Landing The Dream Job
by Jay Silver

Neil Cavallaro said that growing up, “I never envisioned myself becoming a superintendent.” But somehow, Cavallaro managed to land that dream job in 2008 when the Board of Education promoted him from Assistant Superintendent to Superintendent of Schools in West Haven.

Born in West Haven into a family of educators, Superintendent Cavallaro began his career as an elementary teacher at Washington School before moving on to Carrigan Middle School, where he became a Team Leader and moved on to Assistant Principal. He then worked as Principal of Thompson Elementary School until 2001 when he was named Assistant Superintendent in West Haven.

When former Superintendent JoAnn Hurd Andreess resigned in 2008, the Board of Education selected Cavallaro to replace her in the system’s top job. The Board of Education chairman said he wanted someone who would “stay” in the job long-term and someone who knew and understand the curriculum and goals of the city schools. Cavallaro fit that bill and the board voted to put him in that job in April 2008. He took over the position July 1, 2008.

At the time of his appointment, Cavallaro said “I am honored that the board has the faith and confidence in me to be the superintendent. I believe I am ready for the challenge,” according to a story in the New Haven Register April, 17, 2008.

Cavallaro graduated from West Haven High in 1981. He lives in West Haven with his wife Nancy, two daughters Catherine and Lindsey who attended West Haven Elementary schools and then went on to Lauralton Hall Milford. His son, Connor currently attends Carrigan Middle School.

When not attending to school issues, Cavallaro said he enjoys watching the Rangers and Mets. While serving as superintendent, a lot of important events and changes in the school system have taken place.

Under his direction, the Board closed two elementary schools, Thompson and Stiles, and changed the remaining elementary schools from kindergarten to fifth grades into schools for Kindergarten through fourth grade. Carrigan Middle School has become an intermediate school, housing grades five and six, and Bailey Middle School became a middle school for grades seven and eight.

He also made a major change in the food service business in the schools with the intent to put more money back into the education system and to make school meals healthier in accordance with new federal guidelines.

He said a major goal of his while working as Superintendent is to build a new high school, which is currently in progress, with plans to begin demolition and reconstruction next year.

He said the hardest thing about the job is that “you can’t always meet the demands of every parent or grant the wishes of all the parents.” He said since you work for the board of education, you have to be cognizant of what they are looking for and try to stay within their guidelines.

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Cavallaro said construction of the new school is set to begin in the summer of 2015 and is expected to be completed by 2019. Next year’s freshmen will be the lucky class, as they will still be in the high school when the new school is completed.

Plans call for the demolition of various wings starting with the F and G wing first (and yes, there will be shop classes) and then building them back up. He said the new school will have air conditioning, something the high school does not have now, but that does not mean school will be extended into the summer months just because it is air conditioned.

He said he is very pleased with the special relationship the school system has developed with the University of New Haven, offering Westies an education for a reduced cost. He hopes to have even more involvement with the University in the future, he said.

There are also plans for more courses and offerings for kids with disabilities.

As for the rumors about having about 60 math courses in the future, he said, “longer math classes equals better scores and the Math intensity is definitely true, but 60 courses may be a bit exaggerated.”

Lastly, when asked if he had any advice for kids hoping to possibly become a superintendent someday, he said “just work hard. Work hard and start small, and things will go in your favor.”

Our principal, Mrs. Gardner closes with, “Mr. Cavallaro is very supportive of students needs throughout the district and of WHHS. He has made a lot of progress under his tenure especially in terms of curriculum instruction and organizational systems.”
Imagine yourself in college. What do you want to see when you exit your dorm in the morning as you head to class? Do you want to see new people everyday or do you want the comfort of a few familiar faces each afternoon? Do you want to see bright city lights or a suburban backdrop?

College is on many people’s minds around this time of year. Speaking as a senior, I have been consumed with thoughts of college and applications. Like many of my classmates, I have started my Common Application and worried about student loans, getting accepted, and getting teacher recommendations. We are all doing it. Another important aspect of the college process is campus visits. Wonderful and usually not as terrifying, college visits can be the highlight of the college process. As high schoolers, many of us look forward to this next step in our education. One of the best ways to get to know a college and test how well it will suit our own personal desires is visiting the school’s campus.

West Haven High School offers a great two day excursion to six institutions called the Campus Connection trip. Open to sophomores, juniors, and just recently, seniors, this trip allows students to explore a wide assortment of colleges over just a short period of time. Students climb onto a comfortable coach bus (with outlets) early in the morning to start the day. After visiting the first set of three colleges, students stay overnight at a Marriott hotel. Everyone is packed back into the coach bus in the morning to tackle the second set of three colleges. The bus then returns to West Haven High that night.

In Spring 2014, Campus Connection took nearly 50 students and four of our great guidance counselors to New Jersey and Pennsylvania. During the first day of the trip, students visited the campuses of The College of New Jersey, Rider University, and Princeton University. Fighting unpleasant rainy weather, students toured the campuses, saw dorms, and purchased their own university apparel. The second set of colleges brought students to Pennsylvania. Different from the New Jersey colleges, the schools in Pennsylvania were near the heart of Philadelphia, a historic city. The first stop was Temple University, followed by Drexel University, and ending with the University of Pennsylvania. The rain continued to pour throughout the day, but students did not let it hinder their experience. Our students met wonderful college students and learned plenty about the programs available for each college.

Ask anyone who went on the Spring trip. Though the weather was not on our side, we had a great time. My favorite colleges were Temple University and the University of Pennsylvania. Had I not gone on the trip, I probably would have never known I would have really liked these universities. The trip gives you the ability to compare colleges and see what you really like. The six universities were all very different. Some students found out they really liked the colleges integrated into the city and others found that the experience strengthened their desire for an actual college campus environment in a more suburban setting. Some people connected to the historic atmosphere and others were drawn in by academic opportunities the schools offered.

Counselors received such great feedback on the Spring trip that they decided to offer a Fall 2014 Campus Connection, allowing seniors to attend for the first time. Though registration is now closed due to limited seating, Campus Connection is a really great opportunity for students to get out and see colleges. It is fun, educational, and actually helps in deciding which colleges you wish to add to, or take off, your list.
"Luck isn't getting what you want. It's surviving what you don't want." -Leo

Mid September, Fox premiered its new drama Red Band Society, which follows a group of unlikely teenagers, who are banded together by the simple fact that they are all being hospitalized while suffering from various illnesses, such as eating disorders to cancer. Although the very gist of the show might be somewhat sorrow-filled, the creators made a palpable case, in adding just enough humor and warm-hearted moments to keep you hooked. In fact, the narrator of the show Charlie, is in a coma!

Lately, issues such as cancer and death have been addressed in many teen novels such as The Fault In Our Stars and If I Stay. It's refreshing to see a show following close behind drawing attention to a topic that is becoming conspicuous within our society today. It's not hard to say that we all know someone, whether personally or through associates, that are suffering from illnesses. We all know how hard it can be.

The show is focused around a group of teenagers, who reside in the children's wing of a Los Angeles hospital called Ocean Park, and despite their differences, are all going through some heart-wrenching problems. Even though these teens don't seem to have the odds in their favor, they don't let the negativity hold them back. They sneak out, have fun, crave pizza, keep secrets, create new friendships, just like the rest of us do and if there's one thing we'll learn from them is: How to make the best of a worst situation.

All in all, Red Band Society gives everyone a little ounce of optimism. There's always that little light at the end of the hospital corridor telling you not to give up, so don't be surprised if you get a little teary every now and then. It's okay, because everyone's probably crying along with you.

One West Haven High student comments on the show saying, "Red Band Society is inspirational and drama filled. With a wide variety of characters, anyone can find someone to relate too. Really makes you appreciate your life."

Be sure to catch Red Band Society every Wednesday at 9 o'clock to watch 12-year-old Charlie, 16-year-olds Leo, Jordi, Dash, Kara, and Emma, navigate life with the help of Nurse Jackson, Dr. Jack McAndrew, and the new nurse Brittany Dobler!

Main cast at the premier event, from left to right: Astro, Dave Annable, Nolan Sotillo, Ciara Bravo, Griffin Gluck, Rebecca Rittenhouse, Zoe Levin, Octavia Spencer and Charlie Rowe.
Your Physics Teacher’s Trip Across the Ocean by Kharl Reynado

If you’ve taken a Physics class whether it’s this year or last year or even a Forensics class, there is a chance you know Mr. Mark Favale. Before gracing our students with the knowledge of vector forces and Newton’s Laws, Mr. Favale has explored far countries in ways that many students would not even think of traveling.

To background on his career, Mr. Favale went to college at the University of Connecticut. Commenting on what he enjoyed most about college, Mr. Favale said, “college is a halfway point before entering the real world. It gets you there by guiding you.” After undergraduate school as a Physics major, Mr. Favale took a year of his master’s degree in education at the University of Saint Joseph in West Hartford. The next year he decided to visit his sister in California and ended up taking up a job teaching elementary school children there. He called the experience fun and exhausting. Once he got settled with his job, he did not feel rushed to return to college. After some thought he decided to travel to Europe. He then traveled to the Middle East, India, and Nepal.

Mr. Favale didn’t experience the countries all at once though. He would work and save up money, then when he could, he would travel for several months before his money ran out. Continuing this cycle for about five years, he would travel, sightsee, and backpack through the country. He remembers the beautiful scenery of Turkey and India. The striking images of reality stuck with him through his travels. Mr. Favale said that the place was in your face for real. He described witnessing the poor, homeless, and elderly out on the streets, a shocking visual in comparison to the luxuries of America. “We don’t really have that here. That was the most striking thing for me.”

Traveling to Nepal, he hiked a trail through the mountains by himself only carrying a small bag with the bare essentials. Using a map as guidance, he climbed up to a height of 20,000 feet and traveled back down to his start point in a giant circle. The journey allowed him to pass through several villages sometimes 5, 10, or even 15 miles apart from each other. He would sleep in the village homes and pay to eat whatever was cooking that night. There was no electricity and minimal running water. These aspects didn’t bother him as much as the scenery was a sight he could never forget. He remembered the view and described it as a high dry dessert. Nearing the end of his journey, he descended down the mountain. Mr. Favale said, “I remember hearing a car horn. I stopped and thought, ‘Wow, I haven’t heard that for a while.’” After weeks away from computers, buses, and light bulbs, a car horn signaled the end of his journey from the mountains of Nepal.

His inspiration for traveling came from his sister who also traveled. She returned after her travels with exciting stories, sparking Mr. Favale’s interest. He figured, at the time, it was his only chance to explore and travel. If you are thinking about visiting a foreign country and backpacking, Mr. Favale offers some words of advice from one traveler to the next. He advises to pack a small bag only. You have to carry everything and so the smaller, the better. Traveling with large bags is difficult on buses and trains. It could attract theft and swarms of business people inviting you to stay over their hotel with the idea that you’re packing loads of money because of a large bag. He speaks from experience.

To the doubtful and the fearful, Mr. Favale says do not be afraid. Just do it. Hey, if Mr. Favale can do it after college, there’s no reason you shouldn’t at least try. Mr. Favale regrets nothing from his travels. It is an irreplaceable experience.

Above, Nepal. There are four distinct seasons in Nepal.

Mr. Favale regrets nothing from his travels. “It is an irreplaceable experience.”
Significance Over Success  By Marla Gagne

If you come to visit a practice of the West Haven girls’ tennis team, you will see ordinary tennis stuff—ground stroke drills, conditioning at the beginning and end of practice, and some girls playing fake matches. However, you’ll also hear tons of laughter, some loud cheers, and maybe even see some dancing and singing because some girls can’t help themselves. To an outsider, it may seem strange that with a straight loss season, the girls on the team, along with the coach, are so happy, optimistic, and still ready to play the sport they love. However, the team I’m honored to be a co-captain of, is just being themselves. We keep our heads up and strongly support one another, win or lose. In our case, the numbers didn’t reflect our heart, dedication, and talent as tennis players.

Like any team, we started the season off with high hopes and expectations for the matches ahead. As stated in a pre-season Westie Blue article, Coach Kara Kaczynski said, “We are an athletic team and most importantly, the girls are committed and dedicated to me and their teammates to have a successful and winning season this year.” The team was motivated and dedicated and, as a senior, I could see the improvement of both myself and other players from when we all started a few years ago. With our mantra of C.A.C attack (playing Confidently, Aggressively, and Consistently) we seemed ready to play against the teams we lost to last year and ready to finally put some wins on our record. However, despite our improvements and individual wins, the team was unable to pull out an overall victory. Many matches came down to close third sets, tie breakers, and close scores of 3-4, 2-5. Despite not winning, any player on the team could see how much better they played and closer their matches were than last year when matches would often end in 0-7, 1-6 sweeps.

While our team was disappointed that our record did not show the hard work and improvement of all our players, we were still proud of our season. In a Westie Blue article on the last match of the season, Coach Kaczynski stated, “Overall, I have seen improvement in all my players. We had some close matches this year. My team is very close and they work hard and support each other all the time.” It is easy to be a team, support one another, and love coming to practice every day when the team is winning. It takes a strong team to keep their attitudes positive and determined and still love playing every day when constantly losing.

At the start of the season, I along with my co-captain Shannon Card and all other spring sport captains, went to a captains’ conference for spring sports to hear different speakers and advice on leading a team. The keynote of the event was Daniel Hand’s football coach, Steven Filippone, who centered his talk on being “significant and not just successful”. Winning is something that any team strives for and is why we spend hours each day working hard and pushing ourselves past our limits. We all would love to win every game or match and capture a few championships titles, finally making our hard work pay off. However, the success of a team means nothing if they are not significant. Significance is looking at your team mates and being able to say they mean something to you. When you look back in five, ten, or even twenty years will you remember your team and captains as being a family that pushed and supported each other all the time."

Summer Assignments, The Challenge to Get Them Completed  By Emma Murray

Many of the honors students out there may be wondering why they’re saddled with so much homework over the summer. After all, isn’t our break, right? All the teachers here at West Haven High school have to give assignments to their incoming honors and Advanced Placement students to prepare them for the upcoming school year. They normally give them out in May or early June. So technically there is plenty of time during the last part of the school year to start this work. However preparation for finals may prevent students from starting right away.

According to Mrs. Lynch, Secretary of the Honors/AP Committee at our school, “Summer Assignments are always aligned with the curricula of the subject being taught. Honors and AP classes are meant to be rigorous. All students must have a certain amount of previous knowledge in the course to uphold high learning expectations and the fast pace when the class starts in the Fall.” Mrs. Lynch adds, “This is direct preparation for college and the assignments are not meant to be punitive.”

Honors and AP classes require the type of high-level calculating and critical thinking that are encountered in the first year of college. If you can write essays and solve problems successfully for these types of fast-paced classes, you’ve mastered many of the skills that will lead to success in college. These classes can help with your selection of a major in two ways. First, each course provides an in-depth introduction to a specific subject area. Second, success in these types of classes proves that a student has the potential to succeed in a competitive setting like college. This means you’ll find the subject area that you think you want to study in depth in college. The transition from high school to college can be a difficult one. Both your social and academic life will be remarkably different from high school. But the challenge of Summer Assignments will give a student a taste and the start of what the academic load in a college setting will be like.

Seniors Sara Flynn and Jamie Kelley, pictured left represented WHHS for Girls’ State Program. The WH American Legion chooses two candidates each year. They both wrote winning essays to earn this honor. The topic was an essay showing a willingness to learn about government and citizenship, leadership skills and good moral character. They attended American Legion Laurel Girls’ State Program this summer at Eastern Connecticut State University. Congrats Sara and Jamie!
Celebrating Alex Z.  By Susie Beyl

In late 2007, a young, small, shy boy started fifth grade at Washington Elementary School. This boy was quiet, timid, and barely spoke English, having come from south central Mexico, right outside of Mexico City. I actually remember when he started school, as I was in fourth grade with another girl from Mexico and she knew him. I remember a sweet, kindhearted boy in a tee shirt far too big for his body. This once soft-spoken, awkward fifth grader was Alejandro Zitlalpopoca, one of West Haven’s finest young students.

Alejandro, who was known by his friends as Alex Z., tragically passed away recently. A successful, bright, and hardworking young man was lost all too soon. I would like to write this article not to dwell on this tragedy, but to celebrate the beautiful and inspirational life he lived in honor of him and all of his friends and family.

Alex Z. is an extraordinary individual. A spectacularly talented athlete, Alex was on West Haven High’s cross country team and aspired to study sports medicine and athletic training after high school. He was always conscious of his health and well-being. Alex, a goal-oriented and determined student, worked tirelessly to achieve his goals.

Upon coming to America, Alex did not know any English. Through his own hard work and drive, he succeeded in the West Haven School district, eventually working his way out of the ESL program and even enrolled in the CNA courses at WHHS to make sure he would always be financially sound. This typical fifth grader’s whole world was flipped upside down upon coming to America, being thrown into a new culture and environment. He beat all of the odds, looked reality in the face, and persevered through anything with honest, hard work.

Alex very recently became the father of a beautiful baby girl. Being a young parent is one of the most difficult tasks imaginable, but Alex handled it with such admirable maturity and strength. Dr. Charbonneau, Department Head of the World Language Dept. at WHHS worked extensively with Alex from the day he came in from Mexico. She watched him grow into a strong, intelligent, and mature man. “The minute he found out he was going to be a father, it was like a switch went off in him,” she commented. Dr. Charbonneau knows Alex’s family and remarks that they are very close knit and supportive. His parents always put education and family first; making sure Alex and his siblings prioritized the two. She knows that it’s their positive parenting that gave Alex the strength to be the amazing father he was.

Alex’s family held memorial services in Connecticut and New York, where much of their relatives live. In addition to the beautiful vigil put together by the West Haven community, Alex’s parents decided to bury Alex in their hometown in Mexico. They were greatly conflicted, as they said, “Alex’s future was in America.”

As the entire city, his friends, and family grieve, I only ask that you remember the incredible, strong, and beautiful life Alex lived. In his time, he touched the lives of many and spread positivity daily. Though he may be gone, the positivity and joy the boy in the baggy tee shirt spread will never be forgotten, and he will live on in our hearts forever.
Thank you to Junior Class Advisors, Mrs. Joanne Poffenberger and Ms. Melanie Deninger, for organizing this successful Junior Class event.