

ONTEORA

Fall 2021

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

DEAR ONTEORA COMMUNITY,

As we all enjoy the natural beauty that surrounds us in our community this time of year, I want to thank you for your continued partnership. Only through parent and community support have we been able to successfully bring back 100% in-person learning, five days per week for our students. Since the opening of school, there have been no COVID-19 transmissions in school, thanks to the diligence of our staff, students, and families.

Using Ulster County Department of Health (UCDOH) and New York State Education Department (NYSED) guidance, staff, administrators, and Parent Teacher Association (PTA) members have successfully planned local field trips, Homecoming activities, fall festivals, athletic events, and opportunities for civic engagement, all for student growth and pleasure. Student learning, as well as many of the traditional Onteora school experiences, is alive and well! We are constantly monitoring data and looking to open up opportunities for our students to deepen their educational and extracurricular experiences in the most student-centered way possible.

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Another School Year is Well Under Way!

ONTEORA KICKED OFF THE 2021-2022 SCHOOL YEAR ON SEPTEMBER 8. Students, many of whom hadn't seen each other over the long summer break, greeted friends, teachers, and classmates with an enthusiasm that couldn't be obscured by the masks that covered their smiles.



Students filing into the High School/Middle School on the first day of school.

This year, the District is continuing a number of pandemic-related safety measures, including point-of-entry temperature checks, strategically placed hand-sanitizing stations, a daily medical screening questionnaire, signs encouraging social distancing and proper hand-washing, and daily cleaning and disinfection of high-touch surfaces.

Mask breaks are being provided for students as needed, and social distancing of three feet is being maintained indoors to the extent possible. Upgrades to ventilation systems include portable air cleaners with HEPA filters, which have been purchased for every classroom. To optimize ventilation, doors and windows are being kept open as permitted by weather conditions.

In another effort to help keep our schools safe and open for in-person schooling, in October, the District partnered with the Ulster County Department of Health to offer a pop-up COVID-19 vaccine clinic that was open, with parental permission, to students aged 12 and older. The District has also offered parents and guardians the opportunity to sign their students up for regular COVID-19 testing.



We are grateful to everyone who is helping to keep our students, staff members, and community safe. With your assistance, it is going to be a great year!

Phoenicia Grade 1 student Eva Vergara coloring a worksheet on the first day of the 2021-2022 school year.

HOMECOMING: A Celebration of Athletes and School Spirit

See more on pages 4 & 5



Bennett Art Project Infused with History, Science, Sustainability

AT BENNETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, students are immersed in a multifaceted art project that incorporates elements of science, history, literature, and environmentalism.

Art teacher Roberta Ziemba is collaborating with Beth Humphrey, Director of Education & Public Programs at the Woodstock Artists Association and Museum (WAAM), to teach students how to create drawings using inks made from locally foraged materials like acorn caps and goldenrod. The students' work, which depicts fantastical landscapes, will be showcased at WAAM from November 19-December 31.

During a recent class, Grade 5 students were working with a dark brown ink made from acorn caps. The nuts had been collected by students at home (and in some cases on the school's Nature Trail), and then crushed by volunteers who hammered them during recess. Ms. Ziemba added water, boiled the extract, and stirred in gum arabic and ferrous sulphate (a type of iron). The production process, she told the students, demonstrated how science can play an integral role in art.

To inspire the young artists, Ms. Humphrey gave a slideshow of ink drawings from the WAAM collection, including landscapes by Alf Evers and Conrad Kramer, pointing out how the artists used ink, lines, and brushstrokes to create certain effects or a particular atmosphere.



Bennett students Fiona Turck (left) and Kerry Murphy working with ink made from acorn caps. The young artists are students in Roberta Ziemba's art class.

Afterwards, Ms. Ziemba shared some of the long history of natural inks. Oak gall ink, she noted, was used in historical documents like the American Declaration of Independence as well as by renowned authors like the Bronte sisters.

"There is a long history of artists coming to our area because of the resources we have here," Ms. Ziemba added. "We are expanding on that history."

Reducing waste and promoting sustainability are major concerns of Ms. Ziemba, who aims to meet New York State Learning Standards in an environmentally sustainable way. "That's why we are making our own ink from local materials, rather than using markers encased in plastic," she said. In another example of recycling, feathers found on the school grounds are fashioned by Ms. Ziemba

into quills, which the students can use to apply ink to paper.

In the same vein, earlier in the school year, Ms. Ziemba sought out wood scraps from local woodworkers, which the students used to make fanciful dragon sculptures. Her ultimate goal, she says, is to create a "reduced waste" art classroom.

Ms. Humphrey finds the Bennett ink project to be personally rewarding. "It's exciting for me to examine our collection in a new light in terms of materials and sustainability and working with teachers. I am learning too!"

DOWN ON THE FARM: WOODSTOCK STUDENTS LEARN IMPORTANT LESSONS AT LOCAL FARMS

Farms make excellent outdoor classrooms—and playgrounds! Just ask Woodstock Kindergarten and Grade 1 students, who celebrated autumn by visiting local farms. In addition to learning where much of our food comes from, the students had the opportunity to pick seasonal produce, get up close and personal with farm animals, and revel in the crisp fall air.

Kindergarten students toured Kelder's Farm in Kerhonkson on October 5, while Grade 1 students took a field trip to Kesicke Farm in Rhinebeck on October 8. "We picked apples and pumpkins, fed the animals, jumped on the bouncy pillow, and played on the playground," reported Kindergarten teacher Elohim Pacheco about her students' visit to Kelder's. "The farm had so many new equipment pieces added to their playground, and we really lucked out with the weather. The kids had a great time!"

According to Grade 1 teacher Cassandra Kothe, Kesicke Farm was a hit with the first graders. "When we arrived, we were able to take a hayride through the woods to visit the cows," she said. "The cows came running towards us looking for their next meal, which the children happily provided with the assistance of the farmer. They also went for a wagon ride, picked pumpkins, and enjoyed the farm's play space and all of the friendly animals. The weather was beautiful, and the children had a wonderful time!"



Woodstock Kindergarten students visiting Kelder's Farm.

Phoenicia Students Learn about Communities and Community Building



STUDENTS IN PHOENICIA TEACHER CARLY HULL'S GRADE 2/3 CLASS welcomed two special visitors from the local community this fall: Onteora School Resource Officer (SRO) Thomas Sharon and Officer George Neher of the Shandaken Police.

The officers were among the guests invited by Ms. Hull to help her class celebrate "Community Weeks," which took place in her classroom from October 11-30. "Our other guests have included members of the U.S. military and members of our local fire department," Ms. Hull reported.

Describing his visit, Deputy Sharon said, "I was invited to share with the class what a police officer's job is and to show off our cars and equipment." The students, who listened intently to both officers, were thrilled to sit in a patrol car and to try on a police vest.

Ms. Hull's students also learned about the differences between rural, urban, and suburban communities. "It is important to me that my students understand the communities in which they live but also understand the function of communities and the importance of all community members," she said. "Giving them opportunities to interact with members of our local community, such as Deputy Sharon, inspires, motivates, and educates my students in a hands-on way. It is much more than trying on a vest or sounding the siren."

Another important component to Community Weeks, Ms. Hull explained, involved building community within the school building as well as within the classroom. The District's Social and Emotional curriculum encourages "community circles," she said, in which every student is included as a valued participant. "During this tremendously difficult time of education, it is important to me that my students feel connected to their classmates, their school community, and ultimately the community in which they reside," she explained.

LETTER FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

We recognize that the impacts of COVID-19 have caused trauma within our community. Student well-being is at the center of all that we do. By providing opportunities for staff to engage in professional learning and implement student-centered practices within the classroom, we strive to meet the social and emotional needs of students. If you have any concerns about your student's emotional needs, I encourage you to reach out to their teacher or guidance counselor so that our staff can make sure you have access to the broad services we provide.

A big thank-you to Dr. Neal Smoller and staff as well as the UCDOH, who continue supporting us in meeting the State mandate with our weekly testing protocols for all staff members who qualify. We are in the process of setting up optional COVID testing for students whose parents choose to have them tested and thank all parents who have completed the survey we shared.

I hope you enjoy reading about the great things happening here in the District and look forward to our continued partnership.

Thank you again for your patience, partnership, cooperation, and support as we continue to work together to have a successful school year.

Sincerely,

Marystephanie Corsones
INTERIM SUPERINTENDENT

DINING AL FRESCO AT THE HIGH SCHOOL/MIDDLE SCHOOL

At the High School/Middle School, students have the option of enjoying their socially distanced lunches outdoors, thanks to tents and picnic tables that have been placed outside of the cafeteria and to the left of the football field/track. During inclement weather, students will be able to eat their meals in the cafeteria, Middle School gym, or other designated classrooms.



Onteora High School Musician Performs at Carnegie Hall

ONTEORA VIOLINIST JOEY DRISCOLL RECENTLY TRAVELED TO CARNEGIE HALL IN NEW YORK CITY, where she performed as a guest soloist for the charity organization Music For Change. Joey, a senior at Onteora High School, performed Johann Sebastian Bach’s “2nd Partita in D minor for solo violin.” The performance took place on October 9.

According to High School Orchestra Director Erica L. Boyer, Joey submitted an audition video in early September. On the basis of that audition, she was among the lucky students selected to perform on the legendary Carnegie Hall stage.

Joey, who is one of Mrs. Boyer’s students, was thrilled to be chosen. “I didn’t fully believe that I was actually going to have this amazing opportunity to perform until receiving my backstage entrance pass!”



exclaimed the young musician, adding that she was happy with how her performance went. “I was able to play confidently without making any mistakes,” she said. “And walking onto the stage alone felt so surreal!”

The Carnegie Hall experience, Joey believes, was the culmination of her musical journey thus far. “That’s because ‘younger Joey’ would have been amazed that she even had the confidence to audition,

much less set foot onto that stage,” she explained. “I am very proud of how confident I have become as a violinist.”

Joey is currently the Concert Mistress of the Onteora High School Orchestra and Onteora Chamber Ensemble. She will also be performing at the 2021 Area All-State Festival in Newburgh on November 20, and the Conference All-State Music Festival on December 5 in Rochester.

HOMEcoming: A Celebration of Athletes and School Spirit

PARADING ATHLETES, COLORFUL BANNERS, DELICIOUS FOODS AND BEVERAGES, HARD-FOUGHT ATHLETIC CONTESTS—AND LOTS AND LOTS OF SCHOOL SPIRIT! Onteora’s Homecoming celebration this year was all this, and much more.

The fun started early, during the week leading up to the September 25 festivities. Students enjoyed a number of excuses to dress up, including Pajama Day, Tie Dye Day, Fandom Day, Decade Day, and Class Color or Jersey Day (an invitation to wear Eagles athletic jerseys or class colors).

On Saturday, the activities featured plenty of pomp and ceremony, as this year’s Homecoming Court — Darrah Allison, Jackson Scanlon, Marquies (Mark) Treasure, Sophia Wentland, Adam Williams, Delilah Blue, Shayne Bresler, Achaia-Lotus Horwitz Gindele, Jakson Spiotta, and Kyra Smith — was introduced to the crowd before Saturday’s football game.

Also in the spotlight on Saturday were the fall athletic teams, which paraded along the High School/Middle School track as friends, families, staff members, and community members cheered in the grandstands. Senior athletes and their parents — and sometimes their coaches — proudly posed for photos under a Homecoming arch made of red and white balloons.

The crowning highlight of the day’s festivities, however, took place during halftime of the football game, when Jakson Spiotta and Kyra Smith were pronounced “Homecoming Royalty.”

It was a Homecoming to remember!





THE BAND PLAYS ON!

Weather permitting, High School/ Middle School Band Director Steven Murphy brings his musicians outside, where they can practice in the fresh air, inspired by the mountain views. Pictured are Middle School Band members, who were soaking in the October sunshine while learning to play a new piece.

WOODSTOCK STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT FIRE PREVENTION

Woodstock Elementary School celebrated National Fire Prevention Week, with hands-on safety lessons from members of the Woodstock Fire Department. Teachers for the day included firefighters, a paramedic, and an EMT (emergency medical technician).

The students were reminded about the importance of observing various safety measures, such as making sure their homes are equipped with functioning smoke detectors. The youngsters also had the opportunity to learn about some of the lifesaving tools used by the fire department, including oxygen tanks, breathing masks, and automated CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) machines.



Capital Project Update

WORK ON THE 2019 CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT PROJECT, which was approved by voters as part of the 2019-2020 budget, is wrapping up. Much progress has been made to improve accessibility at the High School/Middle School, which is a major goal of the Capital Project.

At the High School/Middle School, the locker rooms, as well as 15 bathrooms, have been renovated as part of the District’s efforts to make sure that every area of the building is compliant with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The original bathrooms, most of which were more than a half-century old, had doors and bathroom stalls that were too narrow to accommodate wheelchairs. In the locker rooms and shower rooms, curbs that had prevented easy access for students with limited mobility have been removed.

Also completed as part of the project are an ADA-compliant ramp leading to the High School gymnasium and a new ADA-compliant parking area near the gym.

In addition, work on the 2019 Repair Reserve Project was completed last spring. This project consisted of modifications to the drainage on the athletic field located inside of the High School/Middle School track to facilitate the usage of the field for multiple sports. While the field was formerly only suitable for football, it can now be used for other sports, like field hockey and soccer, which require a wider playing field.



BEFORE: The Middle School Girls’ Locker Room, as it looked midway through the renovation process. **AFTER:** View of the renovated Locker Room.



BEFORE: This photo, taken over the summer at the High School/Middle School Math Wing bathrooms, shows the Girls’ Bathroom on the left and the Boys’ Bathroom on the right. Both bathrooms required major renovation work. **AFTER:** View of the renovated Girls’ Bathroom in the High School/Middle School Math Wing.



BEFORE: Prior to being renovated, the athletic field located inside of the track at the High School/Middle School depended on drains like this one to keep the field in good playing condition. Drainage issues made it difficult for the field to be used for multiple sports. **AFTER:** With the addition of a long drain positioned alongside the track, Onteora now has a wider, multipurpose playing field, suitable not only for football, but for soccer and field hockey as well.



Bennett Grade 6 teacher Kelly Downs measuring student Jayda Formont as part of a lesson focusing on the metric system.

BENNETT STUDENTS LEARN ABOUT METRIC SYSTEM

On the first day of school, Bennett Grade 6 teacher Kelly Downs marked students’ height in a hallway outside of his classroom. “Students then measured their heights using meters, centimeters, and millimeters,” he said. “The metric system is used in the Science community throughout the world,” he explained. “Our students will also be using this system during Science class this year.”

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New Social Studies Approach Being Introduced at Woodstock and Phoenicia

SOCIAL STUDIES IS BEING TAUGHT IN A NEW WAY THIS YEAR AT PHOENICIA AND WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS. Karen Hadley, an Onteora teacher on special assignment, is helping Grade 2 and 3 classroom teachers weave Social Studies content into other subject areas, like English Language Arts (ELA), Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), and Civics.

The inquiry process, which involves students asking questions, examining sources, making discoveries, and drawing their own conclusions, is central to this new approach. “Students will be examining primary sources and evidence related to a focused question around New York State Standards-based content,” Ms. Hadley explained. “This taps into their natural curiosity to explore artifacts, maps, posters, images, musical recordings, and a wide variety of other first-hand accounts of events to construct meaning.”

Guiding the approach are sample inquiries, or questions, found in the New York State Education Department’s Social Studies Resource Toolkit (<https://bit.ly/SocialStudiesToolkit>), which Ms. Hadley helped develop as part of a 16-member team hired by the State in 2015-2016 to write inquiries for Grades K-12.

One of these inquiries recently took center stage in Allison Mitchell’s Grade 2 classroom at Phoenicia, where students investigated the question, “What symbol best represents the United States?” The students began by examining the American bald eagle, which is found on our nation’s coins and dollar bills, is part of the Presidential Seal, and serves as Onteora’s official mascot. This led to conversations about how this symbol is used and what values are important to the students as citizens of the United States.

It is important, Ms. Hadley stressed, to ask questions that have multiple possible answers, from multiple points of view. “So we are not going to debate whether or not climate change is real, for example, since it has been scientifically proven,” she said. “But we might ask a question like, ‘How can we begin to combat the effects of climate change?’ or ‘How can we address it better than we have been?’”



Phoenicia Grade 2 students (clockwise, from left) Madeleine Haas, Carrie Roefs, Ximena Garcia Rosas, and Abbi Lynch working with Karen Hadley (far right), a teacher on special assignment, to answer the question, “What symbol best represents the United States?” As part of their investigations, the students examined quarters and dollars, which feature the American bald eagle, among other symbols.

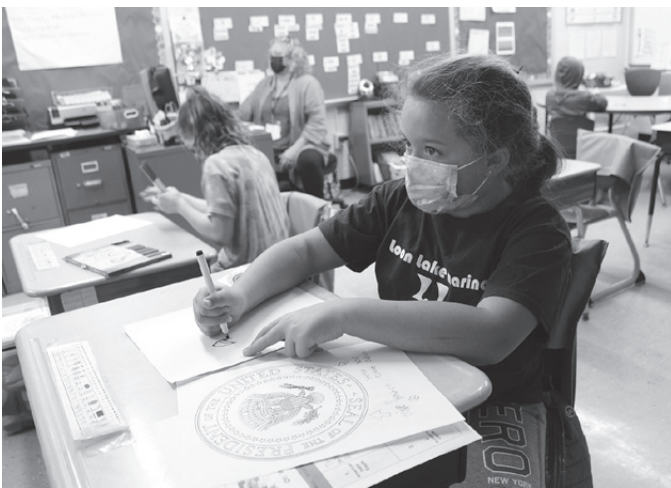
At times, Ms. Hadley said, the teachers may be encouraging “gentle digging” into potentially controversial topics. “These topics exist, whether we are comfortable addressing them or not, and they will come out in our classrooms, one way or another,” she said. “So we might as well create a safe space for students to have some difficult conversations.”

“The last piece of every inquiry is civic action,” Ms. Hadley continued. “Our hope is that students internalize each investigation, connecting with their hearts while also building content knowledge and historical thinking skills. Finally, students will identify a related problem in the community and take some form of civic action as informed participants to contribute toward a solution. This is how we grow educated citizens who want to participate in our democracy.”

Civic action, Ms. Hadley said, might take the form of students starting a classroom recycling program, creating school spirit projects, donating clothes to refugees, conducting a book drive for children affected by a natural disaster, or hosting a community celebration of some sort. “We’ll keep our eye on current events and make every effort to pair our learning with meaningful opportunities for the students to make a difference,” she promised.

In undertaking this initiative, Ms. Hadley said, the teachers have the support of New York State, Onteora administrators, the Board of Education, and the Morningside Center for Teaching Social Responsibility (which supports Onteora’s efforts in the area of SEL). “And we are working on outreach to parents and the community proactively to inform and include their voices in the discussion as well,” she added.

Stephanie Laffin, Onteora’s Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, is pleased with the new approach, which is being piloted in Grades 2 and 3 this year, with plans to expand and integrate it in every K-6 classroom in the future. “We are excited to make Ms. Hadley’s experience and expertise available to support our K-3 instructional staff as we work to integrate instruction into Social Studies, Social and Emotional Learning, Literacy, and Civic Readiness,” she said.



Evie Calascibetta, a Grade 2 student at Phoenicia, watching an instructional video to learn how to draw an American bald eagle during a Social Studies lesson on American symbols.

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ALUMNI SPOTLIGHT
Kaleigh Garraffa
CLASS OF 2017

KALEIGH GARRAFFA, THE AUTHOR OF *LAS LOCAS: THE MADWOMEN*, CREDITS HER ONTEORA TEACHERS AND COMMUNITY WITH HELPING HER TO REALIZE HER DREAM OF BECOMING A WRITER. She also credits the pandemic, which interrupted her in-person studies at Marist College, with giving her more time to devote to her passion.

The Mount Tremper resident, who graduated from Marist in 2021 with a double major in Communications and Spanish with a minor in Creative Writing, describes her first novel as a mystery set during Argentina’s so-called Dirty War (1976-1983), when thousands of Argentinians were kidnapped and killed by right-wing and military death squads. Among those who disappeared were many pregnant women, whose babies were secretly adopted. The so-called “madwomen” of the title were the grandmothers of the missing babies, who staged public protests to draw attention to their plight.

Kaleigh, whose mother hails from the Dominican Republic, has long been interested in Spanish and Latin American culture, an interest that was also nurtured by Onteora Spanish teacher Elena Garcia (who retired last year).

Kaleigh also fondly recalls a Creative Writing class taught by English teacher Bridget Allison. “It helped me get into fiction, memoirs, and poetry,” she explained.

“I fell in love with all of them.” English teacher Erin McGurgan (now retired) was also influential. “She was a great teacher, and helped me cultivate my love of writing,” Kaleigh said.

To help bring her book into the world, Kaleigh turned to Creator Institute, a program founded by a Georgetown University professor to aid fledgling writers. The program connected her to editors and mentors, helping her to shepherd her book from outline, to completed manuscript, to the marketplace.

Needing to raise money to cover printing costs, Kaleigh turned to Indiegogo, a crowdfunding website. The response was overwhelming. “It was super heartwarming how many of my family members, friends, community members, and even strangers helped me reach my goal of publishing my book,” she said. In addition to the satisfaction of helping an aspiring writer, would-be supporters were offered inducements like tarot card readings and signed copies of the book.

Kaleigh has already written the outline and a few chapters for a sequel to *Las Locas*, and has her eyes open for a job in publishing, preferably in New York City.

Wherever she ends up, Kaleigh won’t forget her Onteora roots. “Onteora is a great school district,” she said. “All of the teachers and staff are so welcoming, and everyone is so helpful. I was really prepared for college!”

“It was super heartwarming how many of my family members, friends, community members, and even strangers helped me reach my goal of publishing my book.”
—Kaleigh Garraffa

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