

HOMECOMING 2024:

Another Memorable Celebration of Athletics, Community, and School Spirit



The Ontario Varsity Girls Volleyball team faced off against Ellenville during Homecoming weekend and won!

Onteora athletes and spectators enjoyed another spectacular Homecoming celebration during the weekend of September 27 and 28!

After an exciting Pep Rally and Tailgate Party on Friday, the community was pumped up for a Saturday filled with food, fun, and games—and as always, Ontario delivered. Thanks to all the volunteers—including students, staff, the Ontario Booster Club, and community members—guests were treated to lively street fair-style festivities, featuring an extensive variety of international foods and treats, as well as plenty of Ontario swag! Several Board of Education members were on hand to meet and greet visitors, and to sign up those who are interested in receiving the Board's monthly email communication, "Board Briefs," and District administrators mingled with the bustling crowds.

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Students enjoy some of the many fun games at the Tailgate Party held before Homecoming.

Message from the Superintendent

Schools have been in session for a couple of months, and we have so much to celebrate! Our faculty, staff, and students at Bennett, Woodstock, and the Middle School have been thriving and are creating new friendships and traditions. I'm so proud to be a part of this District, which continues to create nurturing and supportive learning environments for our students.

September and October have passed in a blur of learning and fun activities. Our secondary students have been participating in sports and showing that we may be small, but we are mighty. We have been able to take advantage of the lovely fall weather for athletic events and field trips. In addition, Homecoming was one of the highlights of the fall, as always. It is wonderful to see students of all ages coming together to enjoy this celebration. I am also always so pleased to see our community gather on this day to support our students. We consistently post pictures and information about the events that take place District-wide on social media, so if you haven't already done so, please consider following us on Facebook and Instagram.

We continue to focus on encouraging consistent school attendance because we know that it is critical to the success of our students. We value our partnership with the families of our students in encouraging good attendance, although we understand that this is the time

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Bennett Celebrates the Fall Season



Students thoroughly enjoy “mummifying” their teachers at Bennett’s Fall Festival, which was held in October.

On October 25, Bennett Elementary School transformed into a ghoulish festival of fun!

This year’s Fall Festival offered a full menu of fun and spooky activities for partygoers to celebrate the season. With options ranging from “mummifying” teachers, hunting monsters, braving the “Haunted Hike” nature trail, and navigating a corn maze, there was something for everyone!

This year’s nature trail featured some new characters, including beautiful butterflies and assorted woodland creatures, dogs and cats in a haunted pet cemetery, beekeepers, and a very gregarious spider, who presided over a special spider web where students could hang up their fears. Also on hand was one of Onteora’s “very old students,” who had returned to the school with some friends, including some rather bony musicians and singers.

Inside Bennett, the hallways were adorned with plenty of Halloween decorations, most notably a remarkable display of “literacy pumpkins” that students in all grades had created based on their favorite book characters. The party continued that night with fun and games for the whole community, and many enjoyed a great night out on a beautiful evening—Onteora style!

Thank you to everyone who made this an unforgettable community event, including members of Bennett PTA; Bennett and Onteora staff; several retired teachers, parent, student, and community volunteers; and of course, the Buildings and Grounds Department.



Revelers at Bennett’s Fall Festival delight in the many surprises along the “Haunted Hike” nature trail.

Message from the Superintendent

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of year when illnesses tend to travel through a school community. If a child is unwell, they should, of course, stay home and recover. If you have concerns about attendance or if you encounter any challenges that affect your child’s attendance, please reach out to us so that we can work together to find solutions.

As we enter the season of inclement weather, please ensure that you are set up to receive calls or texts through our automated system, if that is how you would like to be notified of a school closing, delay, or early dismissal. You can be contacted with a call and/or a text. If you would like to sign up to receive calls or texts, or if you’d like to confirm how you are currently set up to receive notifications, please contact Sharon Wood at swood@onteora.k12.ny.us.

Please keep in mind that we will bring students into school whenever possible to provide instruction and to ensure that they are able to access school meals. This will sometimes result in an early dismissal, so that our buses are able to deliver students home before a later-afternoon or early-evening weather event. I understand this schedule is sometimes challenging for families, and I apologize for the inconvenience. Our priority is to provide students with all of the resources we have available to support them in every way that we can.

We are continuing to implement the Board resolution approved in May of 2023 and are working toward creating a unified central campus. Our first goal was to make the transitions in September of this year smooth and positive for our students. Now that these transitions have occurred, we are continuing to work toward a central campus. We will provide opportunities for community input this winter, and are excited to create a central campus that will provide wonderful learning spaces for our students. We will provide updates during Board meetings and through separate communications as we move through the year.

I hope that everyone has a warm and wonderful holiday season!

Victoria McLaren
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Classes from 1957 to 2024 Return to Oteora to Celebrate

This September, the Oteora Booster Club, in collaboration with the District and Class of 1974 reunion organizers, hosted an Alumni Tailgate Party and special celebration of the Class of 1974's 50th anniversary at Oteora High School.

The events were a great success—thanks, in part, to the student volunteers from the National Honor Society and Athletic Council, who helped with the organization of the festivities, as well as with the alumni tours.

More than 65 alumni returned to campus, representing classes from as early as 1957 to 2024, with attendees from the Class of 1974 comprising about half of the group. Many alumni shared positive thoughts and appreciation regarding how beautiful the facilities and grounds looked, and how engaging, informative, and fun the tour—which was led by District employee Amy Russell and student volunteers—was.



Oteora High School students (from left to right) Coco Asada, Sara Metawee, and Abby Elliott, as well as District employee Amy Russell, lead a tour of the High School during the Class of 1974's 50-year anniversary celebration.



Members of the Class of 1974 gather on the steps of Oteora High School during a celebration of their 50-year graduation anniversary.

The students went above and beyond, said Oteora Booster Club President Denise Alterio. "They tirelessly served food during the tailgate parties, helped to clean up at the end, and many even stayed longer than expected. They all represented Oteora in the most positive way!"

Thank you to the following student volunteers, who helped make this a wonderful, memorable event for our alumni: Olivia McHugh, Coco Asada, Abby Elliott, Sara Metawee, Alexia Melendez, and Val Albright!

Thanks are also due to the many Oteora staff, Booster Club members, community donors, and volunteers who generously donated their time and talents!

WOODSTOCK AND BENNETT ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS' GRADE 3 STUDENTS ENJOY A FALL DAY TOGETHER



Bennett Elementary School Grade 3 student Ryan Kothe reaches the top of the climbing wall at Frost Valley YMCA.

THIS FALL, GRADE 3 STUDENTS FROM BOTH BENNETT AND WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS took a fun and informative day trip to Frost Valley YMCA, an environmental education center, camp, and retreat destination in Claryville, New York. The students enjoyed the many activities that Frost Valley offers, including team-building games and a chance at the amazing climbing wall!

Sebastian Colevas enthused, "I loved seeing my friends from Bennett, playing the games, and climbing the rock wall!" Arlo Peltzman particularly enjoyed the games. "My favorite part was when we played 'Who Stole My Bird,'" she said. "One person stood with their back to the group, and another person would steal the bird. Then they would have to guess who took it when they turned around."

The climbing wall, which topped 40 feet, was also a big hit. William Lynch said, "It was super scary to climb the rock wall because I am scared of heights, but it was also really fun to climb with a harness!"

Ryan Kothe actually made it to the very top! "It felt very cool to be the only one to climb all of the way to the top of the tower. The view was amazing!" he said.

A Smooth Transition for The Middle School's Newest Students

Wondering how Grade 6 students are doing at their new digs at the Middle School? The answer is, they are doing great!

This September, Onteora Middle School began its first year as a Grade 6-8 school, and its new students were more than ready. “I could not have asked for a better opening,” said Principal James DiDonna. “It was a wonderful start to the school year, and it still continues to be fantastic!”

After the initial transition of negotiating locker combinations and finding their new classrooms, the sixth graders “acclimated perfectly,” Mr. DiDonna added. “They are fully a part of the building, part of the school, and part of the everyday.”

On October 7, members of the Board of Education stopped by the Middle School for a visit. They toured the Grade 6 classrooms, noting the versatility of the new furniture that easily allows the students to form both individual and group configurations. “It was great to see the upgrades to the building, including freshly painted classrooms, new furniture that promotes active learning, and an incredibly popular outdoor eating



The Middle School's newest students have been taking advantage of the many outdoor spaces available to them.

space,” said Board President Cindy Bishop. The positive atmosphere of the school—which comes from both the teachers and the sixth graders’ older peers—has been integral in making the transition smooth, said Mr. DiDonna. “Grade 6 teachers have been great at helping the students, not only with the day-to-day skills of locker-opening, navigation, and

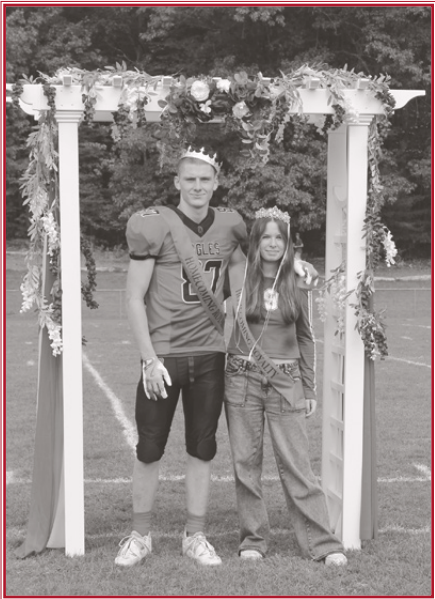
HOMEcoming 2024: Another Memorable Celebration of Athletics, Community, and School Spirit

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At noon, the Parade of Athletes officially began, and in the spotlight were all the fall athletic teams, including Varsity Boys Golf; Varsity Girls Swimming; Varsity Girls Tennis; Varsity Girls Soccer; Varsity Boys Soccer; Varsity Cross Country; Modified, Junior Varsity, and Varsity Volleyball; Varsity Field Hockey; Junior Varsity Boys Soccer; and Varsity Football. Teams paraded along the High School/Middle School track as their fans cheered in the grandstands.

In addition to the pomp and flair, Onteora’s athletes did what they do best—play their games, compete in their matches, and run their races! On Friday, teams including Girls Varsity Field Hockey, Girls Varsity Tennis, Girls Varsity Soccer, Girls Junior Varsity and Varsity Volleyball, and Boys Varsity Golf, all took to the fields, courts, and course. Saturday’s competitions included a Girls and Boys Varsity Cross Country meet, a Varsity Boys Soccer game, and the featured Varsity Football game.

At halftime, senior athletes and their families—and sometimes, friends and coaches—proudly posed for photos under a Homecoming arch, marking a long-standing tradition of celebrating a special moment in their lives—their last Homecoming!



The crowning highlight of the Homecoming Day festivities took place during halftime, when the Homecoming Court—Cole Matteson, Natalie Hastie, Griffin VanDreason, Rhylee Berhman, Keegan Burkhardt, LilyKate Brosnan, Joseph Reese, Abigail Zeh, Milo Turba, Grace Young, Yogi Johansen, and Eleanor Wyman—was introduced and Cole Matteson and Rhylee Berhman were officially pronounced “Homecoming Royalty.” It was great to see so many people, including Onteora alumni, come out to cheer for the teams and support our students!



Middle School Grade 6 students enjoy some walking time on the track during recess.



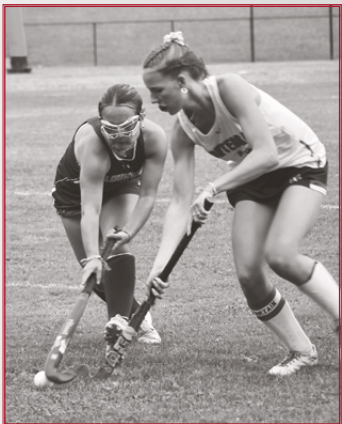
Grade 6 students at the newly-formed Middle School relax in the outdoor space during lunch time.

logging into their Chromebooks, but also with the executive functioning skills necessary for keeping themselves organized and on top of their homework,” he explained.

Family and Consumer Science teacher Karen Grimm and Health teacher Michael Rushford have also been working with students on such skills as

basic computer and keyboarding, communication and teamwork, and social and emotional learning.

Though the newest students spend much of their day in a wing dedicated to their grade level, during lunch and recess, many are enjoying getting some fresh air—utilizing the play areas, as well as the track—with students from all grade levels.



Woodstock Students Receive the Gift of Reading



Woodstock Elementary School teachers unveil a big surprise for students.

WOODSTOCK STUDENTS GOT A WONDERFUL SURPRISE ON THE AFTERNOON OF OCTOBER 18!

The whole school gathered in the auditorium, where suspenseful music was playing and teachers and several PTA members were waiting in front of a rather large, colorfully wrapped mystery.

Reading teachers Nicole Polacco and Andrew Vail emceed the event. "We have some big news!" said Mr. Vail. "We know you have all been wondering what has been sitting in the lobby by the fish tank, but before we show you, we have some questions for you!"

After inviting Grade 1 teacher Cassie Kothe and Grade 2 teacher Erika Parisian to help, Ms. Polacco taught the students a cool, new, sensory-friendly "silent cheer" (which involved waving their hands in the air to show support). The students loved it!

Ms. Polacco peppered the crowd with some fun, leading questions, such as "Do you like reading new books?" and "Have you ever gotten a book off the giveaway cart?" as well as some more grade-specific ones like "Have you ever come to one of our literacy nights when we read books and play reading games?" and



Woodstock Elementary School students give a "silent cheer."

"Did you enjoy the 'book tasting' we hosted during Read Across America Week?" After each question, the room was filled with waving arms, as the students signaled their approval.

Then came the big reveal. Ms. Polacco, Mr. Vail, Ms. Parisian, and Ms. Kothe began to tear the eye-catching paper, and guess what was inside? A book-vending machine! The students gasped and began to cheer—with only some of them remembering to do so silently. Can you blame them?

Next, members of the PTA, who were instrumental in bringing this new addition to Woodstock Elementary School, were brought to the front of the room, where they officially cut the ribbon. Teachers told the very eager students that each one of them would be able to choose a book from the machine on their birthday, and explained that—not to worry—all birthdays would be recognized by the end of the school year, whether they occurred before the machine arrived or during the summer months.

Grade 2 student Caden Nergelovic was one lucky student, as he was the first to be able to demonstrate how to use the vending machine to select a book because, you guessed it, it was actually his birthday!

This all was possible because Ms. Polacco and Ms. Parisian brought this idea to a PTA meeting last year. The PTA began fundraising efforts, with proceeds earmarked for the purchase of the book-vending machine. Local businesses like Ulster Savings Bank and The Golden Notebook donated both books and funding. The PTA also donated a special stamp so each book could be marked with a special slogan: "Woodstock Elementary: Peace, Love, and Learning."

It's truly amazing what a caring community can accomplish together. Happy reading, students!



Woodstock Elementary School students check out their new book-vending machine, which was revealed on October 18.

Board Corner

Your Voice is Important!

As we continue to move toward our goal of becoming a centralized campus by 2028, more opportunities to build on the discussions that took place last spring are planned, including three upcoming sessions specifically designed

for gathering community input on the design work underway. On December 3, participants will experience a First Draft Review and a Prioritization Exercise. On January 15, a Second Draft Review and a Community Discussion will take place. The final session is set for February 25, and includes a discussion of the Proposed Central Campus Design and the opportunity to engage in a Community Q & A.

These important discussions, along with similar sessions that are currently taking place with faculty, staff, and students, will help guide the overall design of the Capital Project proposal, which will be presented for a public vote on May 20.

The sessions will be facilitated by Sharon Lipovsky of Point Road Studios, and will be held at the Middle/High School from 6-8 PM. District architects, engineers, and administrators will also participate. Please consider joining us to share your thoughts!

The Board Wants to Meet You!

Please keep your eye out during future community events for our special Board of Education “tent,” where we will be waiting to meet you and discuss all things Onteora. Stop by to ask questions, sign up for our monthly “Board Briefs” e-newsletter, or simply say hello. We look forward to meeting you! For a schedule of all District events, visit www.onteora.k12.ny.us/calendar.

To read Board Briefs, visit the District website at www.onteora.k12.ny.us/boardbriefs.

NYS Rethinks Graduation Measures

During September and October, the New York State Department of Education’s Blue Ribbon Commission conducted a series of “Ambassador Forums” to provide the public with an opportunity to share thoughts about its proposed changes to graduation requirements. These new proposals, entitled “NY Inspires: A Plan to Transform Education in New York State” include multiple pathways for graduation that reflect a more holistic view of students and the evolving world. This may mean redefining credits, and possibly moving to one single type of diploma.

Several Board trustees and District administrators attended this event held at Ulster BOCES on October 10. Parents, teachers, Ulster BOCES and District administrators, as well as school board trustees from across the region were given the opportunity

to learn, ask questions, collaborate with neighboring Ulster County teams, and respond virtually with teams across New York State. We appreciate this

opportunity to participate in this critical conversation and will stay involved as the situation develops. For more information, visit www.nysed.gov/grad-measures.

Another Amazing Homecoming Celebration

It was so heartening to see so many members of the Onteora community come together to pull off another memorable Homecoming Weekend! Countless volunteers—staff, coaches, the Athletic Department, the Onteora Booster Club, the Buildings and Grounds department, PTA members, students (both current and graduates), and local business owners donated

their valuable time and efforts. It truly takes a village, and our “big village” really came through for our young people. Onteora is fortunate to have so many supportive and generous community and business partners. Thank you to all who contributed to this extraordinary event!

Board Members Sharpen Their Skills

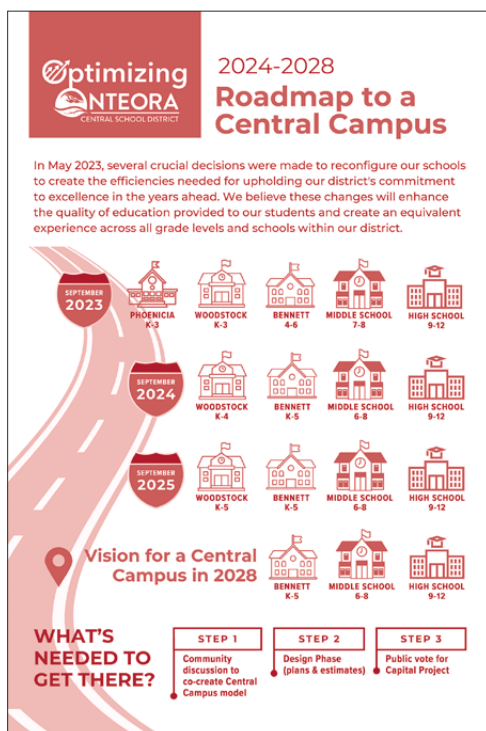
Several BOE members volunteered to attend the three-day New York State School Boards Association’s 2024 Annual Convention & Education Expo this October. The training was designed to help attendees become as effective as they can be in their roles as Board members. This includes legal responsibilities and how to engage civically and advocate for legislative action that best benefits our students.

This year’s expo also included the latest programming on school safety, expanded student mental health initiatives, EV buses, preparing renovations for schools, digital learning, new measures of student achievement, and transparent fiscal oversight.

Congratulations Are Due!

Christina Signore, PTA member and Onteora Booster Club treasurer is the recipient of the Ulster County School Boards Association’s Distinguished Friends of Education Award!

Bennett Elementary Reading Specialists Kristina Countryman, Amanda Kovac, and Julie McCarthy recently gave a presentation at the New York State Reading Association (NYSRA)’s conference in Albany entitled, “Forward Together: New Paths in Literacy Learning and Teaching.” In addition, Ms. Kovac received the NYSRA 2023-2024 Literature Based MiniGrant for her extraordinary not-for-profit website www.joycabulary.com, where she offers free vocabulary lessons and tips for both educators and caregivers.



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SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

Victoria McLaren

NEWSLETTER EDITING & DESIGN

Ulster BOCES Community Relations

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To Postal Customer

Board Corner CONTINUED FROM PAGE 7

Onteora High School teacher Denise Maltese recently published an article in the anthology, “The Legacy of James Moffett: His Shaping Influence on Writing Studies, English Education, and the Teaching of English.”

It is wonderful to see members of our staff and community shine so brightly!

The Holidays Are Drawing Near

It is that time of the year again, and we wish everyone a happy and healthy holiday season! Don’t miss our exciting lineup of Winter Concerts:

- Middle School: December 4 at 7 PM
- High School: December 12 at 7 PM
- Bennett Elementary School Grade 5: December 18 at 6:30 PM

KIDSTOCK IS ONCE AGAIN A BIG HIT!

THIS YEAR’S FALL LINEUP OF CLASSES includes painting, making art with felt materials, “cosmic art,” yoga, song-writing, creative movement, meditation, creating with LEGO bricks, kickball, snack-making, and even a “Junior Woodstock Warriors” obstacle course.

There is truly something for everyone!

Woodstock Elementary students enjoy a “Creative Movement” class during the Kidstock after-school program.



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



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	Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction Stephanie Laffin 845-657-8851	Interim Director of Physical Education, Athletics, and Health Jonnah O'Donnell... 845-657-2373 x2113	MIDDLE SCHOOL 845-657-2373 Principal, James DiDonna
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