

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

To the Onteora School District Community,

This October, members of our Board of Education and I will be giving a presentation on the “ABCs of District Improvement” at the New York State School Boards Association’s 95th Annual Convention and Education Expo in New York City.

In our presentation we will share how Onteora has tackled, and capitalized on, the challenges posed by the Common Core Learning Standards, the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) process, data-driven instruction, and the tax levy limit. Drawing on our experience, we will show how careful planning, the reconfiguration of elementary schools, strong collaborations, targeted research, and the judicious use of data can transform a district, improve graduation rates, and promote student achievement.

We submitted our presentation to the School Boards Association because of the multiple accomplishments that Onteora has achieved over the past three-plus years. If you will do me the favor of indulging me, I would like to share some of these accomplishments.

Our High School graduation rate has increased from 77 to 87 percent, and our “Violent and Disruptive Incidents” have been reduced by two thirds. Our students are moving up to our secondary schools more ready than ever to meet the demands of a challenging curriculum. Our Middle School is now in “Good Standing,” after previously being identified as a “School in Need of Improvement.” We have an iPad student program, online Academic Intervention Services (AIS) and credit-recovery programs, and five new online Advanced Placement (AP) course offerings.

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Class of 2014 Looks to the Future



The Onteora track was a sea of red and white on June 27, as 125 seniors celebrated their successful completion of High School—and the beginning of their post-graduation journeys.

“I’m ecstatic to participate in the future!” Class of 2014 Salutatorian Micah Yannatos told his classmates. “As we start to make the decisions that will set our lives off in certain directions, I think it’s important that we remember what makes us unique among animals: our ability and desire to understand the world around us.”

Robert Tonner, founder of the Kingston-based Tonner Doll Company, was the guest speaker. He told the graduates to define themselves and not let others do it for them. “If you want to do something important, you must work hard,” he emphasized. “Always keep your word and follow through.”

Addressing the Class of 2014, Valedictorian Cassandra Hastie said, “We’re not ending our story, but rather starting new and exciting chapters. I’m confident in your incredible potential to change the world.” She concluded with an inspirational quote from author Maya Angelou: “I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

*More High School
Graduation photos
on page 5*



Congrats to the Class of 2014!

Woodstock Grade 3 Students Enjoy Hawaiian-themed Farewell

The weather was appropriately tropical on June 19 as family members, friends, and staff members gathered in Woodstock Primary School's cafeteria for an aloha-themed send-off for its Grade 3 students, who will be entering Bennett Intermediate School in the fall. The theme was especially fitting for a moving-up ceremony, given the fact that in Hawaiian, the word "aloha" can mean both hello and goodbye.

Principal Kathleen O'Brien, assisted by the Woodstock teachers, called the students to the podium one by one to receive their certificates as they crossed the threshold to the next phase of their education.

"Tonight is our night to celebrate a special turning point in the lives of our third grade students," Dr. O'Brien told the audience. "They are ready to embark on a new journey of learning at Bennett Intermediate School."

Dr. O'Brien also offered the following words of advice to the newest Woodstock alumni: "I encourage



Grade 3 students Maeve Turck and Ruby Gallin show off a "memory book" at Woodstock's June moving-up ceremony.

you to work hard in school and get involved in after-school activities. Set goals for yourself, stay focused on those goals, and don't let anyone or anything stop you from achieving them."

Following the formal ceremony, students and their guests, many wearing leis and tropical attire, marked the occasion with cool ice cream treats, a welcome ending to this significant, steamy evening.

MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT continued from page 1

Administrators, teacher-leaders, and faculty members continue to work together to improve the alignment and rigor of our curriculum. Among other changes, we moved research instruction from Grade 12 to much earlier in our High School program.

Building on the success of last year's Summer Academic Support Program, the District again offered this opportunity to "at risk" students entering Kindergarten through Grade 9. Students enrolling in this three-week program received remedial assistance in reading and math.

We have successfully reconfigured our elementary schools from three K-6 schools to two K-3 primary schools and one Grade 4-6 intermediate school. Bennett Intermediate School continues to improve in creating project-based learning initiatives, with an emphasis on writing across the curriculum and the integration of the arts. Our District-wide music groups for Grades 4-6 have won Gold Awards at the New York State School Music Association (NYSSMA) festivals. We have also added an afterschool enrichment program at no additional cost to the District or to the families of students.

Our Woodstock and Phoenicia Primary schools have focused their attention on creating early-learning-centered primary schools with a focus on child development, social skill development, and early literacy. Thanks to the work of our Primary Schools Planning Committee, which recently completed its first year, we have new recommendations for class sizes. This Committee has recommitted to a second year as we continue to work on important student issues.

At the preschool level, we have a Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) half-day program that is offered free of charge to up to 23 children. By the time this newsletter is printed, we will have heard if we were awarded an additional grant to serve up to another 20 children in a full-day UPK program.

Our District continues to significantly improve student learning and the overall quality of our schools.

We are successfully implementing the new State-mandated APPR and are working together on curriculum maps to address the Common Core Curriculum. Our Response to Intervention Plan has now been in effect for two school years. All of this work has been accomplished through collaborations with stakeholders, targeted professional development, and contractual negotiations.

Our District communications have improved dramatically. Among other efforts, we have improved our website, introduced a mobile app, and integrated Facebook into our communications process.

Our budgets have a successful history due to reconfiguration and a positive outcome of our last tax certiorari proceeding, with the last three budgets passing with zero percent increases on the tax levy. Onteora is currently working to address infrastructure deficiencies in the areas of health/safety, energy efficiency, and deteriorated building conditions, thanks to voter approval of our Capital Improvement Project in May 2014.

While we have much to be proud of, we will still face many challenges in the years ahead. It is a tough time in education, as the State continues to micro-manage local districts and underfund its financial obligations. Our commitment is to continue to strive, to learn, and to improve, so that we can better meet the needs of our children and our District.

I'd like to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to share some of Onteora's many accomplishments. I am extremely grateful to be the Superintendent of the Onteora Central School District. I am also very proud of our community, our School Board, our administrators, our teachers, our staff, and our children and their families.

I look forward to a productive and successful 2014-2015 school year.

Sincerely,

Phyllis Spiegel McGill, Ph.D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION PRESIDENT

On behalf of the Board of Education, I would like to welcome everyone in the Onteora community to the new school year. I trust that it will be a productive and successful one for all of us.

There are several changes to report from the Board. Firstly, we would like to thank retiring trustees Dan Spencer and Michael McKeon for their years of dedicated service on the School Board. Similarly, we welcome Tanya Davis and Gideon Moor, who were elected to the Board at the annual budget and trustees vote in May. Both are parents of District students and come to us with experience in education and deep family connections to the community; we look forward to their contributions at the Board table and in committees. Also in May, Ann McGillicuddy was re-elected to a third term as a trustee. We would all like to thank her for her tireless work as President of the Board over the last two and a half years. At the re-organization meeting in July, Trustee Rob Kurnit was elected as Vice President, and I was elected President; we both look forward to serving in that capacity during the forthcoming year.

Also at our July meeting, the Board established several committees for the 2014-2015 school year: Primary School Planning, Communications, Policy, Facilities, Communications, and Health and Wellness. Participation on committees offers an opportunity for community members to work alongside trustees and help shape educational ideas and propose policies in a collaborative environment. Please contact District Clerk Fern Amster if you are interested in serving on any of these committees.

While we are proud that the Onteora District continues to excel on so many different levels, we recognize the need for continual improvement. As a Board, we will continue to review existing policies and programs, and to consider the introduction of new ones, with the goal of increasing both student achievement and engagement. It is our desire that every student will be able to look back on their years at Onteora satisfied that not only did the District help prepare them academically for their adult lives, but that it was a profoundly enjoyable and exciting experience.

And, as always, the Board will be proactive in campaigning for equitable funding at the State level. The lack of equitable funding is a problem that has created considerable challenges for just about every school district in the State. We urge you to stay informed on these issues and let your elected representatives know how you feel about the increasing shift in the burden of education costs from State aid to local property taxes.

We look forward to seeing you at Board meetings, which typically take place every other Tuesday, rotating around the District buildings. Please check our website for exact dates and locations (www.onteora.k12.ny.us/domain/530).

Sincerely,

Tony Fletcher, President

ONTEORA CSD BOARD OF EDUCATION

Phoenicia Students Soar into the Future

Playing an instrument. Exploring the Nature Trail. Meeting new friends. These are just some of the many things that Phoenicia's Grade 3 students are looking forward to experiencing when they enter Bennett Intermediate School in the fall.

The excitement was palpable at Phoenicia's June moving-up ceremony, where each of the 37 "graduates" had the opportunity to step up to the podium to list some of the exciting features of their new school. There was also a bit of wistfulness, as students shared what they would miss most about their primary school days—everything from Math, to Lunchtime Book Club, to favorite teachers, to spirited games of foursquare.

Phoenicia Principal Linda Sella thanked the families whose support had bolstered the community at Phoenicia. "A strong school community is forever," she declared. "If you build the foundation, it becomes part of who our children are for the rest of their lives."



Phoenicia students are all smiles before their moving-up ceremony.

THE FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL FOR CHILDREN will be Thursday, September 4.

BUS ROUTES

are being finalized, and the new "redbooks" (listing transportation routes) will be available at the school buildings



on or about August 28. Parents can also call their children's school or the transportation office, or use the Parent Portal. The parents/guardians of Kindergarten students can expect to receive a call from the Transportation Department by the last week of August about their children's first-day schedules.

Onteora Community Helps Make College Dreams Come True

As an enthusiastic crowd of proud parents, friends, and community members looked on, Onteora High School seniors gratefully accepted scholarships totaling approximately \$331,000. Approximately 190 awards were announced during the June 11 ceremony, which took place in the Harry Simon Auditorium.

Among the numerous scholarships announced during the event was the Bishop Scholarship Medical Professions Award, which will provide up to \$17,500 a year for four years of college. This year's recipients were Julia Armstrong, Jonah Strand, Lauren Havens, and Ryne Perry.

High School Principal Lance Edelman was thrilled by the impressive show of support for the graduating seniors. "We are grateful to the Onteora community for continuing to support our students," he said. "In this challenging economic climate, their generosity goes a long way."

Principal Edelman also expressed pride in the award recipients. "Our students achieved awards tonight



for academic achievement, achievement in the arts, athleticism, extra-curricular involvement, community service, leadership, determination, and citizenship," he enthused. "I am sure that our students will continue to impress the Onteora community!"

PRE-K STUDENTS "STEP UP" TO KINDERGARTEN

Onteora's youngest scholars—the 29 children enrolled in the District's Universal Pre-Kindergarten program—participated in a special "Stepping up to Kindergarten" ceremony held at First Steps Day Care Center in Woodstock on June 24. Prior to receiving their "graduation" certificates, the children sang, danced, and play-acted their way through an entertaining program that showed off some of the many things they learned this year.



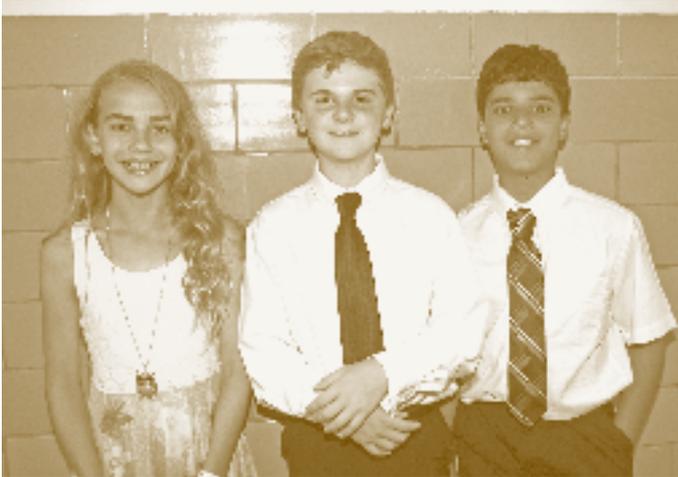
NATIONAL HONOR SOCIETY WELCOMES NEW MEMBERS

Eighteen High School students were inducted into the Onteora chapter of the National Honor Society during a candlelit ceremony held on June 11. Congratulations to the following students: Amanda Brunner, Rebecca Castellano, Miina Childs, Emilia Ditkoff, Alexis Funchess, Taylor Kight, Aidan Klein, Avian Kleine, Hayden La Motte, Nathaniel Mapstone, Andrew Meci, Grace Miller, My Ngo, Laura Price, Jordyn Scism, Dylan Serfis, Eliza Siegel, and Mary Sorich.



High School students participate in a candlelight ceremony marking their induction into the National Honor Society.

Bennett Students Celebrate Achievements at Moving-Up Ceremony



Bennett students enjoying a quiet moment before “moving up” to Middle School.

During a celebratory ceremony held in June, 94 Grade 6 students bade farewell to Bennett Intermediate School and hello to the Middle School, which they will be entering this fall.

Highlights of the evening included a humorous, inspirational address by former Bennett Student Council President Charles Coryell, and several spirited musical selections by the award-winning Bennett Jazz Ensemble.

Students were also recognized for their achievements in many areas, including academics, music, art, physical education, citizenship, service, and even perfect attendance.

Addressing the students, Principal Gabriel Buono suggested that the specifics of their daily classroom lessons are less important than learning how to analyze situations and solve their own problems. “No matter what choice you are faced with, I am here to tell you to reflect on your collective experiences, keep an open mind, learn from your mistakes, and create short-term, achievable goals for yourself so that you can have more positive experiences like you have had in the past two years,” he said.

Class of 2014 Looks to the Future



Important Upcoming Dates

SEPTEMBER

- Sept. 1 Labor Day, School Closed
- Sept. 2 & 3 Superintendent’s Conference Days, No School for Students
- Sept. 4 First Day of School for Students
- Sept. 4 Kindergarten Orientation, 10 AM-12 PM (Phoenicia and Woodstock)
- Sept. 25 Rosh Hashanah, School Closed

OCTOBER

- Oct. 10 Superintendent’s Conference Day, Half Day for Students
- Oct. 13 Columbus Day, School Closed



Thirty of Ulster County’s best and brightest students were recognized for their academic achievements on June 5 at the first annual Scholastic Achievement Breakfast, held on the Ulster BOCES campus in New Paltz. Honorees from Onteora High School were: Cassandra Hastie, valedictorian (right); Micah Yannatos, salutatorian (center); and Rose Sella Rega, top business student.

Middle School Students Move Up to High School

As the familiar strains of “Pomp and Circumstance” echoed through the High School/Middle School auditorium, nearly 100 Grade 8 students solemnly strode down the aisles on June 23 to begin their moving-up ceremony. Providing the musical accompaniment was Grade 7 pianist Adrienne Cox.

“You have finished an important phase of your lives, and are preparing yourselves for new challenges. I know you are ready, as I have had the pleasure of watching you grow and mature,” Middle School Principal Jennifer O’Connor told the soon-to-be High School freshmen. “I watched you learn many important lessons, both inside and outside the classroom. I have enjoyed getting to know you, and wish you well as you enter High School.”

High School Valedictorian Cassandra Hastie, who will attend Harvard University in the fall, offered sage words of advice to the students. “I can’t stress enough how important it is to enjoy your High School experience,” she said. “I thought I knew who I was before entering High School, but I slowly found out much more about myself as the years passed. I made incredible

friends, was taught by dedicated and passionate teachers, took a variety of interesting classes, and gained knowledge in all different subject areas.”

A number of awards were conferred on the graduates during the ceremony. Among those being

honored were Adrianna Roser and Ryan Wright, who both received the prestigious New York State Comptroller’s Achievement Award.

Continuing an Onteora tradition, each student was given two flowers during the ceremony. “The red flower is yours to keep; the white flower is to give away,” Science teacher Kate Van Baren told the students.



“Give the white flower to someone who helped you succeed in Middle School—a parent, a friend, a teacher, a principal, or coach. Let the white flower be a visible way to thank someone who supported you, nagged you, encouraged you, or stood by you when you needed it most.”

When they return in the fall, these students will have crossed an important threshold as they begin the next stage of their educational journey. As Cassandra Hastie observed, “Transitions are not always easy, but they are a necessary and important part of life.”

PHOENICIA CELEBRATES OLD GLORY



Phoenicia students celebrated Flag Day with art, poetry, patriotic songs, and of course plenty of red, white, and blue. Helping the children honor Old Glory were veterans from VFW Post 2837 and American Legion Post 950, members of Women’s Auxiliary Post 950, and former Phoenicia Teaching Assistant Helen Cordo, who founded Phoenicia’s Flag Day celebration more than 35 years ago. Veteran and Town of Shandaken Judge Thomas Crucet delivered the traditional “Thirteen Folds” recitation during a flag-folding ceremony carried out by members of the American Legion Honor Guard. “It is important that children understand that the flag is the symbol representing our country’s freedom, and that this freedom came with a price,” said Teaching Assistant Tracy Quick, who organized this year’s celebration. “Many men and women have sacrificed so much for the freedoms we enjoy today.”

MIDDLE SCHOOL HOSTS “BATTLE OF THE BOOKS”

Reading is alive and well at the Middle School, which staged a “Battle of the Books” on May 28. The three competing teams were cheered on by an enthusiastic audience of classmates, parents, and staff members as they answered a slew of *Jeopardy*-style questions about 10 different literary works, including *The Graveyard Book* by Neil Gaiman, *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas* by John Boyne, *Counting by 7s* by Holly Goldberg Sloan, and “The Raven” by Edgar Allan Poe.

The winning team, The Vermicious Knids, received \$200 in Barnes & Noble gift cards (with the support of an Onteora Teachers Association grant). Members of the other teams received a fiction book of their choice from the library prize cart for their participation. Thanks to all students and staff who participated!



Battle of the Books winners Adam Savage, James Davis, Austin Anziana, and Sabrina Story pose with their team’s poster, which was inspired by the shape-shifting aliens in Roald Dahl’s *Charlie and the Great Glass Elevator*.

Woodstock Welcomes New Principal

Woodstock students arriving on the first day of school will be greeted by a new staff member: Principal Scott Richards, who assumed the reins of the primary school on July 15.

Onteora Superintendent Dr. Phyllis McGill is pleased to welcome Mr. Richards to the District. “We are delighted to have Scott Richards join Onteora as our Woodstock Primary School Principal,” she said. “He has a very positive history as an elementary principal.



He presents with strengths as an approachable educational leader, a dedicated team player, and a skillful and knowledgeable educator.”

An experienced school administrator, Mr. Richards most recently served as principal of Cairo-Durham Elementary School, a K-2 school located in Durham, New York. He also held the principal’s position at two other New York-based schools, Cairo Elementary School and Eugene Brooks Middle School. In addition, he was the Dean of Academics for the Maplebrook School, a boarding school for special education students located in Dutchess County.

Mr. Richards also brings considerable classroom experience to Woodstock, having taught students in Grades 4 and 5. His accomplishments include developing a successful literacy program and being nominated as North Carolina Rookie Math Teacher of the Year.

Mr. Richards received his Master of Science degree in Educational Administration and Policy Studies from the University at Albany. He also holds a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education from SUNY Oneonta and an Associate of Arts degree, with a Liberal Arts concentration, from SUNY Cobleskill.

Principal Richards is excited to be joining the Woodstock community. “Although January 1st is the official start of the new year, I have always considered September to be the real start of the new year,” he said. “I’m looking forward to starting this new year with the families, students, and teachers of the Woodstock Primary School. I can’t wait to get started!”

Bennett Hosts Colonial Trades Fair and Ball

Bennett Intermediate School students recently did a bit of time traveling: they hosted a Colonial Trades Fair on May 15, followed by a Colonial Ball on May 16. Both events were part of the fourth grade’s yearlong study on Living and Working in Pre-Revolutionary Colonial New York.



During a Colonial Trades Fair held at Bennett Intermediate School in May, Grade 4 student Logan Holmquist gave a presentation on the duties of a Colonial-era soldier.

To prepare for the trades fair, Grade 4 students conducted extensive research on trades that were common in early America, using books, Internet sources, and, in some cases, interviews with modern-day craftspeople. They wrote a research-based report, prepared a short speech, and created costumes, tools, shop signs, and other appropriate props. On fair day, the “tradespeople” stood in front of their “places of business,” regaling fair attendees with tales of what was involved in their particular lines of work.

At Friday’s ball, the students showed off their Colonial dance steps—the results of months of hard work under the guidance of Bennett’s Physical Education teachers. They performed two 18th century dances: George Washington’s Favorite Cotillion and a “reel” dance (to the tune of “Yankee Doodle”). Professional dancers were also on hand to share their expertise with the students. A merry olde tyme was had by all!



Elisa Rhodes and Ella Williams show off some of the tools of their chosen “professions” during Bennett’s Colonial Trades Fair.

PHOENICIA HOSTS HEALTHY SNACK EXPO

Continuing its yearlong campaign to encourage healthier eating habits, Phoenicia hosted a Healthy Snacks Expo in June. Students sampled an array of delicious, nutritious snacks from two local eateries, and voted on their favorites. A big thank-you to the Peekamoose Restaurant and the Phoenicia Diner, which donated the tasty, healthy treats!



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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT

Carolyn Rivera Bell, Class of 1983

For Carolyn Rivera Bell, Onteora provided much more than book learning. It also helped start her on a rewarding career path as a residential therapist and ultimately as an educator for more than 20 years.

Although Bell has fond memories of many Onteora staff members, one teacher in particular made a huge impact. “Bernard Lapo,” she recalls, “allowed a young and naïve 10th grader to take a psychology class filled with seemingly worldly juniors and seniors.” The class, she says, was a “life changer.”

Other Onteora teachers also help lay the foundation for a well-rounded education. Among them were Donna Marrin, whom Bell recalls as “wonderful, dedicated, and caring,” Domingo Lago, “who not only taught his students a love for Spanish, but was also like a father figure,” and Bruce Miller, “who spent endless hours after school with students who struggled in math.”

As a senior at Onteora, Bell took a Health class with Robin Sears, who led a field trip to the Hudson River Psychiatric Center in Poughkeepsie. The expedition increased Bell’s interest in psychology. She went on to volunteer at the center, gaining valuable knowledge and skills, which she would put to good use in later jobs.



Carolyn Rivera Bell, Class of 1983

After graduation Bell attended SUNY Purchase, where she worked at the campus children’s center and decided to pursue a career in teaching. After earning a Master’s degree in Education from SUNY New Paltz and a Master’s degree in Reading from the University of Albany, Bell worked as a residential therapist for Ulster-Greene ARC for seven years. Working 28-hour weekend shifts, she helped adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, developing lifelong relationships with many of them.

During this time she also worked as a substitute teacher. She eventually began teaching full time, a career she has enjoyed for 21 years. She currently teaches Grade 5 students at Miller Middle School in the Kingston City School District. Although Bell admits that many of the days she spends teaching are “utterly exhausting,” she remains passionate about her current career. “I love working with 10 and 11 year olds,” she says. “At this age, students still get excited about learning; they have an attention span, a sense of humor, and some degree of independence.”

Married to Onteora alumnus Kieran Bell, Carolyn Rivera Bell resides in Woodstock with her husband, who teaches at New Paltz High School.

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