

Hinsdales share schools with same name

New York's Hinsdale Central educates many more grades and yet has far fewer students

By Jim Slonoff

jslonoff@thehinsdalean.com

If every single graduate at Hinsdale Central School in Hinsdale, N.Y., delivered a five-minute speech, the graduation ceremony still would be shorter than the one at our Hinsdale Central High School.

In fact, the entire student body of the Hinsdale Central School — from pre-K through 12th grade — could easily sit in the chairs set up for Hinsdale Central's graduation on Dickinson Field — and leave room for the graduating class' family and friends.

Graduates at the New York school numbered 24 this year, with the entire student body at about 450.

But don't be fooled into thinking the rural school's small size leaves students missing out on big opportunities.

After traveling over and around the hills of the Town of Hinsdale, it was time for me to visit with Laurie Cuddy, who has been the principal of the Hinsdale Central School for 17 years. Prior to taking the helm at Central, she taught for 16 years in elementary and middle schools.

Although most public



schools here do not house preschool through 12th grade, such schools are not uncommon, Cuddy said.

"There are several of these schools in Allegheny and Cattaragus counties of New York," she said. "We call ourselves the 'dinosaur schools,' But again, my phrase to out-of-district new families is, 'We are the best little public-private school around.' And we have sev-



Laurie Cuddy is principal of Hinsdale Central School in Hinsdale, N.Y. Students at the school surprised her with two pages dedicated to her in the annual yearbook recently. "Even though we come from a small school district, that isn't something that should hold us back," students wrote. "Her wise words of encouragement and thoughtful pieces of advice help students make it through each day and push toward tomorrow." (Jim Slonoff photos)



Not only did Samantha McStrow attend Hinsdale Central School, she also did her student teaching there. And now she is one of the first-grade teachers at the school.

eral families from out of district who attend here. It's a great reflection on our teaching staff."

The school, located on the tip of Appalachia, has enough students who qualify for free and reduced lunch that it is considered "deprived" by the state of New York. But students are never treated as if their futures will be determined by their economic status.

Cuddy remarked with pride how counselors and teachers focus on introducing the idea of continuing education to kids almost as soon as they walk in the door.

"We start college visits early on in early elementary, like first grade — and the

local colleges have been so supportive," she said. "So the kids get to have a preview of what college does offer to you, what does it mean in terms of careers, what can you aspire to become past the fireman or the teacher or pediatrician — things like that."

The school works with several colleges in Buffalo, N.Y., and Olean to arrange visits.

"As a matter of fact, one of our guidance counselors today is taking the fourth grade to St. Bonaventure. I'm really proud we have tried to connect our kids with college now," she said.

Cuddy says one of the benefits of having all the kids in one building for their

■ HINSDALE 14743

This is the third in a four-part series on our visit to Hinsdale, N.Y.

entire educational career is it helps build stronger bonds between students and teachers. The relationship between teachers and parents is key to students' success as well.

Graduation time at HCS

The Olean Times Herald reported on June's graduation at Hinsdale Central School.

"Cuddy, in a tender and triumphant address to the graduates, credited their

Please turn to Page 38

Hinsdales share schools with same name

Continued from Page 5

success to 'working diligently for what you want,' and other unique attributes they demonstrated to her in their high school years, despite weathering some personal hardships. She said these qualities will help them reach future goals in their adult lives.

"Among their positive traits, she said, the classmates juggled more outside jobs with their academic load than any other class during her time in the district, and kept more students on the high honor roll, but their most memorable distinction was in the form of a prank."

One morning, the story says, she found her office door ajar and opened it to find a "sea and sky full" of blue balloons.

Cuddy shared with me another unexpected move by students. When she opened this year's yearbook, two full pages in the front were devoted to "Mrs. Cuddy — Our Big Dream Cheerleader." She had no idea.

"I never would have thought of this in a million years, they did a dedication page for me. It was so beau-



The week I was visiting Hinsdale, N. Y. it seemed everywhere I went I would run in to students from Hinsdale Central School. Along the Olean Creek, the sixth-grade class was studying ecosystems. Another group was

tiful. It was a surprise I never would have expected it in a million years, not a million years," she said.

Students presented the book to her during the morning announcements, which are televised.

"I just sobbed like a baby," she said.

Among the other highlights of the school, Cuddy cites students' involvement in science fair, Spanish club

and new hiking and archery clubs. Some members of the archery club have won state events and gone on to compete nationally, performing well.

"With hunting being a popular sport in the area, its no wonder that the students do so well. The kids come in at 6 a.m. to set up the targets and compete in heats," she said.

The PTO contributes a



great deal to the student welfare and the community as well. exploring the Hinsdale History museum. The third-graders were excited to look up their teachers and parents in the collection of yearbooks. (Jim Slonoff photos)

"We have a wonderful PTO that has grown and supports this school in such a huge way. We did our first color run this year, and as you can see we don't have a track, so we mapped out a color run around school, down the street and back with hundreds of people running," she said. "The whole community took part in it."

And while education is key to the school, helping create well-rounded young adults also is a priority. "The other piece that we have, which is pretty unusual for a public school, is our tech coordinator runs the local church youth group. And I would say this past year she's had over 40 students in youth group from grades seven through 12," Cuddy said.

"We make announcements here at school. We don't call it church. We say there is a youth group meeting," she said. "Youth group does so many things — we help support the food pantry, we clean up yards for the elderly, we clean up the roads, we serve dinners at the local American Legion and in the churches and fire hall.

"And what we're really trying to do with kids is to teach them to give. Now within that group you have kids whose families who have to

go to that food pantry," she said, her voice filled with emotion. "And at Christmas and Thanksgiving we provided meals for almost 100 families."

New York's Hinsdale Central does have one link to our Hinsdale Central. And I heard about it from the school office staff, the district office staff, the district superintendent and one of the guidance counselors. It was mentioned repeatedly during my visit.

"Boy you have a lot of kids going to Northwestern, don't you?" Superintendent Larry Ljungberg asked when we were introduced. "We get your mail here all the time."

A minute or two later I was chatting to guidance counselor Gary Cuddy and the subject came up again.

"I used to talk to someone at Hinsdale, before I'd fax over the mail," he told me. "She had a funny name."

Well, that was an easy guess.

"You mean Carol Bobo?" I asked.

"Yep that's her!" Gary Cuddy said.

You'd think Northwestern would know the difference between Hinsdale Central School in New York and Hinsdale Central High School in Illinois. But then again, both schools are kindred spirits in terms of passion for teaching, pursuit of excellence and caring for students.

Many of our Hinsdale Central grads who attend Northwestern may have New York's Gary Cuddy to thank.

It seems Northwestern has, many times, sent college applications to New York instead of Illinois for follow up information. Artist Dave Poulin worked with the students at Central to create several bronze statues that are in front of the school.

