzie L, Stephanie Folarin, Alexandra D, Ripley L-B., Chase J, Kels R, Chris W, and Emily D.



Board of Trustee Chair, Alexa Seip welcomes family and friends of the gradating class of 2023.



Tom Mendenhall delivers this year's commencement speech.



Chris Windsor '23 congratulates his peers and offers gratitude for their education at WRUS.

2023 Awardees

Chrissy Aull Founder's Award for Experiential Learning: Chris W.
 Thomas F. West Achievement in Digital Arts & Technology Award: Lizzie L.
 Senior Portfolio Award: Ripley L-B.
 Environmental Inquiry Award: Chase J.
 St. Paul's Episcopal Church Award for Loving Kindness: Ty W.

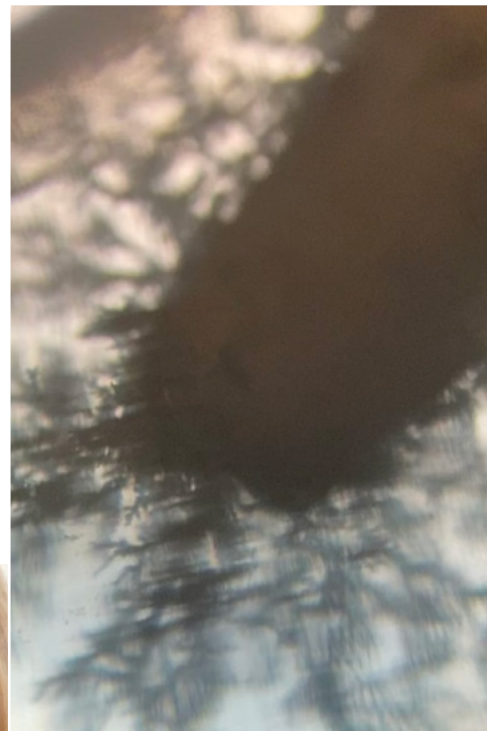
IN THE *Classroom*

Teachers at Wye River deliver innovative lessons for all types of learners, often incorporating movement and visual aides to convey meaningful curricular content.

(Left Top) Algebra 3/Trig cemented their knowledge of the Unit Circle with a hands-on activity. Students matched angles, radians, and points (x and y coordinates derived from sin and cosine of angles) using the circle painted on the gym floor.

(Left Bottom) Graphic novels are accessible and engaging for many students, especially those with language-based learning differences. Ms. Meek's US History class took a different approach to uncovering first-hand accounts of WW2 Japanese Internment in the United States. In the graphic novel, They Called Us Enemy, George Takei recalls life from ages 4-8 within the confines of a concentration camp.

(Below) Chemistry students watched copper react with silver nitrate in their stoichiometry lab. After completing pre and post-lab measurements, students were able to determine the amount of copper that reacted when placed into an aqueous solution of silver nitrate. Take a look at what they observed!



Trent observes copper/silver nitrate reaction.



Alex '24, Chase '23, Ty '23, and Ripley '23 study the unit circle.



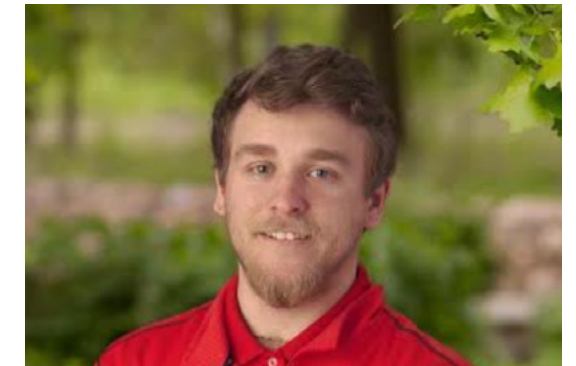
Lorenzo '26 and Sanaa '25 read They Call Us Enemy in US History.

DEVELOPING & SUSTAINING *Community Culture*



ALUMNI *Spotlight*

by Katie Lillard, Director of Admissions



Matt Donohue '17 is making a difference in the lives of 22 third grade students at Easton Elementary this year. As someone who navigated school with a learning difference himself, Matt says that he is “looking at teaching from a different perspective”. Largely impacted by his time at WRUS, Matt believes in the importance of seeing each student as an individual, with their own learning style and their own motivations. “Every single student matters, and every students deserves a good education,” says Donohue.

by Katie Lillard, Director of Admissions

Wye River’s community culture is intrinsically accepting and kind. Our students’ unique differences have often isolated them from a sense of belonging, yet they find among their WRUS fellows that they fit perfectly well. No longer the square peg in a round hole, our students feel a part-of when they enter the WRUS community; they feel seen, valued, and loved by their teachers and equally as importantly, by their peers. A challenging, heart-heavy feeling of otherness is usefully channeled into true empathy. That understanding, in turn, allows students the opportunity to develop confidence in their abilities, to take risks, and to experience success. Sustaining an atmosphere of kindness and understanding where students are safe to be themselves is essential for the academic growth of the individual and for the long term success of the school.

We nurture this innate strength of cultural inclusivity in everything we do. Our athletic program, for example, has a no-cut policy, so that students can explore their interests with less intimidation and fear of failure. Teammates support and encourage one



Josiah, Trent, and Rammy work to defeat Gunston in January’s home game.

another regardless of ability or skill level. Every grade participates in their own team-building activities off-campus annually so that they can get to know one another in small, intimate settings. Select students from all grades are rewarded for showing exceptional character with special experiential learning opportunities throughout the year. All students are invited to Prom. And each spring, the entire school travels to the Corsica River to spend a relaxing day together fishing, kayaking, and playing games so that students of all grade levels can mix and

mingle as friends. Most importantly, on a daily basis, we work with students to develop communication skills that enable them to respectfully resolve differences, give feedback, and express gratitude. Our students know that kindness and inclusivity are assets worth celebrating. In nurturing them, we support a foundation for happiness and cooperative living here at school and in life beyond graduation.



Members of the sophomore class solve a team building challenge at Camp Pecometh in Centreville.

Matt first became interested in teaching during his roth grade year at WRUS when he and a group of peers created a program for the local Headstart on Kent Island, called Kindergym, under the leadership of former teacher and Assistant Head of School, Matt Cowan. This program provided the childcare organization with physical education that they otherwise did not have access to. Now, almost ten years later, with a high school diploma and BS in Education from Salisbury University, Matt Donohue is setting an example for young children of the Eastern Shore and proving that a learning difference does not need to be a barrier to success.

WYE RIVER UPPER SCHOOL

CURRENTS

ADHD, an Executive Function Delay

by Michael McLeod, Guest Speaker

ADHD Misunderstood

ADHD has long been misunderstood and mistreated as a disorder of attention, but we are beginning to recognize that it is truly a performance disorder. This means that individuals with ADHD may struggle to demonstrate what they know in real-world situations and the present moment. As an ADHD and Executive Function Specialist, I have seen firsthand how this misunderstanding has led to inappropriate assessment and treatment of this condition.

What we now understand is that ADHD is really an Executive Function developmental delay. Executive Functions are a set of cognitive processes that allow us to regulate our behavior, control our impulses, and achieve our goals. These functions include working memory, cognitive flexibility, inhibitory control, and planning and organization. Research has shown that Executive Functions are the greatest predictor of success that we have, and they are essential for living a successful independent life.

How can we improve our executive functioning?

For far too long, we have viewed Executive Functions as an external behavioral-based disorder, with heavy focus on organization and time management. But what we now know is that it is the internal skills that are lacking and need to be strengthened. More specifically, the skill of Internal Language needs to be harnessed to strengthen Executive Functions.

Internal Language is the ability to talk to ourselves in our heads, also known as self-talk. It is how we plan, strategize, and problem-solve. This skill is essential for strengthening Executive Functions because it helps us to regulate our behavior and control our impulses. When we talk to ourselves in our heads, we can remind ourselves of our goals, focus our attention, and think before we act. It is like having an internal coach or mentor who can guide us through challenging situations.

By harnessing the power of Internal Language, we can strengthen Executive Functions and help individuals with ADHD to achieve their full potential. This means moving away from a narrow focus on behavior and organization, and instead emphasizing the development of internal cognitive skills. With this approach, individuals with ADHD can learn to better regulate their behavior, control their impulses, and achieve their goals. They can also develop the skills they need to live a successful independent life.

The Bottom Line

In conclusion, we need to start looking at ADHD for what it truly is - an Executive Function developmental delay. By focusing on the development of internal cognitive skills, such as Internal Language, we can help individuals with ADHD to strengthen their Executive Functions and achieve their full potential. Executive Functions are the greatest predictor of success that we have, and they are essential for living a successful independent life.

Let's work together to help individuals with ADHD unlock their full potential and thrive.

Shore Rivers River Keepers led freshmen in an oyster dissection and explained the many roles the Oyster plays in maintaining the Chesapeake Bay watershed, making it a keystone species.





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