

# Bulldog Bulletin

NEWS FOR THE HALSEY HIGH SCHOOL COMMUNITY

Vol 4 Number 1

Dec, 2021

## Halsey Students Back In Class But Masks Are A Must

Smiles, fist bumps, and encouraging words greeted students from staff and administrators on the first day of school back in September. After over a year of online and hybrid learning, more than 1,400 Halsey students were back in the classroom. But when they returned, they found things were a little different. In this issue, we look at how the pandemic has affected the school and how students and staff are coping in times of Covid-19. Despite learning in the shadow of the virus, the Halsey community is RISE-ing to the occasion. We asked Halsey Principal Christopher Van Vliet for an update on the school year so far and how health concerns are being addressed. He also shared some impressive student achievements and his goals for the school in the months ahead.



***After more than a year of on-line learning and hybrid instruction, describe the challenges you faced when reopening school in September.***

It was very exciting to open our doors to all students and Staff again in September! We had been through so much together by that point; a full shutdown with all remote learning, a hybrid reopening in the Spring, and then planning all summer for the full reopening in September. We wanted to make it as normal as possible for everyone, and for the most part it was, although masks were still required along with the other usual health and safety protocols. Welcoming back almost 1,500 people in one building after such a long break was not easy. But our Team pulled together for the good of our students and our Academy, and we had a very successful opening.

***How have the staff and students addressed the challenges Covid-19 has presented in the first part of the school year?***

I think our school community has done an excellent job adjusting to this new normal. We have seen compliance with masks and distancing when necessary, and there has been a feeling of gratitude in our building since the return, as it seems we are all very appreciative to be in each other's company again. We have had our health challenges for sure as some students and some staff have needed to quarantine, but they have been manageable and we are getting through this together.



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# Halsey News

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## Halsey Students Back In Class But Masks Are A Must

*(Our conversation continues with Halsey Principal Van Vliet)*



***What effects do you think a year of online learning have had on students?***

I think it's probably too early to really tell, but initially, the absences of the physical interaction between student and teacher have been noticeable. Teachers are very pleased to have their students with them as it improves the instructional process and students have reported that they like being in a routine again, where they get to see their teachers and classmates each day. I think we did see some positives come out of remote learning and an improved knowledge and use of technology. However, we have noticed an improvement in instruction since our return and this is something to feel good about.

***What steps are being taken in the school to address student needs and deficits post-pandemic?***

We began the year with the State's "Start Strong" testing program, to help us analyze which students may need extra support in certain areas. This has helped our staff to focus on these areas of need and make the necessary adjustments in order to help our students get caught up for any learning gaps which may have occurred during the remote learning phase. We are also equipped with a full time social worker now, Mr. Lopez, who has been a terrific addition to our team, especially in the area of social and emotional wellness. Together, we will continue to support our students as we emerge from this life changing event.

***Mask wearing by students and staff has almost become part of the school uniform, but some students are still feeling uneasy about being in school and are worried about infection. What is the school doing to keep students feeling safe from the spread of Covid-19?***

As we are now well into the school year, I think everyone has pretty much gotten used to the new normal. Yes, for now, masks are required and pretty much part of the uniform. It is an inconvenience for us all but the best way to help keep us all safe. Also, as vaccines are mandated for staff, this has helped to protect our school community. Following all CDC, state and district guidelines helps us all to stay healthy and safe as well.



***What are some of the silver linings of the pandemic and online learning?***

I think our staff have been forced to step outside of their comfort zone and embrace technology in a new way, which has and can continue to impact teaching and learning in a positive way. I also feel that we have gained a new appreciation for school. We are fortunate to be together in such a special school with such wonderful people.

***Looking back on the pandemic, what do you think you did right and what do you think you could have done differently?***

I feel we did our best to protect our staff and students as best as possible. We followed all district and state protocols, communicated news and updates in a timely manner, and supported our members who were in need. Having all gone through this together, I'm sure there are steps along the way that perhaps we would have wanted to adjust, but for the most part, we have kept our school community safe and healthy and have avoided an interruption in instruction. We have done our best to get through this together and I am very grateful for our team's efforts.

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# Halsey News

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## Halsey Students Back In Class But Masks Are A Must

*(Our conversation continues with Halsey Principal Van Vliet)*



**Another crisis that hit the Elizabeth community was the flooding caused by Tropical Storm Ida. How did that storm affect the Halsey community and how did the school address the needs of students?**

This was unfortunate timing as the school year was just beginning. And, unfortunately some of our students and families were impacted by this. Some of them were even displaced. I think having this happen as we were planning to reopen after the pandemic was another tough challenge for us, but as always, our Halsey pride was evident, and we all pulled together to open school only a few days later, and we were able to make this opening as normal as possible under the circumstances.

**What are some of the school accomplishments so far this year that you want students, parents, and staff to know about?**

We have had our highest overall daily attendance rate in years, which shows that students are excited to be back. We had over 360 students on our Honor Roll for MP1 and over three quarters of our students are passing all of their subjects and on track to either graduate or advance to the next grade level. We have a multitude of support programs after school for our students who need additional support. Our suspension rate continues to drop which shows us that our students are behaving appropriately. Overall, we are very pleased with our progress so far and we look forward to continuing to RISE together!



**What are your goals for the rest of the year at Halsey?**

I'd like to see us continue to be healthy and safe and move towards more of a normal that we are all used to. I'd also like to continue to see our students progress academically, socially, and emotionally, so that we are graduating students who are ready to move on to the next phase of their lives and be valuable contributors and citizens in society. Safety, health, success, and happiness. Together, we will keep RISE-ing!



# Witnesses to a Storm

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## Tropical Storm Ida's Fury Still Fresh In The Minds of Students

By Victoria Reyes

On September 8th, Tropical Storm Ida slammed into Elizabeth with driving winds and torrential rains. It dumped close to 7 inches of rain on the city streets in a matter of hours. Neighborhoods flooded, motorists became stranded, homes and cars were destroyed, and four people lost their lives. The storm also left hundreds homeless and delayed the start of school. Months later, many residents are still struggling to get their lives back to normal. We asked Halsey students to tell us what they remember about that stormy night.

*"I looked outside when I heard that there was a massive storm. Everybody, including myself, felt desperate"*

Marvin Reyes, senior

*"I was sitting at home with my family when I noticed a water bubble forming in the ceiling."*

Shania Kolas, junior

*"I was using the computer when the window in my bedroom seemed like someone threw a bucket of water at it."*

Pyetro Tolentino, junior

*"My backyard looked like the Atlantic Ocean had just spawned there."*

Jose Chevres, junior

*"I saw waters reaching high levels and people climbing on things to get to higher ground."*

Harvey Cuevas, junior

*"As we headed towards Westfield Ave, we saw that the whole street was flooded. Cars started getting stuck in the water."*

Maria Cuevas, senior

*"I called my friend who lives down the street by the river. She said they were evacuating."*

Leslie Hernandez, senior



See what math teacher Xavier Florencia saw by clicking [here](#).

*"I saw water rushing through the window. It smelled like gasoline. We wondered if it was coming from the gas station."*

Jerrick Portillo, senior

*"My uncle called my mom for help. Water was rising fast."*

Chelsea Blandon, senior

*"The entire street was flooded. Cars were submerged. People were standing on top of their cars."*

Erika Martinez, junior

*"I watched as large amounts of water rushed into the sewage drains. I could tell they would not be able to keep up with the amount of water."*

Quanasia Robinson, senior

*"The next morning, I saw bikes in the middle of the street and washed away cars. Baby toys were all over the parks and roads."* Gaemlie Baptiste, sophomore



# Students in the Spotlight

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## Halsey Scholars Going Above and Beyond

By Lesly Hernandez and Damaiela Silva

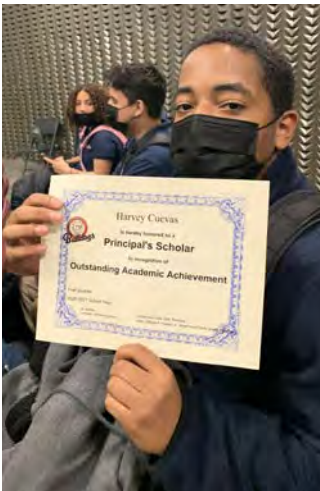


After a year and a half of online school, students are now back in class and so is the motivation to do well in school. Now, they'll have an award to show for all their hard work.

On December 6th, Halsey's three hundred and sixty Honor Roll students for MP1 were recognized in two separate sessions. This was the first recognition ceremony since before the pandemic began in March of 2020.



Guidance counselors handed out certificates to students who went above and beyond with their grades in MP1.



One hundred and sixty students received Superintendent's Scholar awards for passing every class in MP1 with all "A's" or higher than a 90.

Another two hundred students received Principal's Scholar awards for ending MP1 with all "A's" and "B's."

"We are very proud of all of our scholars for MP1," said Principal Christopher Van Vliet. "We hope to see even more students on this list in MP2. You can do it and we are here to support you."



# ROTC UPDATE

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## ROTC Reboots After Year of Virtual Learning

By Pricille Burdy

Our cadets are back in their boots! After a long year of quarantine and virtual learning, Halsey's ROTC program is up and running. But, it hasn't been easy. There was a lot of catching up to do, including finding new recruits in the freshman class, ordering new uniforms, and getting everyone up to speed and back into shape. We talked to Marine Instructor Colonel Robert Golden, who heads up the ROTC program at Halsey, about these challenges and what lies ahead for the program.

**What happened over the summer?** We had the Reboot Boot Camp. It was very good. It generated a lot of interest from freshmen and sophomores that were interested last year but couldn't get in. So that was really beneficial.

**What were some of the challenges you faced getting ROTC back to speed after the pandemic?** The biggest issue we had was getting all the new recruits into platoons and getting them situated. It felt like we were starting from scratch. We also had to order new uniforms for the freshman recruits. We had a lot of interest from freshmen about joining up. The toughest thing was getting these freshmen to give up certain things. For girls, it was the long Cardi B nails. For guys, it was getting a haircut.

**Now that ROTC is back up and running, what are some of the activities you have planned for this coming year?** We have a full year of competitions set up. We're going to start having the rifle team, the PT team and drill team competing.

**Has anything changed with the rifle team?** It is a brand new team. Out of sixteen team members of the rifle team, twelve of them are females. This is the first time I have ever seen so many females make the team. We also have a lot of freshmen and only one returning team member. My goal is to get them into as many competitions as possible.



Marine Instructor Colonel Robert Golden



*Quarantine is finally over which means the preparations for competitions are in full force. Colonel Golden and the ROTC Halsey Rifle Team are preparing themselves for upcoming competitions. There is no room for errors. Even though this team has a lot of new recruits you can feel the confidence of the cadets as they take aim at their targets. This will be an exciting season for our rifle team. Good luck, cadets!*



# ROTC UPDATE

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## Halsey ROTC Rifle and PT Teams Win Competitions



They aimed for a win and they got it. Halsey's ROTC Rifle Team won first place at the Keystone Classic Marksmanship competition in Reading, PA on December 11th. Nine teams from Maryland, Pennsylvania, New Jersey and Delaware competed. Kaiden Valentin was the High Shooter among the Rookie class of 28 participants, with a score of 217 out of a possible 300. "I must admit, I was a bit surprised that this fledgling team took first place at their first ever competition," said Colonel Golden. "Not only did they have to overcome some nerves, but they had to beat five veteran teams that had two or three years of experience coming into the match. I am so proud of this young team. We will only improve going forward."



Cadet Sergeant Maria Garcia Cabana placed third in the individual new shooter category and was excited by their achievement. "It was really rewarding to see our hard work pay off. We really pulled through as a rookie team going against veteran teams."

Cadet Second Lieutenant Sebastian Mateo is the team captain of the rifle team. He placed second in the individual new shooter category. Mateo helped the cadets stay focused during the competition. "I'm really proud of our 'gunslingers.' They've really come a long way in a short time," he said.

Cadets on the PT team also had a strong showing in the Reading competition. They placed second overall and the females placed first in their category.



### Honoring Those Who Served

On Thursday, November 11, 2021, 180 cadets of the Halsey ROTC program went down to city hall to honor all of our soldiers and veterans who have fought for this country and continue to do so. They formed a battalion in front of city hall for this special day. The mayor, the police department, and the fire department were there for this special event. Veterans from Elizabeth were also present to commemorate their fellow patriots. They put a wreath on the war memorial in downtown Elizabeth to honor the veterans who have died fighting for our country.



# HALSEY CELEBRATES DIVERSITY

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## Celebrating Culture with Culinary Creations



As we head home for the holidays, some students are thousands of miles from their extended families. That's especially true for many Halsey students who have just moved to Elizabeth from far away places. Jaqueline Dixon figured a taste of home would help anyone who might be

feeling homesick during the holiday season.

Dixon is the faculty advisor for the Multicultural Club and an ESL teacher at Halsey. "I had students make a video showing how they cook a traditional holiday dish from their native countries," she said. "Food is a way of connecting to the other students and connecting with someone else's culture."

She used this project to expose students to other cultures and traditions and teach language and communication skills. "I asked that they look presentable, look at the camera, describe the ingredients, and actually cook the dish." The club, which meets twice a month, is made up of twenty students from a mix of over twenty countries. Most are in Halsey's bilingual program. Languages spoken in the club include Portuguese, Spanish, Tamil, Arabic, and French.

What were some of these culinary creations? Lasagna from Brazil with a twist, a bean puree from El Salvador, platanos and pork from the Dominican Republic, and curried noodles from Sri Lanka. "I was happy with the results. I was surprised how well these high school students can cook," Dixon said.

She hopes these videos and other projects in the Multicultural Club will help spread awareness of other countries and cultures in the school. "It's important to be open minded about other cultures. Our kids don't get to travel as much as they like to. So how do we expose them to culture? By bringing them together. It's also important for us teachers to show it to them. They need to be exposed to it more here at Halsey."

My name is Julian Perez. I am from El Salvador. I made a typical dish from my country. It doesn't have an official name, but people there call it bread with black rice, fried plantain and liquefied beans. It contains bread, rice, bean soup, blended beans, onion, green chili, banana, oil, salt and chicken consommé.



*Click picture for video*

Hello, my name is Diogo Sandy. I made this video with my brother, Danillo. We are both from Brazil. We made a traditional lasagna dish but with a Brazilian twist. The ingredients we used were ground meat with spices (that we cannot tell you about because it is a family secret), tomato sauce, dry lasagna noodles, sliced ham, and mozzarella cheese.



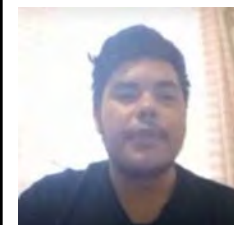
*Click picture for video*

Hello, my name is Santhi Nagarasa. I made a curry noodle dish with an egg from Sri Lanka.



*Click picture for video*

My name is Mateo Passo. I am from Ecuador. The cultural music from my country is based on different cultures from Europe and Africa. It is typically a combination of Cumbia music and music made with wind instruments and singing. It is similar to traditional Colombian music. The music is mainly for dancing with a partner.



*Click picture for video*



# Student Voices

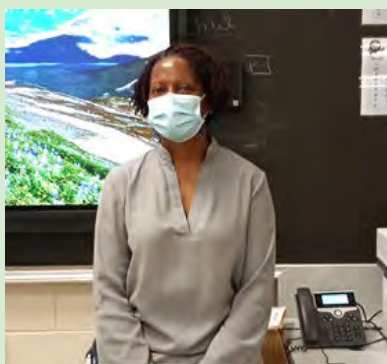
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## Does Your Mind Need A Day Off? How About Taking A Mental Health Day

By Lesly Hernandez and Demoni Gause

For most of last school year, we were all at home, isolated from the world. Many students have still not returned to what they would call normality. Online school made some tired, made it difficult to focus, and did not give students enough motivation to complete work. COVID-19 is still around and we are all wearing masks. All this is making us feel mentally drained. Should schools have mental health days to help students deal with this anxiety?



Lisa Perry, Y.E.S. Program Director  
Photo by Jerick Portillo

Lisa Perry, Halsey's YES (Youth Enrichment Services) Program Director and a licensed social worker and therapist likes the idea. "I support it because there could be a lot of things going on at home. The student could also be suffering from mental health problems," she said. "However, a system must be worked out to get a note from a doctor or nurse so that students don't take advantage of it."

Recent research shows students are stressed at school. According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, one in five children and adolescents experience a mental health problem during their school years. The National Association of School Psychologists said serious mental health problems, such as self-injurious behaviors and suicide, are on the rise, particularly among youth.

Mental health issues have skyrocketed to the top of the list because of how we all spent the last year and a half. "If you had a preexisting mental health problem, the pandemic most likely made it worse," said Perry. "Today, students are feeling anxious and annoyed from the uncertainty. People are feeling on edge."

Would having mental health days help? [A recent poll](#) of 61 Halsey students conducted by Mr. Hill's journalism classes showed that 92 percent believed that having mental health days would be a good idea. Most felt having 3-6 mental health days a year should be made available to students who need them.

"In my opinion, mental health is especially important, and there are many students who do not know how to fight with their own minds," said senior Marvin Reyes Sosa who was part of the poll. "I think there should be days off to take a break for mental health."

However, the poll also showed that 82 percent said students would probably take advantage of it and abuse their rights. Senior Jerick Portillo said taking some simple steps could solve this problem. "The school could have a "mental health" icon on the PowerSchool attendance. Once a student uses all of their days, they wouldn't be able to take advantage of it anymore." Senior Leyanis Vasquez Diaz had another suggestion. "To validate the person's request to take days off, have them bring in a note from a doctor or psychologist."

Whether mental health days become a reality is still up for debate. But mental health experts like Perry say it's good that we're talking about this issue. "Having those mental health days will help normalize and spread awareness of mental health."



# Teacher Spotlight

## All About Adachi: From Math to Marriage

By Margery Benitez

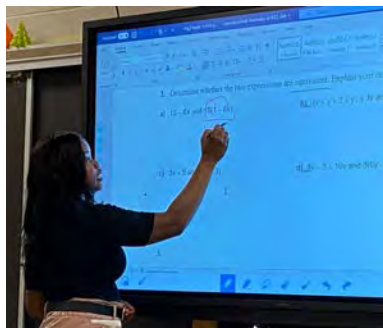


Photo by Victoria Reyes

Her energy is contagious. Her passion is all about math. When she was a little girl, she had a gift for numbers. Now that she's all grown up, she shares this gift with students at Halsey.

For the past six years, Theresa Adachi has been teaching math at Halsey. This year, it's all about algebra. We talked to her about why she got into teaching, the challenges of teaching online, and her upcoming wedding to the man of her dreams.

**How does it feel to be back in person, teaching?** I like it. It's so much better than virtual learning. I missed the interaction I had with my students.

**What were some of the challenges you faced while teaching virtually?** Trying to see if my students actually understood what I was teaching them. They learn better in person because we get to meet, one on one.

**Did it feel like a lost year?** For the students who paid attention, who took what was being delivered to them seriously, it was not a lost year. It was a loss for those who didn't take it seriously. I did not have control over these students when we were virtual. I couldn't take their phones away. They could have been on their phones or watching TV. I had no control over that.

**Do you think forming a connection with your students helps them learn better in your class?** Absolutely. I feel like it has a benefit in terms of classroom management. It helps them do better when you form that connection.

**What made you want to teach math? Which college did you go to?** I always knew I wanted to be a math teacher. It was the only subject that came easily to me. I went to Montclair State.

**If you could teach any other subject, which subject would it be?** Wow, that's hard to answer. I don't see myself teaching anything other than math. I would like to teach another grade level, like a college class.

**How long have you been teaching? Would you ever consider teaching at another school?** I started teaching at Halsey straight out of college, six years ago. And I want to stay here. The main reason why I want to continue teaching here is because of my students. I'm going back to school for education and literacy. I eventually want to be a math coach or maybe a supervisor.



**Where do you see yourself in 10 years?** Hopefully, I will still be in education. But I don't necessarily see myself in a classroom full time. What I'd like to be is a math coach or supervisor. I want to expand my role in the profession.

**What are some hobbies you like to do outside of school?** I love to travel and to try new food. I'm a foodie. I also love to dance and watch Nigerian movies.

**Do you miss Nigeria?** Yes! I've been here for over 20 years. I came to the United States when I was 8 years old. I actually went back over the summer. That's where I got engaged.

**Do you have the wedding day planned?** My fiancé and I don't have everything planned just yet. What we do know is we're looking to get married in the summer.





# Halsey Gives Back

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## Halsey's "Can" Do Spirit Brings Food To The Needy

By Quanasia Robinson

Halsey's annual can drive surpassed all expectations this year. **Students collected 4,718 cans of food for those in need for the holiday season.** Donations went to St. Joseph's Social Service Center in Elizabeth which distributes food to clients in the community.

Halsey students donated, helped box, and packed the cans to be delivered. Despite busy schedules and concerns about the pandemic, they took time out of their day to donate and give back to those in need. The drive was coordinated by Halsey teacher Brandi Donnelly.

"The students really stepped up to the plate with this year's canned food drive," Donnelly said. **"I was overwhelmed with pride as the students donated and packed up all the cans.** Ms. Billingsley and I dropped off the cans at St. Joe's. The volunteers at St. Joe's were so grateful for Halsey's donations. 4,718 cans will help feed a lot of people in our community over the holiday months," stated Donnelly proudly.





# Annual Homecoming Court Pageant

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## Honoring Halsey's Homecoming King And Queen

It's an annual autumn tradition where we celebrate royalty and show off our school spirit.

At this year's 2021 Homecoming Court event on October 22nd, homecoming kings and queens from the district's seven high schools were honored by adoring parents, friends, classmates, teachers and administrators.

The festivities began with a crowning ceremony at the Thomas A. Edison Career & Technology Academy's cafeteria. It ended with a procession of the royal couples at William's Field during the Elizabeth versus Bridgewater Raritan football game. The Elizabeth High School Marching Band and Elizabeth Cheerleaders were also there showing their school spirit. Last year's homecoming event was canceled due to the pandemic.

Representing Halsey Academy were Homecoming King Ovy Garcia and Queen Jennifer Bravo. What was it like to be in the spotlight? Bravo tells us.



## Getting The Royal Treatment

by Jennifer Bravo

*I was picked as the homecoming queen back in the spring of 2021. We were all still doing virtual school. As the day approached I got more and more stressed and nervous about what I was getting into.*

*Honestly, that night was a bit of a blur. There were hundreds of people in the bleachers including my mom and sister. Our principal, Mr. Van Vliet, members of the Elizabeth Board of Education and politicians were also there. By my side was Homecoming King Ovy Garcia.*

*At the end of the night, I realized I had a lot of fun. Not only had I met homecoming kings and queens from other schools in person, I also felt happy and thankful for being able to represent all of us Halsey students that night under the bright lights of Williams Field.*





## **Girls Varsity Soccer Goes From Rough Start To A Winning Season**

By Vielka Fernandez

It was a season to remember. It had a rough start but finished with players improving their skills and winning nine games.

The Elizabeth Girls Varsity Soccer Team ended the 2021 season with a 9-6-2 record. They made it to the second round of the states tournament after winning the first round with an amazing golden goal in the first 20 seconds of overtime.

Vielka Fernandez, (the author of this article) their top scorer, gave the pass to Sasha Nunez for the



**Girls senior night vs Roselle Park**



golden goal. This moved them on to the second round where they lost, and their season ended.

Two players from the team described what they thought about the season. Goalie Genesis Guzman said, "I think it was pretty fun. We all had fun and I actually felt like a family with my team." Forward Jasmine Pinzon said, "I had the time of my life with them girls. I'm proud to say that's my second family."

This year's team is a great group of girls with a great attitude who are willing to work hard. They will be losing a total of 9 seniors at the end of this year, but there's hope that a crop of new players will help bring fresh talent to the varsity team and a winning season in 2022.

# **HALSEY ATHLETES IN THE SPOTLIGHT**

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## **Highlight of EHS Boys Soccer Season, A State Sectional Title Win**

It was a dramatic game as both teams tried to break the 1-1 tie. But in the end, penalty kicks gave the Elizabeth High School Boys Soccer team a 4-3 win over No. 2 Hunterdon Central. This earned them the NJSIAA/Wawa North Jersey, Section 2, Group 4 sectional championship.

Halsey's own Cleff Alexis scored the decisive penalty kick that clinched the game for Elizabeth. The win, on November 11th at

Williams Field, capped an impressive season for the team, ranked No. 11 in the NJ.com Top 20.

Despite a heartbreaking loss to Monroe a year ago and a schedule buffeted by the pandemic, the players this year were determined to take their team in a winning direction. And they did. Halsey student Chrystian Calle was one of the key players on the squad, providing the team with 5 goals and 2 assists for the season.

Even though they lost to Kearny in a shootout the following week, these players ended their season with an impressive and hard-won 19-4 record.



## **EHS Football News**

The Elizabeth Varsity Football Team had some solid wins in the middle of their 2021 season. They beat out Watchung Hills Regional, Plainfield, and Hunterdon Central in away and home games. But they had trouble keeping the momentum going. The team ended the season 3-7.

Here is Halsey's Wendell Cadet in action helping the Minutemen defeat Plainfield, 19-18, at home on September 17th.



# *Holiday Happenings*

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## Holiday Toy Drive Collects 200 Toys for Kids in Need



This year's annual Toys for Tots drive will bring a lot of holiday cheer to kids in the area. Over 200 toys were collected by the Elizabeth Baseball Team, along with the help of students in Halsey's ROTC program.

"We were able to have the toys delivered to several area hospitals over several days," said Senior Marine Instructor Colonel Robert Golden. He helped coordinate the event.

"These toys will go to less fortunate children in hospitals during the Christmas holiday season. Special thanks to Coach Matt Belford and the Elizabeth Baseball Team," said Golden.



**Watch for the next issue of the Bulldog Bulletin in 2022**