

Common Core Information Night for Grades K-6

On Thursday, December 4, Onteora will be hosting an evening of presentations on the Common Core Learning Standards. Instructional experts from Ulster BOCES will lead sessions focusing on the new State learning standards for Math and English Language Arts (ELA) for students in Kindergarten through Grade 6.

Parents, guardians, family members, teachers, and staff are invited to attend the event, which will take place in the Middle School/High School auditorium from 6 PM-8:30 PM. According to Marki Clair-O'Rourke, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, "The District's goal is to offer information, support, and guidance to families, and to help our students meet the challenging new demands associated with the new learning standards."

Fun with Folktales at Woodstock and Phoenicia Primary Schools

Folktales, as a literary genre, are a part of the second grade curriculum at Onteora. To that end, Library Media Specialist Steve Patschke has been guiding students at Woodstock and Phoenicia through a project-based learning unit on folktales that incorporates reading, art, and music.

Mr. Patschke kicked off the unit of study in October by having students read a wide selection of folktale-based books, such as Brian Gleeson's *Anansi* (a retelling of two West African folktales) and Gerald McDermott's *Raven: A Trickster Tale from the Pacific Northwest*. "The children learned how folktales were handed down orally, from generation to generation," explained Mr. Patschke. "They were tales that tried to explain the unknown world, long ago."

The children also worked with Art teachers Michelle Weiss and Roberta Ziemba to create folktale-inspired artwork, and with Music teacher Paul Schubert, who taught them a folksong from Africa. The students showed off their creativity and their newfound knowledge about folklore at a school-wide assembly held at each primary school in November.

During the course of the assembly, the children performed folktales from the Ashanti people of West Africa, the Mayan natives of South America, and Native Americans from the State of Georgia, as well as a Hindu tale from India, all to a delighted audience of students, staff, parents, and guardians.

Culminating the semester-long project, Mr. Patschke, with the help and support of the Woodstock and Phoenicia PTAs, will host two well-known storytellers named Eshu Bumpus and Motoko Dworkin on December 5. Dressed in traditional African clothing, Eshu tells folktales and plays a wide variety of instruments from Africa. Motoko, who hails from Japan, tells traditional tales while displaying fascinating artifacts from her home country.

"We are looking forward to a year filled with wonderful fun, stories, and adventure in the library!" said Mr. Patschke.



Library Media Specialist Steve Patschke and Woodstock student Eleanor Wyman reading *Why the Sun and the Moon Live in the Sky*, by Elphinstone Dayrell.

See pages 4-5
for more
HOMECOMING
photos

During Homecoming, a pie-in-your-face booth raised money for High School PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) programs.



MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

To the Oteora School District Community,

I'd like to share with you my revised goals and associated work plan for the 2014-2015 school year. These six goals, which were established by the Board of Education in concert with me, are listed in the box to the right. Below are highlights of some of the work being carried out in connection with these goals.

LATER SCHOOL START TIMES FOR SECONDARY STUDENTS (GOAL 1)

We have established the Shared Decision-Making Team that will be working on this goal. The Committee's first meeting is scheduled for November 24. The Charge of the Committee is as follows: Provide parameters, identify hurdles, and craft solutions specific to the Oteora CSD in regards to the Superintendent goal.

The membership of this Committee will need to follow the guidelines outlined in a 2002 document entitled "Oteora Central School District Shared Decision Making," with the following modifications: the addition of four extra parents (one from each building and the Parents in Partnership President), one more ONTEA (Oteora Non-Teaching Employees Association) member, one ONTSA (Oteora Non-Teaching Supervisors Association) member, and an additional secondary principal. This means that although we have many wonderful people who have volunteered, we will need far fewer committee members than we had originally anticipated.

The committee participants will be: Superintendent Phyllis McGill; Principals Lance Edelman, Jennifer O'Connor, and Gabriel Buono; Parents in Partnership Coordinator Lindsay Hereth, Middle School PTSO President Virginia Wiswall, High School parent Maxanne Resnick, Bennett parent Catherine Legnini, Woodstock parent Valerie Storey, and Phoenicia parent Adam Caro; OTA President Rich DeRuvo, guidance counselor Sarah Turck and teachers Brian Connelly, Andy Occhi, Harvey Boyer, Bobby Hallock, and Claudia Kuhn; ONTSA member and Director of Transportation Nicole Sommer; and ONTEA President Nancy Parisio and Vice-President Dillon VanLeuvan.

To those of you who have volunteered and were not selected for the Committee, please know that if we have someone who is unable to serve or if we need additional members, we will come to you, as appropriate, to serve.

CURRICULUM MAPPING (GOAL 5)

Members of the District Curriculum Advisory and Leadership Council were trained on the process of Curriculum (Diary) Mapping in early July. Based on that training, the Council developed a "turn-key" training plan, with a view towards training curriculum development committees on the curriculum mapping planning process and expectations. This "kick-off" training event was held on August 5. Since that time, curriculum development committees in ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies have been diary mapping on Superintendent's Conference Days as well as on monthly release days. Grade K-6 art and music teachers have also asked to join the curriculum mapping efforts. These maps are being stored on a shared drive to ensure central access.

On November 12, members of the District Curriculum Advisory and Leadership Council participated in a Digital Curriculum Mapping Solutions showcase at Ulster BOCES to explore technology mapping software packages being considered by the District. On November 14, members of the District Curriculum and Advisory Leadership Council attended a workshop entitled "Vertical Alignment: Leading Collaborative Inquiry to Ensure Learner Growth." We continue to build the capacity of the Leadership team in support of this important District initiative.

TECHNOLOGY (GOAL 6)

Last spring, our District hired a technology company to conduct a K-12 audit of our progress in the area of technology. This audit examined our infrastructure and network, our use of technology with students for instruction, and our professional development with teachers and staff. As part of the audit, 128 faculty members completed a survey, focus groups have been held, and visitations to our schools have occurred.

The audit results are currently being summarized and will be presented at our December 2 Board of Education meeting to be held at Woodstock Primary School.

COFFEE CHATS

Finally, I'd like to invite you to share coffee and conversation at one of our upcoming Superintendent's Coffee Chats. The first one is scheduled for December 9 from 8:30-9:30 AM, the second one will be on January 7 from 8:30-9:30 AM, and the third will be on February 19 from 6-7 PM. The coffees will be held in the District Office's conference room.

Thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share this information with you. I look forward to a productive and successful 2014-2015 school year.

Sincerely,
Phyllis McGill, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Superintendent's Goals for 2014-2015

The following goals were established by the Board of Education in collaboration with the Superintendent for the 2014-2015 school year:

GOAL 1: Based on the recommendation of the American Academy of Pediatrics and considerable other data-based research, plan and prepare for later start times for secondary students using an 8:45 am-9:00 am target. This goal acknowledges the need to factor into account current elementary start times, BOCES attendance and extra-curricular activities, and the need to engage the community in the planning process.

GOAL 2: Promote District-wide culture and climate, across staff, administrators, parents and school board, by improving and developing communications; and implementing leadership models, drawing on examples of Leadership Academy, School Improvement Teams and other models.

GOAL 3: Plan and articulate a five year financial plan. The financial plan should incorporate current fiscal parameters and should reflect both fiscal and educational priorities of the District.

GOAL 4: Formalization of the use the Professional Learning Community model, to create teams of stakeholders organized by grade or subject to help set learning goals, and ways to access student learning and progress.

GOAL 5: The three year plan to write vertically- and horizontally-aligned K-12 curriculum maps is to include in Year 1:

- a. Develop and write diary maps, identify mapping software and begin training on mapping software
- 1. Diary mapping will identify opportunities to incorporate experiential learning and project based learning across all grade levels.
- 2. Diary mapping will introduce and integrate additional "hard sciences" into the curriculum, K-12, with an emphasis on Computer Science, Chemistry and Physics, so that all our students acquire the skills to be producers of technology, not simply consumers.

GOAL 6: In conjunction with adoption and implementation of K-12 Technology Audit recommendations, vis-a-vis (i) infrastructure, (ii) staffing support, (iii) instructional technology, and (iv) professional development, plan for the introduction and integration of additional computer science into the curriculum K-12.

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

Dear Members of the Onteora Community,

Since convening with our new Trustees this summer, the Onteora Board of Education has been actively working on several initiatives designed to improve the educational experience and outcomes for all our children.

Firstly, we have established a Task Force on Testing Reduction in response to concerns expressed by parents, teachers, and administrators over the quantity of “high stakes” testing being required of our students, particularly in Grades K-8. Please look to your PTAs for updates on this task force and opportunities to participate.

Secondly, we requested that the Superintendent hold a public forum/presentation on the Common Core Learning Standards and their implementation within the District to clarify some of the confusion that exists over the role of Common Core, what it means, and how it impacts our students, etc. The forum has been scheduled for December 4.

Thirdly, as you may have heard, the Board and the Superintendent collaborated on a Superintendent Goal to plan and prepare for later start times for Middle and High School students. The Board has advocated later secondary start times as part of its goals since 2012, and in discussing the topic at its meetings, held in public, has shared research papers as part of the published meeting agendas. In 2013-2014, members of the OCSD Board and Administration began work with other Ulster County School Boards Association members to further research the issue at a regional level. A resulting paper, entitled “Later School Start Times for Adolescents,” was co-published by SUNY New Paltz’s Center for Research, Regional Education and Outreach (CRREO). The paper is available through Onteora’s District Clerk and at the following link: www.newpaltz.edu/crreo/2020_school_start_times.pdf.

Also in August, the American Academy of Pediatrics issued its own paper, entitled “School Start Times for Adolescents” (<http://bit.ly/1z4N0NF>), adding to the scientific evidence indicating that teenagers

are physiologically driven to fall asleep later and wake up later than younger children and adults, and that making teenagers attend school before 8:30 AM has profound negative consequences—both health and educational. As more districts nationwide make the change to later start times (and the conversation is ongoing at many districts in our region), the research demonstrates the proven benefits, not just academically, but in reduced levels of tardiness, sleepiness, depression, substance abuse, and traffic accidents.

However, our own Superintendent Goal as originally approved at the Board table failed to clearly articulate our intent to engage the community in the process of moving to later Middle School/High School start times, for which we apologize, and after feedback indicating the difficulties in implementing any significant change for next year, was re-crafted to address these concerns. The Superintendent has assembled a District Comprehensive Planning Team to tackle the parameters, hurdles, and solutions around our shared, research-driven goal. We look forward to reviewing this work, understanding that it is driven by our common interest in the health and well-being of all students.

The Board has also been working, at its public meetings, on re-crafting the District’s Mission and Vision Statements. We are holding public hearings at Board meetings through November and into December before approving them. We have additionally crafted a draft of District Core Values, for which we welcome public input. Please see the District website to join that conversation.

Finally, we wish to thank former Trustee Tom Hickey for his service. Due to moving out of the District, Mr. Hickey resigned in September. At the time of writing, his seat remains unfilled; please visit the District web site or contact the District Clerk if you are interested in applying.

Sincerely,
The Onteora CSD Board of Education

BOARD OF EDUCATION GOALS FOR 2014-2015

At the October 7 meeting of the Board of Education, the Board Goals for 2014-15 were finalized. They can be read in full via the District home page: <http://bit.ly/1wb6lTj>

DISTRICT INVITES FEEDBACK ON CORE VALUES

The Board of Education has crafted a draft of “District Core Values” and welcomes the community’s input. To view the draft, please go to the District website: <http://bit.ly/1oaljhz>

Superintendent and Board President Address Statewide Educational Conference

On October 27, Onteora Superintendent Phyllis McGill and School Board President Tony Fletcher gave a presentation entitled “The ABCs of School District Improvement” at the New York State School Boards Association’s 95th Annual Convention and Education Expo in New York City. To view their presentation, please visit the District website: <http://bit.ly/1udSxzk>



Bennett Runners Support Local Charity

The Onteora track was a river of red on Homecoming, as Grade 5 students from Bennett Intermediate School participated in the school’s third annual Red Dress Run. Wearing hand-made “dresses” made from red T-shirts, the students ran to raise money for the Woodstock Animal Sanctuary, as well as for project-based learning activities.

The students’ choice of a charity was inspired by *Home of the Brave*, written by Katherine Applegate. In the book, a Sudanese refugee helps save a cow named Gol (“family”) after arriving in his new home in the United States. The students are donating \$1,000 to the animal sanctuary, which provides care for a number of cows.

The remaining money raised by the run will fund fifth grade project-based learning activities. Tentative plans include a radio interview with Susan Shaw, host of “Saturday Gumbo” (a weekly radio show on WKZE); a weeklong Mardi Gras unit of learning and celebration



in February; and a Skype interview with Nechama Liss-Levinson, the author of *When the Hurricane Came* (a book about Hurricane Katrina).



Onteora Comes Home

Homecoming 2014

Honoring its athletes during Homecoming weekend is an Onteora tradition. This year’s Homecoming schedule included a Varsity football game featuring the merged Kingston/Onteora team, as well as field hockey, volleyball, and soccer games. Students, alumni, and community members came out in force to cheer on Onteora’s athletes and to show their school spirit.

This year, many people also came to pay tribute to Clifford Secor, an Onteora athlete who lost his life in 1969 after suffering an injury during a JV football game against Highland. Cliff’s jersey number, 27, was retired during a ceremony attended by his mother and other family members.

Other Homecoming highlights included a “Red Dress” charity run by Bennett Intermediate School students, a “pie-in-your-face” booth that raised money for High School PBIS (Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports) programs, a pep rally, and a Homecoming Dance. Presiding over the festivities were Homecoming King Aidan Klein and Homecoming Queen Rebecca Castellano, and Homecoming Court members Dylan Serfis, Emma Russell, Mike Fauci, Avery Maillet, Steven Tillighast, Samantha Grecky, Andrew Keaveny, and Mary Sorich.



Pre-K students from Discovery Preschool are all smiles as they wait for Halloween treats at the Reservoir Delicatessen and Dairy, which is located next door to the school. Discovery is one of the participants in Onteora's Universal Pre-K program.



Welcome Back!

The 2014-2015 school year is well under way. Students returning to school this year were greeted by sunny skies, jubilant, high-fiving classmates, a host of welcoming staff members, and newly spiffed-up buildings and grounds. Work carried out over the summer included:

- reconstruction of concrete stairs, entrances, and sidewalks at the Middle School/High School;
- replacement of the original electric power service entrance wiring and equipment at Phoenicia and Woodstock Primary Schools;
- reconstruction of the parking lot, sidewalk, and front entrance at Woodstock Primary School;
- electrical and wiring upgrades at Woodstock Primary School; and
- installation of new heating/ventilation units in two classrooms, classroom cabinetry upgrades, and the addition of new adjustable basketball hoops at Bennett Intermediate School.



iPADS IN THE CLASSROOM:

High School/Middle School Adopts New Learning Tool

This year, all students in Grades 7-11 received a new learning tool: iPad tablet computers. The tablets are equipped with educational “apps” that promote learning, growth, and achievement—while helping to prepare students for the kind of 21st-century technology they will need for colleges, trade schools, and jobs.

Middle and High School students are already using the devices to hand in homework, study for tests, carry out research, organize their work, collaborate with their peers, and communicate with teachers.

In Science teacher M. Scott Via’s classes, students use various apps to keep up with the latest Science-related news and events. Mr. Via’s students also use the iPads to receive instant feedback on their “Do Now” assignments, and to create a portfolio of work within eBackpack, an educational “cloud.”

“Most assignments in my classroom are completed in eBackpack and submitted for digital review,” reports Mr. Via. As a result, his need to photocopy materials and assignments has diminished drastically. Of course, students who prefer hard copies of assignments are still provided with these copies.

Global Studies teacher Doris Thomas’s students use their iPads to upload homework assignments, peruse required readings, research topics, watch educational videos, and view PowerPoint presentations, among other tasks. “Anything I put on eBackpack, students can view at home,” Mrs. Thomas adds. “It’s great, because even if my students are absent, they can have access to the day’s lesson.”

In addition to eBackpack, students are using apps like Flashcards, IXL Math, ExploreLearning Gizmos (a Science app), and MakinVIA (which allows students to order eBooks through the library). Most of the apps run without an Internet connection. Any assignments that need Internet access can be completed in school.

At the beginning of the year, a user agreement was distributed to students, parents, and guardians, explaining that the devices are not to be used for Social Media or games.

At school, students are blocked from inappropriate sites by an Ulster BOCES filter. At home, parents and guardians are responsible for monitoring their children’s iPad use.

In the near future, New York State will require students to take State assessments using computers or iPads. The District’s iPad initiative is helping to familiarize students with the soon-to-be required test format.

According to High School Principal Lance Edelman, the iPads fit well with the District’s vision for technology. “Creativity, collaboration, problem solving, and digital citizenship are skills that students need to master and apply in all curricular areas,” he said. “We know that this also aligns with the new State standards, which require students to be literate in research and information analysis, to understand how to use media purposefully, and to learn how to communicate effectively.”

For more information on the iPad initiative, go to the District website: <http://bit.ly/1vXLLxp>.



High School students use iPads to complete their schoolwork in the library.

MIDDLE SCHOOL SUMMER READING CHALLENGE

Congratulations to Grade 8 student Spencer Estes, the winner of the Middle School’s Summer Reading Challenge.

According to Library Media Specialist Amy Weisz, the challenge attracted eight participants, who were tasked with carrying out a number of activities, including reading fiction, non-fiction, and poetry books, checking out a book from a public library, visiting a bookstore, writing and submitting a story or a poem, and reading a book read by their parents when they were younger.

Those who succeeded in completing at least 85 percent of the challenge were entered into a drawing for a Kindle Fire HD tablet, which was generously donated by the Middle School PTSO.

All of the participants were invited to a celebratory waffle brunch and received prizes including tote bags, books, and book-related posters.



Onteora Teachers Undertake Curriculum Mapping

Maps are useful tools. They help us avoid unnecessary delays and detours, guiding us to our destinations as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

This year, a number of Onteora teachers in Grades K-6 are creating different kinds of maps—curriculum maps. This special type of “mapmaking” will help teachers design and deliver more coherent, more effective courses of study in the areas of Math, English Language Arts, Science, and Social Studies.

The overarching goal of curriculum mapping—the final destination, if you will—is improved student learning.

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Marki Clair-O’Rourke explained how the process works: “Curriculum mapping is when you identify, month by month, the content, skills, and vocabulary you are teaching, as well as the assessments and resources you will use, while aligning all of this to the appropriate State learning standards and guidelines.”

By compiling all this information, the teachers are in a better position to identify—and address—any gaps, duplications, or misalignments in their curricula.

The work began in August, when the District held a curriculum mapping “kick-off” event attended by 27 teachers. Since then, the members of the various curriculum development committees—40 teachers in all—have met monthly to work on their maps and share their progress with their colleagues.

Bennett Grade 5 teacher Karen Hadley describes how she and her fellow teachers are approaching their task: “We are mapping out a teaching diary aligned with the Common Core for each subject, both horizontally—across the school year, and vertically—across all the elementary grades, K-6. So if a new teacher comes to the District, he or she can see exactly what has been taught before, including resources, vocabulary, skills, and assessments, all aligned with the standards for that grade in each subject area.”



Woodstock teachers Elissa Parness (left), Phyllis Evans (center), and Dawn Lunchmee work on mapping their curricula during a recent workshop.



Three Bennett teachers work on their curriculum maps. Pictured are Maryanne Kenly (left), Jennifer Bruck (center), and Ken Haaland. This special kind of mapmaking will help Onteora’s teachers design and deliver more coherent, more effective courses of study.

Phoenicia Grade 1 teacher Ingrid White also hopes to help create an information-packed document that all teachers, including new ones, can easily use to shape their curricula. “When teachers have the information they need at their fingertips, they can spend more time doing what they want to do—developing meaningful lessons and focusing on what’s important for children,” she said.

Onteora Superintendent Dr. Phyllis McGill is excited about the ongoing curriculum mapping efforts. “We are very pleased that this work is taking place, as we find our students do best when teachers engage in collaborative planning,” she enthused.

Work will continue throughout the year, with teachers in Grades 7-12 formally undertaking curriculum mapping next year.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY, PHOENICIA!

In late September, Phoenicia Primary School celebrated 50 years of learning, laughter, and love. Graduates and former staff members flocked to Phoenicia’s Welcome Back Picnic for a night to remember, joining the school’s current students, staff, and families.

Young and old alike marveled over the contents of a recently unearthed time capsule, and cheered as Principal Linda Sella helped bury a new one (containing such treasures as a New York State quarter, a Chunky Monkey Reading lesson, and an iPod filled with Physical Education Teacher Patrick Burkhardt’s favorite tunes).

Honored guests included Randy Collins, who served as the school’s principal from 1984-2001, and the talented duo known as Ratboy Jr., who provided the evening’s family-friendly musical entertainment. Even Phoenicia’s Main Street businesses joined in the fun, displaying colorful, celebratory flags decorated by Phoenicia students.

“So many people helped to make our birthday party a truly memorable occasion,” said Principal Sella. “We’re so grateful to every volunteer from the staff, PTA, and community. But most of all, we’d like to thank the many former students and staff members who came to share their photos, memories, and mementos. We loved welcoming you back!”



Phoenicia Principal Linda Sella addresses students prior to burying a time capsule.

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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Dr. Phyllis Spiegel McGill

NEWSLETTER EDITING & DESIGN

Ulster BOCES Community Relations

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To Postal Customer

Onteora High School Named to List of Best High Schools in the United States

Kudos to Onteora High School, which has been included in The Daily Beast's list of the nation's best high schools for the third year



in a row. Onteora, which was ranked 526 among the 754 schools making the list, was one of only two Ulster County schools earning spots this year. Onteora joins New Paltz High School, which was ranked 397.

To compare public high schools in the U.S., The Daily Beast used six indicators, with graduation and college acceptance rates being given the most weight. Other criteria used in the ranking included the percentage of students taking college-level courses, the percentage of students receiving free or reduced-price lunches, and SAT and ACT scores.

Among other accomplishments, Onteora was praised for its graduation rate (94.7 percent), average SAT score (1649), and average ACT score (25). Seventeen percent of students were enrolled in Advanced Placement classes, and 80 percent of graduating seniors were reported to be college-bound.

To view profiles of all the schools on this year's list, visit www.thedailybeast.com/features/2014/america-s-top-high-schools.html.

Onteora High School Students Selected for All-State Music Groups



Three Onteora High School students have been selected to participate in the highly competitive New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) All-State Music Festival, to be held in December in Rochester, New York.

Senior Eliza Siegel (right) and junior Daniel Foster (center) will be singing with the All-State Mixed Chorus, while senior Mary Sorich (left) will be playing with the All-State String Orchestra.

The students were chosen based on their individual performances last spring at the NYSSMA Solo Music Festival. Only those with stellar scores on their solos were picked to participate in the festival. The All-State Festival will culminate with a performance in the historic Eastman Theatre.

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