



Augustus Luttinger (left) and Nadou Louis (right) enjoy a celebratory moment after receiving their diplomas.

Onteora Eagles Celebrate their Graduation and a Bright Future

Eighty-six Onteora Eagles celebrated their successful conclusion of High School—and the start of their post-graduation journeys—during a joyful commencement ceremony, that, due to favorable change in the weather forecast, was held outside on our picturesque athletic fields, on June 26.

Class of 2024 Valedictorian Virginia Potter addressed her fellow graduates. “We have all worked so hard and for so many years for this, and here we are, surrounded by those who helped us get here,” she said. After thanking teachers, parents, and friends, Virginia encouraged her classmates to be thoughtful with others, especially in small, everyday moments, “because these small moments make up the majority of our lives.” She also encouraged her classmates to be kind to themselves. “We are often our harshest critics, but when we practice not judging others, we will be less critical of ourselves. Let go of regrets and what ifs. Allow yourself to learn from the past and focus on the present moment,” she said.

Onteora High School Salutatorian, Principal’s Award recipient, and Class President Sophia Odatto relayed a story of a little boy she observed on a beach, who was staring intently at the sand beneath his toes as he walked. The child caught her attention, she explained, because “he was only focused on his relationship with the granules of sand directly beneath him, greeting each step with the same curiosity as the last.”

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Ava Yarabek (left) and Sarah Wolfeil (right) show off their diplomas at graduation.



Message from the Superintendent

The summer flew by, and I hope everyone enjoyed time with family and friends and making wonderful memories.

At the Board of Education’s reorganization meeting in July, Cindy Bishop was re-elected to serve as President of the Board, and Meghann Reimondo was elected to the office of Vice President. We welcomed Rick Knutsen as a new member of the Board of Education during this meeting as well. I’m excited to work with this leadership team throughout the coming year. The Board has a wonderful combination of a wealth of knowledge and fresh ideas.

We have capital work happening in our buildings this summer, and the Board was provided with an update at its August 6th meeting. The meeting can be viewed at www.youtube.com/live/wGSyYYsKUc if anyone would like to watch the presentation. The presentation covered the work that is happening this summer, the work that is scheduled for next summer, and the priorities identified for the future.

We are excited to welcome our athletes back on campus this month prior to the start of school, and they will be followed by the rest of the student body very soon.

I hope everyone enjoys the remainder of their summer break and can spend quality time with loved ones.

We are looking forward to everyone returning in September.

Victoria McLaren
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Phoenicia Farewell is a Memorable Send-Off

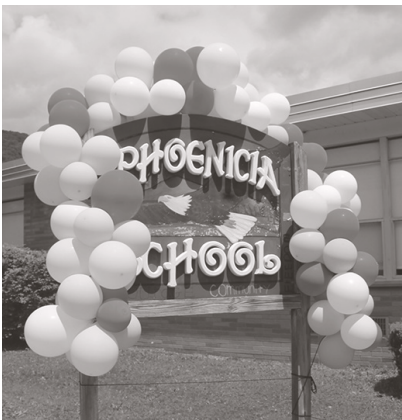
On what was a beautiful, breezy day, an amazing showing of the community—including alumni, retirees, current and past staff members, students and families, and Onteora staff and administrators—gathered at Phoenicia Elementary School to celebrate the school’s 60-year history and to bid farewell.

Event organizers Christina Signore and Janice Tieri from the Phoenicia PTA officially kicked off the event with heartfelt speeches. “The closing of a school often brings forth feelings of sadness and loss, but it also brings forward change, creating new opportunities,” said Ms. Tieri. “It is with this in mind that we can acknowledge the loss we feel, while also being grateful for memories we shared, and for those we will make anew.”

With a festival-like atmosphere, the event was truly a community affair. Young celebrants whooped it up on the “Fun Zone” playground provided by the Topple Family of M&M Masonry, and enjoyed getting their faces painted by Dyani of Heavenly Face Painting, sponsored by the Woodstock PTA. Sabrina Asch, aka “DJ Major Mayhem,” (sponsored by the Woodstock PTA) was there spinning tunes, and participants enjoyed hamming it up at the photo booth, which was sponsored by the Onteora Teachers Association. The Phoenicia and Woodstock PTAs, along with staff and administrators, operated concession stands, sponsored by the Onteora Booster Club and the Phoenicia Diner. Families and friends also enjoyed a circus/aerial arts performance in the gymnasium by Westchester Circus Arts, as well as an impressive musical performance by Bennett Music teacher Harvey Boyer, retired Phoenicia Music teachers Paul Schubert and David Laks, and Bennett Jazz Band members Dylan Jared and Baxter Bryant.

There were many hugs, some tears, and plenty of laughter, as friends, former co-workers, teachers, and former students reunited and re-lived cherished memories on their old stomping grounds. Many teachers and administrators from every decade came back to visit. Notable attendees included Phoenicia Elementary School’s second principal, Randy Collins; former teacher Marion Blish, who began teaching at Phoenicia at its inception; and a few members of Phoenicia’s first Kindergarten Class of 1964. Participants enjoyed exploring the historical display inside, where yearbook photos from every decade at Phoenicia Elementary School were displayed.

A huge THANK YOU to everyone who worked tirelessly to make this memorable event happen!



Welcome Back to School

The first day of school for students will be
Wednesday, September 4.

LET THE LEARNING BEGIN!



The Class of 2028 is on the Move!



Abigail Leach holds up her well-deserved certificate of completion.

Comptroller’s Student Achievement Award, which recognizes students who show academic excellence and leadership potential, was awarded to Vivienne Lamb, and the New York State Attorney General’s “Triple C” Award, which honors commitment, character, and courage, was given to Austin Otis. The Field Hockey Award, presented by Junior Varsity Field Hockey Coach Jennifer Brueckner, was awarded to Saige Gierloff.

Soon-to-be freshmen were showered with recognition during their Grade 8 Moving Up Ceremony.

Middle School Principal James DiDonna praised the students for their hard work and dedication and a special guest speaker, Onteora High School Class of 2024 Valedictorian Virginia Potter, shared some parting wisdom. “Be kind to those around you,” she advised. “Always show up, do your best, and take advantage of the many opportunities around you.”

The ceremony also included a presentation of awards. The New York State



Julian Bovee, Luke Sand, and Oliver Wyman enjoy the reception after the Middle School Moving Up Ceremony.



NTEORA
CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

CONNECT WITH US

Have you signed up for our email list?

Community members who don't have children in the district can join our email list and receive updates directly to their inbox about:

- Important District Initiatives
- Optimizing Onteora Restructuring Plans
- Monthly “Board Briefs” Communication from the Board of Education

SIGN UP TODAY!

www.onteora.k12.ny.us/maillinglist

Scan the QR Code



SUMMER BUILDING IMPROVEMENTS COMPLETED

THERE WAS A LOT OF ACTIVITY AROUND OUR DISTRICT THIS SUMMER as our voter-approved capital project work progressed. One of the updates students, staff, and families may notice when they return in September are newly-improved tennis courts! The courts were resurfaced and painted, new nets and fencing were installed, and striping for both tennis and pickleball was done. The project was funded by the repair reserve.

At the Middle School/High School, a new generator was installed, and many improvements were made to the outside areas, including the addition of new sidewalks to create a safer egress for students, as well as concrete repairs. These projects, and an additional project at Bennett Elementary, where multiple floor tiles were abated and replaced, were funded through the District’s Capital Reserve fund.

At Woodstock Elementary School, students will notice a brand new exterior door, a new ramp outside the gymnasium, and soon a new security vestibule-window. These projects were funded through the 2021-22 General Fund Appropriation. In addition, all original heating units, as well as multiple floor tiles, were replaced with funding through a combination of COVID-19 relief funding and the Capital Reserve.

At Phoenicia Elementary School, improvements were made that were necessary to put the building on the market. These included an exterior door replacement and the removal of concrete footings under door lines, which was funded through the 2021-22 General Fund Appropriation. In addition, the abatement and replacement of floor tiles was funded through a combination of COVID relief funding and the Capital Reserve.



A new generator was installed at the MS/HS.



Woodstock Elementary School had a brand new exterior door installed.



Newly improved sidewalks and drainage system at the Middle/High School.



Newly improved tennis courts.

Bennett Graduates Check Out New Digs at Middle School

Soon to be Middle Schoolers (i.e., Grade 5 and Grade 6 students from Bennett Elementary School) were given the chance to officially check out their new digs. First they met with Middle School Principal James DiDonna, as well as several current students, to discuss all things Middle School. The new students were eager to hear about what a Middle Schooler's day looks like, and they enthusiastically asked many questions, including ones on such important topics as lunch and lockers.

After touring the halls with Mr. DiDonna, the students went to the cafeteria, where they were officially welcomed by Food Services Director Christine Downs, as well as many of their new teachers. They then



Next year's new Middle School students enjoy their first lunch together in the cafeteria.



practiced using their meal cards and set about having their very first lunch as a Middle School student. As a special treat, each student received a yummy dish of ice cream.

Welcome to Onteora Middle School, all new students!

Current Middle School students speak with incoming Middle School students during their visit to the school.

Onteora Eagles Celebrate their Graduation and a Bright Future

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Encouraging her fellow graduates to find comfort in moments like these, Sophia concluded, "I hope for the rest of our lives we remember that there will always be new granules of sand that deserve more thorough investigation."

The honorary guest speaker was Ulster County Commissioner of Jurors Paul T. O'Neill, who shared three very practical pieces of advice with graduates. First, he said, "Make the world a better place. How you do this is up to you." Secondly, he stressed the importance of choosing a career that matters to them personally, and shared a candid anecdote of how he came to be in his current position. Lastly, O'Neill told the graduates, "Always do your best, and if you make a mistake, fix it if you can. If you can't fix it, apologize. Always remember that virtue is in the effort."

As they received their diplomas, the graduates were exuberant, often striking poses for the waiting cameras, and hamming it up with high-fives, multi-step handshakes, and even confetti bursts.

At the conclusion of the ceremony, Onteora High School Principal Lance Edelman addressed the graduates. "This class has made me very proud," he said. "It has been an honor to watch you grow." Next, in a playful moment, Mr. Edelman said, "It is my pleasure to give you your final set of instructions. Please turn the tassels on your caps." He then pronounced them as officially finished with their high school studies.



Mikayla Hartwell (left) and Sean Hallinan (right) celebrate getting their diplomas with some confetti.



Maria Grinberg (left) gives a wink as she arrives at her seat. Next to her is fellow graduate Cameron Grant.

PHYSICAL & MENTAL HEALTH EMPHASIZED THROUGH YOGA UNIT AT WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY

BEFORE SCHOOL ENDED FOR THE SUMMER, STUDENTS AT WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL were able to enjoy a week-long deep dive into yoga during their Physical Education classes. The young yogis worked with local instructor HariPrakaash



Woodstock students practice the "tree" pose with their instructor, HariPrakaash.



on multiple techniques aimed at enhancing their physical and mental health, including breathing exercises, focusing and relaxation practices, and imaginative stretching poses like "cat," "cow," and "butterfly." At the end of their lessons, they were encouraged to "get their crazies out" by doing some free dancing.

"I try to expose the students to many kinds of movement and body awareness activities," said Physical Education teacher Sonja Rothe. "Yoga is a great way for students to build this awareness while strengthening their bodies and having a good time, too!"

Woodstock students enjoy stretching and practicing many poses during their yoga classes.



The Honor Guard from the Ulster County Sheriff's Office leads the National Anthem at graduation.



Anabel Sorbellini (left) and Che Spiotta walk to the traditional processional march of "Pomp and Circumstance."



Onteora High School Valedictorian Virginia Potter receives her diploma from Principal Lance Edelman.



Ada Helm (left) and Riley Hegeman (right) execute a special handshake after receiving their diplomas.



Onteora High School Salutatorian, Principal's Award recipient, and Class President Sophia Odato gives her speech at graduation.

Celebrating Onteora CSD's Commitment to Performing Arts

The Onteora Central School District has long recognized the transformative power of the performing arts in shaping well-rounded, confident, and creative students, and has made a steadfast commitment to ensuring that the arts are an integral part of the educational experience. The District's investment in the arts is not merely about staging performances; it's about cultivating essential life skills that extend far beyond the stage.

Participation in performing arts fosters creativity, critical thinking, and problem-solving abilities—skills that are increasingly valued in today's fast-changing world. Students who engage in the performing arts learn to collaborate, communicate effectively, and adapt to different roles and challenges, all of which are essential for success in any field.

The process of self-discovery and expression developed through performing arts builds confidence and resilience, helping students to navigate both the academic and personal challenges they encounter.

The District offers a wide range of opportunities for students to engage in the arts, from elementary school through high school. Whether they are performing in school musicals, singing in the chorus, or playing in the band, students are encouraged to explore their passions and develop their talents.



The "School of Rock" band shows they have what it takes at "The Battle of the Bands."

The District's productions, such as the spring performance of *School of Rock: The Musical*, are a testament to the talent and dedication of both students and staff. Directed by Onteora alumna Geneva Turner and Onteora Middle/Senior High School Chorus Director Brittany Carroll, the talented thespians put on three amazing performances in mid-April. Audience members never seemed to stop laughing, clapping, tapping their feet, and even singing!

The Onteora community loved their performances, especially standout musical numbers such as "You're in the Band" and "Stick it to the Man," which allowed the characters to really strut their stuff—and rock. The actors themselves were equally enthusiastic about their School of Rock experience.

Alice Slips, who is entering Grade 8 in September, played the role of "Katie." She said, "I really liked it because I got to play bass, and I got to meet a lot of new people who are into the same stuff as me because they are doing theater, which is really great!"

Graduate Ada Helm, who had acted in many Onteora productions over the years, said that playing the lead role of "Dewey Finn" (also known as Mr. Schneebly) was a great choice for her final performance at Onteora High School. "I was so excited to take on this role because I knew it was something I could really have fun with," she said.



The cast of *School of Rock: the Musical* strikes a pose.

MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WIN PRESIDENT'S CHALLENGE SCHOLARSHIPS

KUDOS TO Alexis Bruce, Scarlet Cordero, Vanessa Flores, Gillianna Griffin, and Ja'meer Maize, who have won SUNY Ulster President's Challenge Scholarships! The Onteora Central School District partners with SUNY Ulster and the SUNY Ulster Foundation to offer these scholarships to first-generation, college-bound students. Upon graduation from high school, these students will be afforded the opportunity to attend SUNY Ulster, tuition free, for two years. The students also receive guidance counseling and mentoring throughout their high school careers. Pictured with the students are Onteora Middle School Principal James DiDonna (far left) and SUNY Ulster President's Challenge Scholarship Program Coordinator Nancy Clarke.

Board Welcomes New Members & Elects Leaders

At the Board of Education’s reorganization in July, we officially recognized Cindy Bishop, who was re-elected to serve as President of the Board, and Meghann Reimondo, who was elected to the office of Vice President. We also welcomed Rick Knutsen as a new member of the Board of Education during this meeting. Congratulations!

Optimizing Onteora: Putting Plans to Paper

After a cross-section of our stakeholders—including parents, teachers, staff, administrators, and local residents of all ages and interests—got together to collaborate on a vision for our future Central Campus in Boiceville in May and June, the Administration accelerated progress with architects, engineers, and financial advisors to support the student-centered ideas that were overwhelmingly stressed in the four community forums. These included having phone-free “hang spaces,” integrating learning and nature, bringing more community members into the classrooms to share their experiences, and so much more.

The Board and Administration immediately began consulting with the District’s architects and fiscal advisors regarding building conditions, capital project options, and budget planning needed to support the community’s vision. This includes determining the design and scope of work that would be necessary for a centralized campus reflecting the priorities identified in the community visioning sessions, and conducting an environmental review. Progress on this work will be presented at Board meetings regularly, and once a proposal is ready, it will be presented to the community for approval. We hope to share this plan with you in the fall.

Our guiding focus in this vision process is to create the best learning and developmental experience that our school district can offer for all of our students. Students are at the center of all we do. We will lead with intention as we create our Central Campus, while doing our best to address community concerns. We appreciate your engagement and support through this transition.

You can read more about the vision to create a Central Campus in Boiceville by visiting www.onteora.k12.ny.us/optimize.

Help Shape the Fiscal Future of State Aid for Our District

A State-ordered study of the NYS Foundation Aid formula is underway, and will inform potential changes to how the formula for education funding works. The study is being conducted by the Rockefeller Institute of Government, and as part of the process,

2024-2028
Roadmap to a Central Campus

In May 2023, several crucial decisions were made to reconfigure our schools to create the efficiencies needed for upholding our district's commitment to excellence in the years ahead. We believe these changes will enhance the quality of education provided to our students and create an equivalent experience across all grade levels and schools within our district.

SEPTEMBER 2023

PHOENICIA K-3

WOODSTOCK K-3

BENNETT 4-6

MIDDLE SCHOOL 7-8

HIGH SCHOOL 9-12

SEPTEMBER 2024

WOODSTOCK K-4

BENNETT K-5

MIDDLE SCHOOL 6-8

HIGH SCHOOL 9-12

SEPTEMBER 2025

WOODSTOCK K-5

BENNETT K-5

MIDDLE SCHOOL 6-8

HIGH SCHOOL 9-12

Vision for a Central Campus in 2028

BENNETT K-5

MIDDLE SCHOOL 6-8

HIGH SCHOOL 9-12

WHAT'S NEEDED TO GET THERE?

STEP 1

Community discussion to co-create Central Campus model

STEP 2

Design Phase (plans & estimates)

STEP 3

Public vote for Capital Project

the researchers want to hear from education stakeholders across New York State, including students, their parents and families, teachers, school staff, and administrators.

Over the summer, board members and administrators participated in conferences and webinars to learn more and work to ensure our District receives fair educational funding from New York State. In addition, Assistant Superintendent for Business Monica LaClair traveled to the Capital Region on August 14 to speak at a public hearing, which was hosted by the Rockefeller Institute of Government.

Give YOUR Input: Let Your Voice be Heard

It is vitally important that members of small communities, such as Onteora, have their voices heard about the need for a fair and phased-in approach to any proposed changes in the State Aid formula, as school budgets typically envision five years out in their planning.

Onteora Superintendent Victoria McLaren and members of the Board have been providing their input about the Foundation Aid formula through The Rockefeller Institute survey—and you can, too!

To provide input or learn more about how Foundation Aid supports our District and the impact changes to the formula could have on our students, visit www.onteora.k12.ny.us/aidstudy. This window for input is available from now through Friday, September 6, 2024, at 11:59 PM (EST).

Continue the Conversation

There will be many more opportunities for community input next year, as well. Please be sure to check the website and sign up for Board Briefs, a monthly email update on the important work being done by the Board of Education and the District. Sign up at www.onteora.k12.ny.us/maillinglist.

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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Victoria McLaren

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To Postal Customer

SEVENTEEN ONTEORA HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS EARN
NEW YORK STATE SEAL OF BILITERACY

THE NEW YORK STATE SEAL OF BILITERACY is an accolade awarded to students who have demonstrated a high level of proficiency in English and another World Language.

To earn this award, students must present a research project to a panel of evaluators and be interviewed—entirely in their target language. It typically takes years of language study for students to get to this point. Seventeen of our students spent the last year diligently researching a chosen topic, meeting regularly with their mentors, and preparing for a test in which an intermediate high level score is needed to pass.

Congratulations to the 11 graduates who successfully presented in Spanish: Virginia Potter, Iris Koester, Oscar Espinoza, Linus Driscoll, Ariaehni Boyd, Guadalupe Hernandez, Nadou Louis, Evangeline Truitt, Hailey Peck, Ava Lamb, and Sophia Odato; as well as the five seniors who successfully presented in French: Meredith Grant, Noah Makowski, Abilene Adelman, Jefferson Voelker, and James Lynch.

In addition, Cocoro Asada, who will be a senior in September, successfully presented in Japanese, and plans to present again next year in French, thus working towards earning a dual Seal of Biliteracy when she graduates. If Corcoro is successful, it will be the first time a student has accomplished that particular honor at Onteora High School.



Onteora graduates who have earned the New York State Seal of Biliteracy pose for a group photo. They are flanked by Onteora High School Principal Lance Edelman (second row, far right), Word Languages Liaison Valerie Stewart (first row, far right), and World Language teacher Christi Nelsen-Epstein (first row, far left).

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