ONTEORA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

BUDGET 2025

Proposed 2025-2026 School Budget is Below Tax Levy Limit:

Budget Prioritizes Students, Fiscal Stability, and the Future with Proposition 2

For the 2025-2026 school year, the Onteora Board of Education is proposing a budget of $63,588,660, reflecting a 2.03% increase over the current year. The corresponding tax levy increase to support the proposal is 2.0% and remains below New York State's allowable levy increase of 2.99%, requiring a simple majority voter approval. This marks the 14th consecutive year that the Board has presented a budget that is at or below the State's tax cap: a testament to the District's consistent fiscal planning and commitment to the community's taxpayers.

"We remain deeply committed to providing comprehensive support—both academic and emotional," says Superintendent Victoria McLaren. "The proposed budget prioritizes students and reflects prudent long-term planning, keeping a smart use of fund balance, and a careful eye toward future fiscal challenges."

Prioritizes Programs & Services for Students

The proposed budget represents the culmination of a year-long, data-driven planning process and is anchored by a strong "student-first" philosophy. This approach ensures that all budget requests connected to teaching and learning, which are submitted on a building-by-building basis (such as field trips, guest speakers, and specialized programs), have been funded.

Priorities such as student mental health, after-school homework help, and extracurriculars continue to be funded, and the process for our Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) and the implementation of the Branching Minds MTSS data system to support student growth are also supported. The successful Summer Skills Academy will also once again be offered.

CONTINUED ON PAGE 4

Read About the Bennett Elementary School Literacy Fair on Page 4

VOTE MAY 20 2 PM-9 PM

Budget Highlights

- ★ Continues to support all existing educational programs and services for students, including mental health supports, after-school homework help, extracurriculars, and the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) process and MTSS new data system
- ★ Restores the Summer Skills Academy
- ★ Enhances student safety through two School Resource Officers
- ★ Supports the Ulster BOCES Career & Technical Center relocation to the iPark 87 facility to provide students with career training opportunities in more than two dozen fields
- ★ Replaces an aged, high-mileage small school bus
- ★ Purchases a tractor, scissor lift, and utility terrain vehicle to maintain grounds
- ★ Leverages fund balance and savings to present a tax levy increase below the NYS tax cap level for the 14th year in a row

ONTEORA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT
4166 Route 28 • Boiceville, New York 12412
Phone: 845-657-6383 • www.onteora.k12.ny.us

NON-PROFIT ORG
US POSTAGE
PAID
NEWBURGH, NY 12550
PERMIT #145

MAN-WSS

To Postal Customer

Optimizing ONTEORA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

Please see insert for Capital Project Information

BOARD OF EDUCATION
Cindy Bishop, President
Meghann Reimondo, Vice President
Sarah Hemingway-Lynch, Trustee
Clark Goodrich, Trustee
Emily Mitchell-Marell, Trustee
Caroline Jerome, Trustee
Rick Knutsen, Trustee

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS
Victoria McLaren

NEWSLETTER EDITING & DESIGN
Ulster BOCES Community Relations

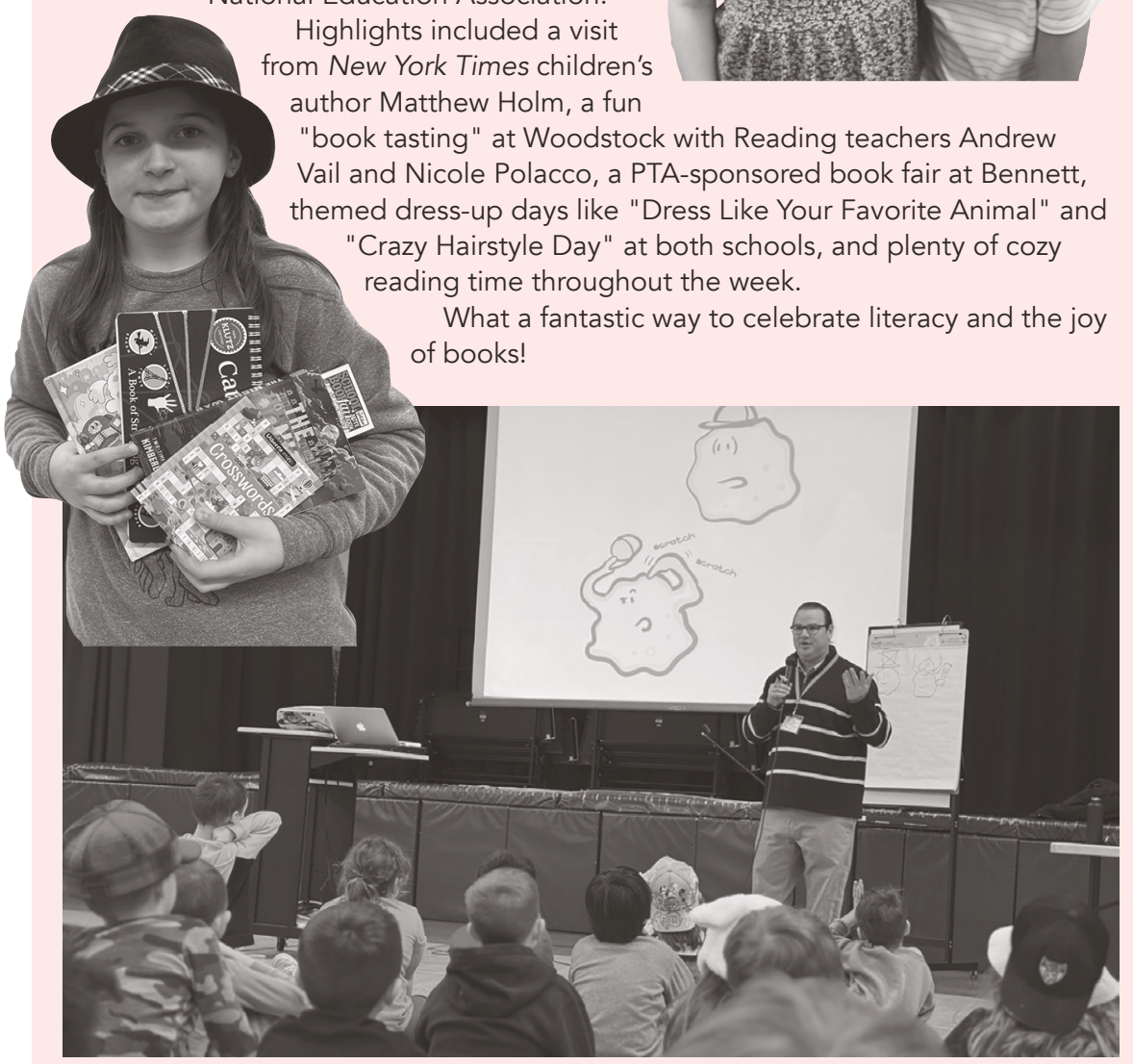
This publication was printed on recycled paper

CELEBRATING READ ACROSS AMERICA WEEK WITH FUN AND BOOKS!

BENNETT AND WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOLS were buzzing with reading excitement from March 3-7 as students and staff embraced Read Across America Week, a nationwide celebration sponsored by the National Education Association.

Highlights included a visit from *New York Times* children's author Matthew Holm, a fun "book tasting" at Woodstock with Reading teachers Andrew Vail and Nicole Polacco, a PTA-sponsored book fair at Bennett, themed dress-up days like "Dress Like Your Favorite Animal" and "Crazy Hairstyle Day" at both schools, and plenty of cozy reading time throughout the week.

What a fantastic way to celebrate literacy and the joy of books!



Onteora Welcomes School Resource Officer at Woodstock Elementary School

Deputy and SRO Corey Halwick

Please welcome Deputy Corey Halwick, Woodstock Elementary School's new School Resource Officer (SRO)! Deputy Halwick assumed his new post on February 10.

Deputy Halwick is no stranger to our area. He grew up locally, in the Town of Ulster, and began a career in law enforcement in 2005 when he was hired by the Ulster County Sheriff's Office as a part-time deputy. In 2010, he officially became a part of the Town of Woodstock community—first as a part-time police officer, and then in 2013, as a full-time police officer.

Deputy Halwick transferred to the Sheriff's Office in 2025. He has many talents and skills. Currently, he is assigned to the Ulster County Emergency Response Team (UCERT), as well as the Marine Unit and the In-Water Rescue Team (IWRT) as a boat operator, rescue diver, and swift water technician.

When he is not busy in law enforcement, Deputy Halwick enjoys spending time with his family and working on home improvement projects. "I am excited about my new role as an SRO," he said. "I look forward to being able to establish a positive relationship between the students and the law enforcement community."

Grade 1 student Danny Simco Lefferts checks that his pumpkin seed is planted just right.

GROWING KNOWLEDGE:
First Graders Celebrate Agricultural Literacy Week

On March 18, Grade 1 students at Bennett Elementary School celebrated Agricultural Literacy Week with a special visit from a Cornell Cooperative Extension volunteer.

The young learners in Alissa Schupp's and Rachel Wood's classes enjoyed a reading and a lively discussion of *The Pie That Molly Grew* by Sue Heavenrich, learning how a tiny seed can transform into a pumpkin—just like the one that Molly bakes into a pie to share!

During the course of their discussion, the students explored topics ranging from gardening, to farming, to the vital role played by pollinating bees, and connecting these topics to the food that they eat. They eagerly shared their personal experiences with gardening and local farms, making predictions about which crops will be ready by fall.

The best part of the lesson? Each student received a pumpkin seed to nurture over the coming months—gaining hands-on experience in plant growth, responsibility, and sustainability.

Plus, it was a whole lot of fun!

Grade 1 students at Bennett Elementary School listen to a story read by a volunteer from Cornell Cooperative Extension during Agricultural Literacy Week.

Grade 1 students Lily Franceschina (left) and Leo Slovensky (right) place their pumpkin seeds where they can get sunlight.

Message from the Superintendent

Dear Onteora Community Members,

This year has been full of community partnership and collaboration in support of creating the future of Onteora and the development of a Capital Project that will be on the ballot as Proposition 2. I have been inspired by the participation of so many members of our community in this process. We have come together many times and dreamed together, shared ideas, engaged in the design process, and created a Central Campus vision that provides incredible opportunities for our students. We have held closely to our priorities of "Students First, Staff Forward, Fiscally Responsible, With Community" throughout this process.

I look forward to continuing this work after the vote and bringing this community vision to life for our students. We are committed to continuing the conversation as we move through this transformative process and keeping our community apprised of our progress. We will engage with faculty, staff, and students during the design phase and share the schedule of work so that everyone is up to date on our progress.

We are excited to see the capital improvements that were previously approved by our community come to life this summer. Our Middle School gymnasium is getting a much-needed renovation, and we are adding a security vestibule to the entrance of the Middle/High School. The students will be able to appreciate a permanent pavilion behind the cafeteria at the Middle/High School for lunch outside.

Thankfully, this budget season has been smoother than last year. Although we are bracing for future cuts to our State funding, our Foundation Aid remained in place this year, so we have been able to continue with all programs for our students. We also continue to fund the second SRO in our budget, who was added during this school year. Budget presentations can be reviewed online at www.onteora.k12.ny.us/budget.

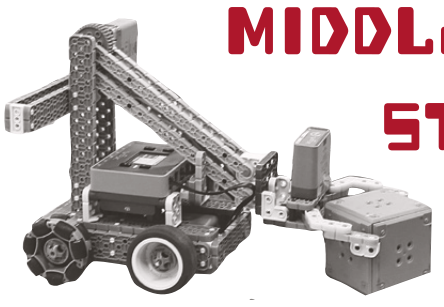
We have two Board of Education seats on the ballot this year, and three candidates. Our Board Trustees are elected officials who volunteer countless hours in service to our school community. We are grateful for each individual willing to step into this role and support our district.

We are coming to the end of the year and all of the milestones and celebrations this entails. We are incredibly proud of our students and all they have accomplished over the past year. I look forward to seeing all of their families at our end-of-year events. I encourage everyone to attend our High School graduation. It is the culmination of everything our students have achieved with the support of this generous and amazing community.

Please ensure that you vote on May 20th at either Bennett Elementary or Woodstock Elementary from 2 PM to 9 PM. Alternatively, you can obtain a ballot early and mail it in. Applications for early mail ballots can also be found on our webpage. Thank you for your support of our district.

Victoria McLaren

SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS



MIDDLE SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY STUDENTS DESIGN, BUILD, TEST, AND MORE

Grade 8 students in Doug Sanders' Technology class at Onteora Middle School have been busy acquiring vital STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) skills!

Students learned and utilized SolidWorks, an industry-standard CAD (computer-aided design) program that is used by companies around the world, to design and build a bridge truss. Then, in a winning combination of hands-on learning and real-world skills development, they tested their individual builds.

Middle/High School Technology teacher Doug Sanders helps students Kenny Rogers (left) and Austin Martin (right) with a robotics project.

Each student slowly added sand to a bucket, which measured the amount of force applied to the roadbed of their bridge. Students recorded the weight of the sand just before the bridge broke, and thus, were able to evaluate the total efficiency of their structure.

For another project, students used block programming—which uses graphical blocks that represent standard coding concepts—to program a robot to perform specific functions on an obstacle course-type track. They programmed the robots to move forward, reverse, turn, go specific distances, and even utilize a claw feature to pick only red blocks up and move them.

"Programming can be a little tedious," said student Byron Reznick. "But when you get it right, it is also very fun!"

Oliver Haas (right) and CJ Gizzi (left) attempt to stack blocks manually using a remote control before programming the robot to stack them autonomously.

Mr. Sanders utilizes the strategy of differentiation in his class to allow for students to work at their own pace, ask as many questions as they would like, or even surpass the basic requirements of the assignments with further challenges. As a result, students in his class are always engaged.

"Onteora students are not strangers to robotics and other STEM activities," he explained. "As early as elementary school, they begin using simpler kits to learn programming, and then take on more advanced and complex programming as they go along."

Congratulations to the High School's Harvard Model Congress team!

Oskar Baron

Twenty Onteora High School students traveled to Boston this winter to participate in the Harvard Model Congress, where they took on the roles of individual senators and representatives, as well as members of various executive branch organizations.

During their time there, the students wrote, debated, and voted on bills as members of the House Foreign Relations Committee; the House Select Committee on Intelligence; the House Space, Science and Technology Committee; the House Judiciary Committee; the Senate Commerce, Science, and Transportation (CST) Committee; and the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee.

Other students represented South Korea (the Republic of Korea) in the G-20 intergovernmental forum, and Latvia and Algeria in the United States Agency for International Development. Two of our delegates argued and judged cases in the Supreme Court, and several others worked in the West Wing.

Special recognition goes to Onteora junior Oskar Baron, who won a "Best Delegate" gavel for his role on the Senate CST Committee, which focused on the topics of internet privacy, data regulation, generative AI (artificial intelligence), and misinformation.

Proposed 2025-2026 School Budget is Below Tax Levy Limit:

Budget Prioritizes Students, Fiscal Stability, and the Future with Proposition 2

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1

Enhances School Safety

Ensuring our schools are safe places for students and staff is a top priority. This current school year, a second School Resource Officer (SRO) was added to the budget to provide dedicated support at both the Boiceville and Woodstock Elementary School campuses. The proposed budget continues to support both SRO positions, ensuring both campuses have the benefits of having on-site safety support in the event of an emergency.

Supports a New Career & Technical Education Center for our High School Students

The budget supports Onteora's share of the cost of building and relocating the Ulster BOCES Career & Technical Center to a state-of-the-art workforce training facility at the iPark 87 complex (former IBM) in Lake Katrine. The new facility is anticipated to open to students in September 2025. Our High School juniors and seniors are able to enroll in half-day career training programs in more than two dozen career areas.

Provides Vehicles & Tools for School Operations

The 2025–2026 proposed budget reflects thoughtful spending in other areas as well. It includes $225,000 for equipment purchases that will directly support District operations. This includes a new tractor, scissor lift, and utility terrain vehicle to assist with groundskeeping and maintenance needs. It also includes the replacement of a small, aging, high-mileage school bus—ensuring that the District's transportation fleet remains safe and cost-effective to operate.

Anticipates Decreases in State & Federal Funding

In terms of revenue, Onteora is expected to receive only the minimum 2.0% increase in Foundation Aid from New York State, and fully anticipates a greater loss in State support next year as changes to the State Aid formula are rolled out. While less reliant on Federal funding, the District is also monitoring changes on the Federal level. As a result, the District is approaching the future with deliberate planning. The future loss of State Aid has become an important factor in preparing for a transition to a centralized campus structure—a move that aims to reduce costs while strengthening educational opportunities for all students (see Capital Project information on the insert).

Closes Budget Gap with Reductions and Fund Balance

Strategic cost reductions are also embedded in the budget. Three positions are being eliminated through retirement attrition. There are also program realignments—such as elimination of a BOCES program that no longer aligns with student needs, and cost savings in the school lunch program—made possible by staffing changes. These decisions allow the District to reduce expenses without impacting classroom instruction or staff morale.

After applying projected revenues and reductions, a $2,518,408 budget gap remained. Fund balance was used to close this gap without cutting programs or further increasing the tax levy.

"Another outcome of this careful budgeting process is a reduced reliance on the District's fund balance compared to previous years, which reflects progress toward greater long-term sustainability, even in the face of rising costs and an ever-shifting financial landscape," says Assistant Superintendent for Business Monica LaClair.

What is a Contingency Budget?

If Onteora's proposed budget fails, the District would have the option of re-submitting the same budget, presenting a different budget, or going to a contingency budget. A second budget vote would be held on June 17, 2025, a date established by New York State.

If a budget is defeated a second time, then the District would be required to adopt a contingency budget. Under a contingency budget, the 2025-2026 tax levy would remain at the same level as the 2024-2025 school year. This would require a reduction in the budget of a total of $968,682. By law, the District would not be permitted to purchase any equipment and would also need to eliminate free community use of facilities.

Please Vote

The community is encouraged to participate in the school budget vote and election of Board of Education members on Tuesday, May 20, 2025, from 2-9 PM. Qualified voters may vote in person at either Bennett or Woodstock Elementary School, or may vote by absentee or early mail ballot. Information about applying for and receiving absentee or early mail ballots is available on the District's website.

Bennett Elementary Holds First Literacy Fair

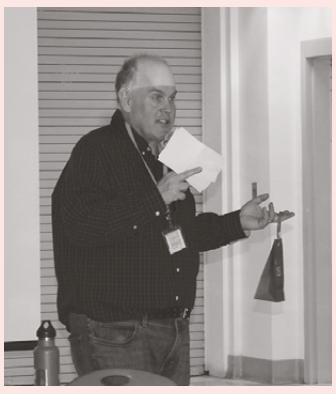
THE FIRST ANNUAL BENNETT ELEMENTARY LITERACY FAIR, held on March 6, was a huge success, with about 50 students, and many families, in attendance for the evening.

Students were first welcomed with a free book of their choice, generously donated by the PTA. Students and families were then able to attend a book fair, visit the Phoenicia Public Library table—and since math was the theme of the evening—go to the math "measuring station" and participate in a math-themed scavenger hunt.

Students and families then traveled to classrooms to listen to math-based interactive book read-alouds, read by teachers, and create a book-inspired craft to take home. The evening ended with delicious hot cocoa and cookies, donated by the PTA and the Phoenicia Diner. Principal Gabriel Buono led a spirited game of Bingo, during which 30 "book bundles" and game prizes were given away.

It was a memorable event promoting lifelong literacy!

Middle/High School Hosts Trivia Bowl



Board Trustee Rick Knutsen emcees at the Trivia Bowl.

Which came first—the chicken nugget or the Egg McMuffin? What four characters are named the most frequently in the Harry Potter series—besides Harry?

These questions, and so many more, challenged the teams at the Middle/High School's first-ever Trivia Bowl, held on March 5. The event, which had an impressive showing of students and teachers interested in testing their knowledge by playing this fun game, was sponsored by the Onteora Booster Club, and emceed by Board trustee—and former "Jeopardy!" contestant—Rick Knutsen!

Teams tackled such categories as "Trivia Potpourri," "Where Have I Seen That?" (which involved identifying some very close-up photos of locations around our region), "The Marvel Cinematic Universe," and "Six Truths and a Lie," featuring facts and lies from Onteora teachers. Thank you to all who made this event possible!

High School Social Studies teacher David Nelsen-Epstein and his teammates ponder one of the questions at the Trivia Bowl.

TAX INFORMATION

What is the Tax Levy?

The tax levy is the total amount of taxes a school district raises to help fund its budget, after accounting for all other revenue resources. The tax levy is the basis for determining the tax rates for each municipality within a school district. Tax rates are impacted by the changes in town assessments and state equalization rates, and are not determined by the school district. The Board of Education has adopted a budget that utilizes a 2 percent increase in the tax levy, which is $479,171 below the allowable increase of the tax cap calculation.

Our maximum allowable tax levy for 2025-2026 came in at $49,881,971. We are proposing a tax levy of $49,402,800, so we will be collecting $479,171 less than the maximum we are allowed, or almost 1% less.

Since the tax levy is below the State Tax Cap, why do I have to vote?

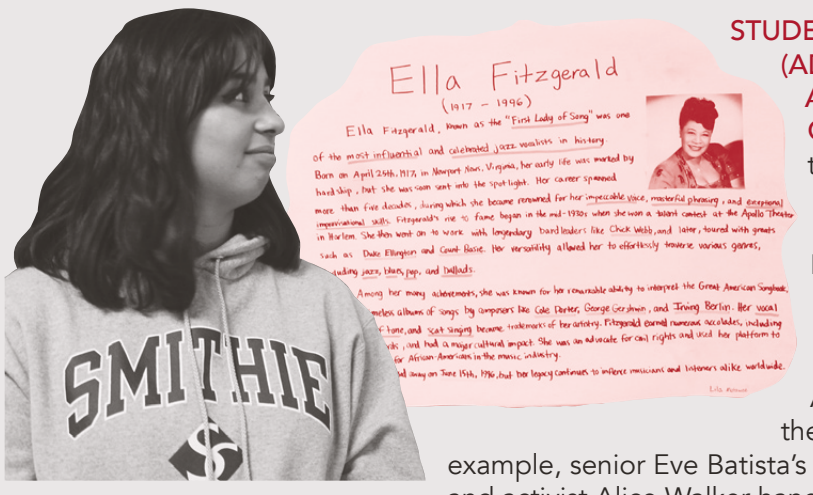
Even though the District's proposed tax levy increase is less than the allowable calculation under the New York State Tax Levy Limit (tax cap) parameters, voter approval is still needed. Under the 2012 legislation, commonly called the Two Percent Tax Cap law, if the proposed budget is defeated two times, the District would have to make budget reductions to reach a zero percent tax levy increase. In addition to requiring the elimination of all equipment purchases ($225,023), an additional $743,659 of reductions to non-mandated programs would be necessary to reach this level. In addition, by law, fees would have to be charged for facilities use. Under a contingency budget, the Property Tax Rebate is also discontinued.

Register for September 2025 Kindergarten Now!

The District's online registration system for Kindergarten is now open for September 2025. Visit www.onteora.k12.ny.us/registration. Please be sure to choose the 2025-2026 school year.

Current Universal Pre-Kindergarten parents will be mailed information and do not need to complete the online form again. Once your child is completely registered, you will be contacted with an appointment for Kindergarten screening. Screening will take place during the week of June 2, 2025. For questions about Kindergarten registration, please contact Sharon Wood, Onteora's District Registrar, at 845-657-6383, ext. 1023, or swood@onteora.k12.ny.us.

African American Studies Students Bring History to Life



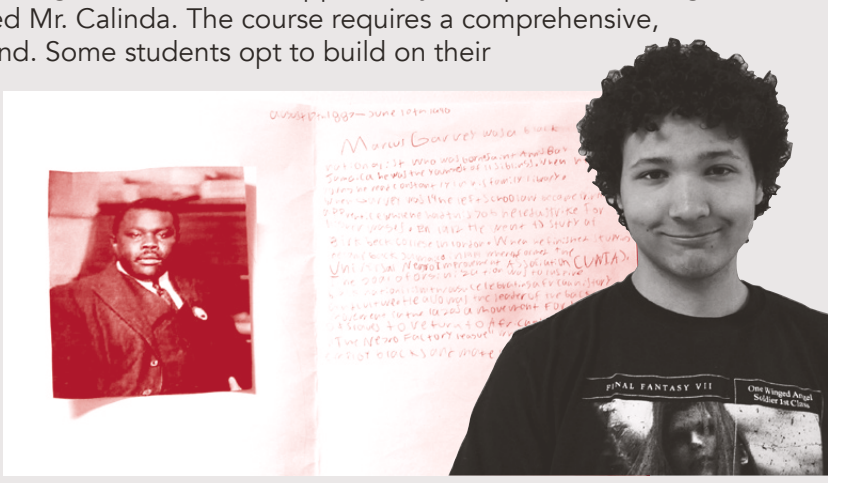
Lila Metawee shows the poster of her research on the American singer Ella Fitzgerald.

STUDENTS IN JASON CALINDA'S AP (ADVANCED PLACEMENT) AFRICAN AMERICAN STUDIES CLASS AT ONTEORA HIGH SCHOOL decorated the hallways with their historical marker projects in February—an opportune time to celebrate Black History Month!

Each student conducted in-depth research and created a poster presentation on two prominent African American figures, placing their work near relevant classrooms. For example, senior Eve Batista's beautiful poster display on the writer and activist Alice Walker hangs near an English classroom, and senior Lila Metawee's work on singer Ella Fitzgerald hangs near the music rooms and auditorium.

The course, based on a curriculum designed by scholars assembled by the College Board, is open to students in Grades 10-12. Upon successfully completing the course and achieving a score of 3 or higher on the AP exam in May, students can potentially earn college credits or the opportunity to skip foundational-level classes during their college years.

"The work is challenging, and the class gives students the opportunity to experience the rigors of a real college-level course," explained Mr. Calinda. The course requires a comprehensive, thesis-based research project by year-end. Some students opt to build on their previous research for this assignment. Junior Amanuel Shim, for example, is using his research on American rapper and hip-hop artist Brendan McCarty as a springboard to explore the issues of violence and racism in the rap industry.



Amanuel Shim shows off the poster based on his research on rapper Brendan McCarty.

Senior Eleanor Wyman chose to research activist, abolitionist, and local historical figure Sojourner Truth. "Her life story is extremely powerful and should be an essential story for Americans to learn about, especially New Yorkers," said Eleanor. "After she escaped slavery, she spent her life devoted to fighting systemic racism and the institution of slavery."

Eleanor explained how Sojourner Truth challenged white feminism when she delivered her famous *Ain't I a Woman?* speech at the Women's Rights Convention in Akron, Ohio, on May 29, 1851. "Her words created a better, more equal foundation for the movement," she said.

Jaelyn Ostling, Grade 12, chose the historical figure Claudette Colvin, who was a pioneer during the 1950s Civil Rights Movement. "Not many know that she was actually the first person to refuse to give up their seat on a segregated bus, nine months before Rosa Parks did," Jaelyn said. "Claudette inspired people to fight for their rights. If she had not done that, I feel like people would still have been afraid," she added.

Lily McNamara, Grade 12, chose to focus her studies on American rapper and singer-songwriter Lauryn Hill. "Most of the people we get to study aren't as prevalent in current pop culture," Lily explained. "I wanted to focus on someone who is still a household name in the R&B world, and Lauryn Hill made history by becoming the first African American woman to win a Grammy in the R&B category."

Scarlett Andretta, Grade 12, chose to focus her research on the American writer and Presidential Medal of Freedom winner Maya Angelou. Scarlett explained how Angelou, the author of the novel *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, has broken barriers and challenged societal norms. The author, she added, suffered hardship and abuse from authority figures in her childhood, especially her stepfather. Nevertheless, Scarlett said, "Her life is a remarkable example of someone who faced adversity, yet was able to turn her challenges into an emboldening force." In her poster, Scarlett discusses how the novel, though controversial, has helped many other survivors of abuse feel empowered enough to tell their own stories.

Eve Batista displays her research poster on Alice Walker, an activist and an award-winning writer.

ONTEORA 2025-2026 PROPOSED BUDGET

WHAT YOU WILL SEE ON THE BALLOT

2025-2026 BUDGET PROPOSITION #1

BE IT RESOLVED that the Onteora Central School District Board of Education be and is hereby authorized to expend the sums set forth under the various headings which are voted upon in gross and not in detail in the total amount of $63,588,660 (which includes $20,000 to support public library) for the year commencing July 1, 2025 and ending June 30, 2026, and the Board is authorized to levy and collect the necessary tax thereof on the taxable property of the District.

CAPITAL PROJECT PROPOSITION #2

That the Board of Education of Onteora Central School District, in the Counties of Ulster and Greene, New York (the "District"), is hereby authorized to construct improvements and alterations to Bennett Elementary School and the Middle School/ High School and to construct site, athletic and recreational improvements; and to expend therefor an amount not to exceed the estimated total cost of $70,500,000; (b) that the amounts of $10,000,000 from the District's "2023 Capital Reserve Fund", approved by the voters of the District on May 16, 2023, and $5,000,000 available from current funds of the District are each hereby authorized to be expended to pay a portion of said total cost, and such expenditures are hereby approved; and (c) that a tax is hereby voted in an aggregate amount of not to exceed $55,500,000 to finance the balance of such total cost, such tax to be levied and collected in installments in such years and in such amounts as shall be determined by said Board of Education; and that in anticipation of said tax, bonds of the District are hereby authorized to be issued in the aggregate principal amount of not to exceed $55,500,000 and a tax is hereby voted to pay the interest on said bonds as the same shall become due and payable.

BOARD CANDIDATES: (VOTE FOR ANY TWO)

- Daniel Aliberte
- Jenny Jared
- Rory Smith

ANNUAL BUDGET VOTE
AND ELECTION OF TRUSTEES

VOTE

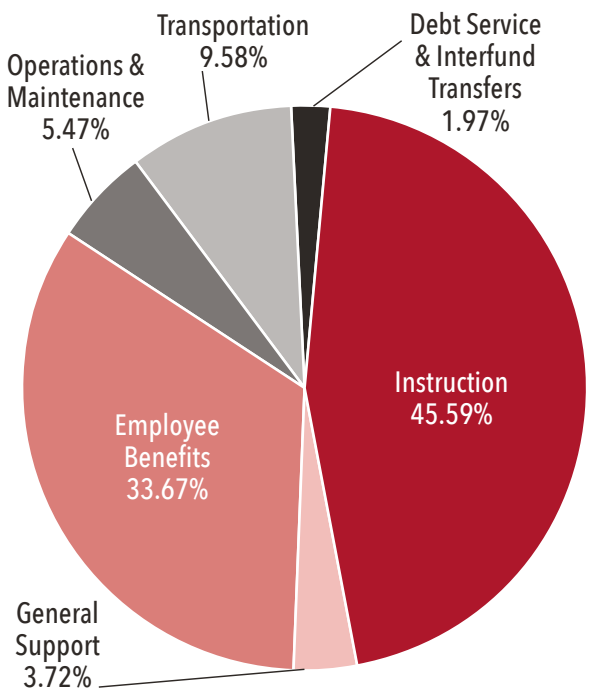
Tuesday, May 20, 2025
from 2 PM-9 PM

Qualified voters may vote at at Woodstock & Bennett Elementary Schools.

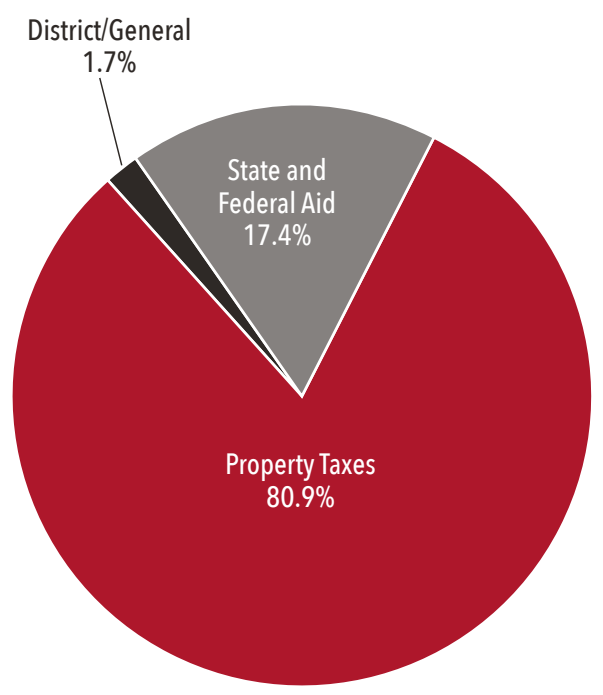
2025-2026 Budget Summary

	Administrative	Program	Capital
Instruction	$2,002,132	$26,985,565	$0
General Support	$2,131,714	$0	$234,998
Employee Benefits	$2,362,022	$17,221,133	$1,829,113
Operations & Maintenance	$0	$150,000	$3,329,412
Transportation	$0	$5,988,946	$105,023
Debt Service & Interfund Transfers	$0	$435,000	$813,602
TOTAL	$6,495,868	$50,780,644	$6,312,148
Percentage of Budget	10.2%	79.9%	9.9%

Proposed Budget by Expense



Budgeted Revenues



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS ABOUT VOTING

Am I Eligible to Vote?

To be eligible to vote, you must meet the following criteria: be at least 18 years of age; be a U.S. citizen; be a resident of the Onteora Central School District for at least 30 days prior to the vote; not be prohibited from voting under Section 5-106 of the Election Law (e.g., individuals adjudged to be mentally incompetent)

Absentee & Early Mail Ballot Process

A new voter law in New York now allows eligible voters to apply for, receive, and cast an Early Mail Ballot ahead of the annual budget vote and board election. Absentee Ballots are still available. The process for obtaining either type of ballot is the same:

To obtain an Absentee or Early Mail Ballot, an eligible voter must first complete an application. Applications can be: downloaded from the District's website, picked up in person, or requested by mailing a letter to the District Clerk.

Note: The "Application for Absentee Ballot" requires a qualifying reason.

Submit completed applications to the District Clerk in Central Administration:

In person: Monday through Friday, 8 AM-4 PM at 4166 State Route 28, Boiceville, NY
By email: Send a scanned copy to districtclerk@onteora.k12.ny.us
By mail: Onteora Central School District, District Clerk, PO Box 300, Boiceville, NY 12412

Deadlines:

- If you want your ballot **mailed to you**, your application must be received by **May 13, 2025**
- If you plan to **pick up your ballot in person**, your application must be received by **May 19, 2025**
- **Completed ballots** must be received by the District Clerk no later than **5 PM on Tuesday, May 20, 2025**

For voting questions or to request special arrangements, call 845-657-6383, ext. 1030.

Download applications at: www.onteora.k12.ny.us/mailballot
www.onteora.k12.ny.us/absenteeballot

Where are Copies of the Proposed Budget Available?

Copies are available for review at the following locations:

- High School/Middle School Offices
- Bennett Elementary School
- Woodstock Elementary School
- The Business Office at Central Administration
- Public Libraries within the District
- The District Website, www.onteora.k12.ny.us

ONTEORA 2025-2026 PROPOSED BUDGET

Board of Education Candidates

(in the order they will appear on the ballot)

Three candidates are seeking election for two available seats. Both members will serve three (3) year terms commencing July 1, 2025 and running through June 30, 2028.

Daniel Aliberte, PARALEGAL AT LYG LAW FIRM

Lives in West Hurley
Returned to the District 3 years ago

Daniel Aliberte is a Class of 2000 graduate of Onteora High School and earned a Bachelor of Science from SUNY Oneonta. He grew up in Onteora but left the area after graduation. He returned to the area three years ago and currently has one child who attends Woodstock Elementary School. He serves as an assistant coach for a local little league.

Jenny Jared, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD AND CO-FOUNDER OF THE COMMUNITY SERVICE NON-PROFIT UNITED WE OM

Lives in Hurley
Resident of District for 5 years

Jenny Jared has two children in the Onteora School District, one at Bennett Elementary School and one at Onteora Middle School. She holds a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Carnegie Mellon University. Jenny has been involved with the PTA and the Onteora Booster Club. She has been a part of the Woodstock Elementary School PTA, and was the president of Bennett Elementary School PTA from 2021-2024. She is currently a parent representative on the District Safety Committee, and is part of the Onteora Booster Club Leadership. She also served on a building-level Ad Hoc Committee in 2022, and on a Middle/High School Hiring Committee in 2024. In 2023, Jenny was the recipient of the Community Member Service Award, presented by the Onteora Teachers Association.

Rory Smith, WATERSHED MAINTAINER WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION (DEP)

Lives in the Town of Olive
Resident of District for 23 years

Rory Smith has one child currently in the District, at Onteora High School, and another who graduated from Onteora High School in 2022. Rory served in the United States Army and received an Honorable Discharge. He served as a volunteer soccer coach for the Town of Olive for eight years, and as a member of the soccer board. Rory also worked for the Catskill Watershed Corporation, and before that, was self-employed as a carpenter for 20 years.

School Budget Notice

OVERALL BUDGET PROPOSAL	Budget Adopted for the 2024-2025 School Year	Budget Proposed for the 2025-2026 School Year	Contingency Budget for the 2025-2026 School Year *
Total Budgeted Amount, Not Including Separate Propositions	$62,325,500	$63,558,660	$62,589,978
Increase/Decrease for the 2025-2026 School Year		$1,233,160	$264,478
Percentage Increase/Decrease in Proposed Budget		1.98%	0.42%
Change in the Consumer Price Index		2.95%	
A. Proposed Levy to Support the Total Budgeted Amount	$48,434,118	$49,402,800	
B. Levy to Support Library Debt, if Applicable	$0	$0	
C. Levy for Non-Excludable Propositions, if Applicable **	$0	$0	
D. Total Tax Cap Reserve Amount Used to Reduce Current Year Levy	$0	$0	
E. Total Proposed School Year Tax Levy (A + B + C - D)	$48,434,118	$49,402,800	$968,682
F. Total Permissible Exclusions	$358,192	$428,433	
G. School Tax Levy Limit, Excluding Levy for Permissible Exclusions	$48,381,460	$49,453,538	
H. Total Proposed School Year Tax Levy, Excluding Levy to Support Library Debt and/or Permissible Exclusions (E – B – F + D)	$48,075,926	$48,974,367	
I. Difference: G – H (Negative Value Requires 60.0% Voter Approval – See Note Below Regarding Separate Propositions) **	$305,534	$479,171	
Administrative Component	$6,288,950	$6,495,686	$6,413,068
Program Component	$50,285,506	$50,780,644	$49,990,260
Capital Component	$5,751,044	$6,312,148	$6,186,650

* Provide a statement of assumptions made in projecting a contingency budget for the 2025-2026 school year, should the proposed budget be defeated pursuant to Section 2023 of the Education Law.

Should the proposed budget be defeated pursuant to Section 2023 of the Education Law, a Contingent budget would eliminate all equipment purchases ($225,023) from the budget. In addition, $743,659 would be eliminated from the budget.

*** List Separate Propositions that are not included in the Total Budgeted Amount: (Tax Levy associated with educational or transportation services propositions are not eligible for exclusion and may affect voter approval requirements)*

Description	Amount
Proposition 2 – Renovations and Reconstruction and addition to School District Facilities using $15,000,000 in cash reserves/cash and $55,500,000 in borrowing	$70,500,000

	Under the Budget Proposed for the 2025-2026 School Year
Estimated Basic STAR Exemption Savings [1]	$336

[1] The basic school tax relief (STAR) exemption is authorized by section 425 of the Real Property Tax Law.

The annual budget vote for the fiscal year 2025-2026 by the qualified voters of the Onteora Central School District, Ulster County, New York, will be held at Bennett and Woodstock schools in said district on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 between the hours of 2:00 pm and 9:00 pm, prevailing time in the Bennett and Woodstock Elementary schools, at which time the polls will be opened to vote by voting ballot or machine.

ONTEORA STAFF ENJOY DAY OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

WHILE OUR STUDENTS MAY HAVE ENJOYED A DAY OFF ON MARCH 12, our teachers, administrators, and staff were all busy learning and growing during a Superintendent's Conference Day!

Middle/High School staff began their day with an informative keynote presentation on Assessment with Cassandra Erkens from Solution Tree. Throughout the day, all schools hosted workshops with valuable learning opportunities, including "Multi-Tiered Systems of Support" with LaTisha Cole from Branching Minds; "Seen, Valued, and Heard: Using Universal Design for Learning (UDL) for Flexible Learning Environments" with Dr. Barbara Tischler Hastie from Ulster BOCES for teacher assistants and monitors; "Co-Teaching Strategies for Teachers," and more.

In addition, School Resource Officers Tom Sharon and Corey Halwick, along with Chris Blackwell from the Altaris Consulting Group, discussed safety scenarios with building-level safety teams.

Bennett Elementary School Safety Team

Celebrating Our Talented Musicians and Artists!

The 2025 Music & Arts Celebration, held on March 13th at the Middle/High School, was the perfect way to honor Music in Our Schools Month and Youth Art Month, while showcasing the creativity and dedication of our students.

Attendees enjoyed a museum-style art exhibition in the cafeteria, featuring student work from all grades, including pieces that were featured in "Future Voices 2025" at SUNY Ulster's Muroff-Kotler Gallery this spring.

In the gym, there were perfomances by the Bennett Orchestra, Chorus, and Band; the Middle/High School Theater Club; the Middle School Jam Band, Orchestra, Chorus, Band, and Jazz Ensemble; and the High School Orchestra, Concert Choir, Wind Ensemble, and Chamber Orchestra. Highlights included Toto's "Africa" by the Middle School Chorus, an "Eighties Flashback" medley by the High School Wind Ensemble, and a moving "Eleanor Rigby" by the High School Chamber Orchestra. The finale united Middle and High School Bands with the Onteora Color Guard for a high-energy performance of "Uptown Funk." As always, plenty of student musicians and singers were given opportunities to solo.

Many thanks to our amazing Music teachers Harvey Boyer, Brittany Carroll, Karen McKenna, Corinne Sorace, Erica Boyer, Josephine Catalano, and Marilyn Dizon, and our equally amazing Art teachers, Jennifer Wentland, Shelly Hamilton, Anita Sidler, Roberta Ziemba, and Danielle Payette. We're also deeply grateful to the Onteora Booster Club; the Facilities Department; our administration and Board of Education, including Rick Knutsen, our Board Trustee and keyboard accompaniment extraordinaire, and of course—YOU—our appreciative audience, whose support makes all of this possible!

LANGUAGE STUDENTS CELEBRATE WORLD LANGUAGES WEEK

ONCE AGAIN, THE HALLWAYS OF THE MIDDLE/HIGH SCHOOL were filled with beautifully illustrated posters, thanks to World Languages Week, which was celebrated at the school from March 3-7.

Continuing a longstanding Onteora tradition, World Language students in Grades 7-12 created colorful posters that showcased both their creativity and their language skills. Choosing from lists of Spanish proverbs and French tongue twisters, the students translated their chosen phrases into poster form and then shared their creations with their classmates.

Pearl Male, Grade 7, chose the French saying, "Souris qui n'a qu'un trou est bientôt prise," which literally translates to "A mouse with one hole soon gets caught" (and can be loosely translated as "Better safe than sorry").

USEFUL DISTRICT INFORMATION

DISTRICT OFFICE
845-657-6383

www.onteora.k12.ny.us

Superintendent
Victoria McLaren 845-657-8851

Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction
Stephanie Laffin 845-657-8851

Assistant Superintendent for Business
Monica LaClair 845-657-8499

Assistant Superintendent for Pupil Personnel Services
Amanda Allison 845-657-3320

Director of Special Education
Carol Grima..... .845-657-3320

District MTSS Coordinator
Elizabeth Fallo 845-657-6383

Interim Director of Physical Education, Athletics, and Health
Jonnah O'Donnell... 845-657-2373 x2113

Director of Transportation
Nicole Sommer..... 845-657-2537

Director of Food Services
Christine Downs.... 845-657-6383 x2181

Director of Facilities
Kyle Harjes..... 845-657-6384

District Clerk
Amanda Gates 845-657-6383 x1030

HIGH SCHOOL • 845-657-2373
Principal, Lance Edelman
Asst. Principal, Dieter Schimmelpfennig

MIDDLE SCHOOL • 845-657-2373
Principal, James DiDonna

BENNETT ELEMENTARY • 845-657-2354
Principal, Gabriel Buono

WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY • 845-679-2316
Principal, Scott Richards

NON DISCRIMINATION STATEMENT The Onteora Central School District does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, weight, national origin, creed, religion, religious practice, ethnic group, political affiliation, gender (including gender identity, expression, or nonconformity to stereotypical notions of masculinity and femininity), marital status, sex, age, disability, sexual orientation, or other legally protected status in access to programs and/or employment provided by the District. Inquiries to the District concerning discrimination or harassment based on sex or sexual orientation may be referred to the Title IX/Title VI Compliance Officer, Stephanie Laffin, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum & Instruction, at: Onteora Central School District, slaffin@onteora.k12.ny.us. Inquiries regarding discrimination can also be made to the United States Department of Education, Office of Civil Rights, 32 Old Slip, 26th Floor, New York, NY 10005, (646) 428-3900, ocr.newyork@ed.gov.

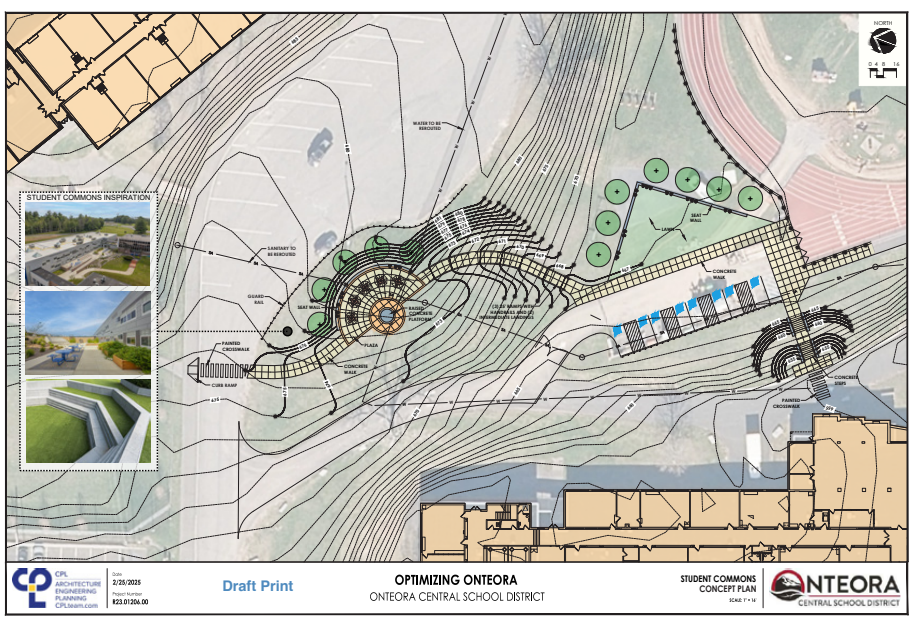
Optimizing ONTEORA
CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

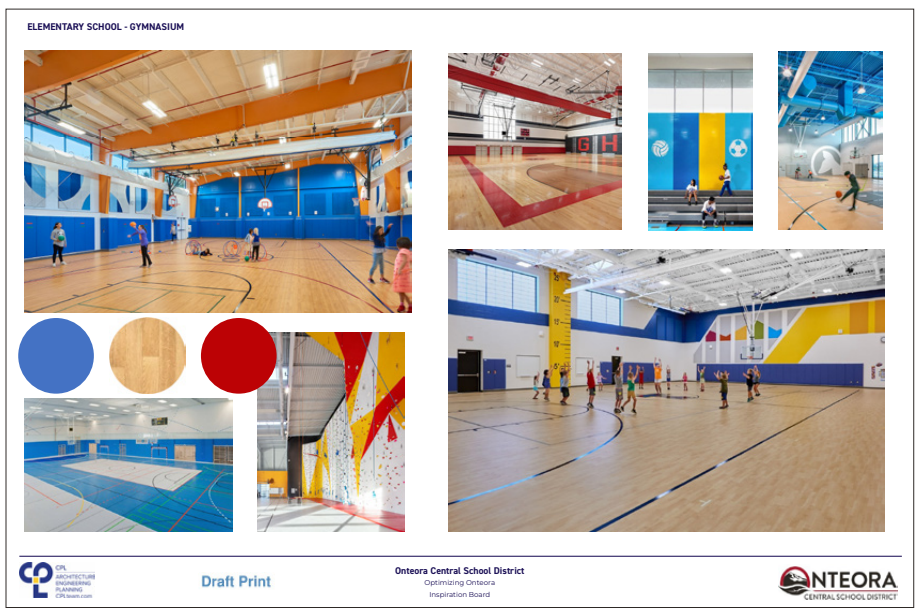
Student First

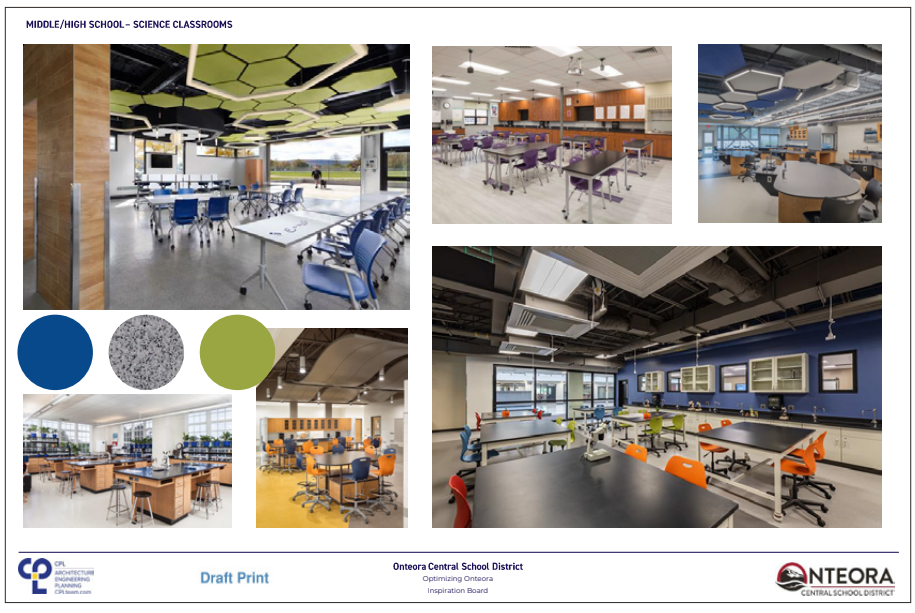
Staff Forward

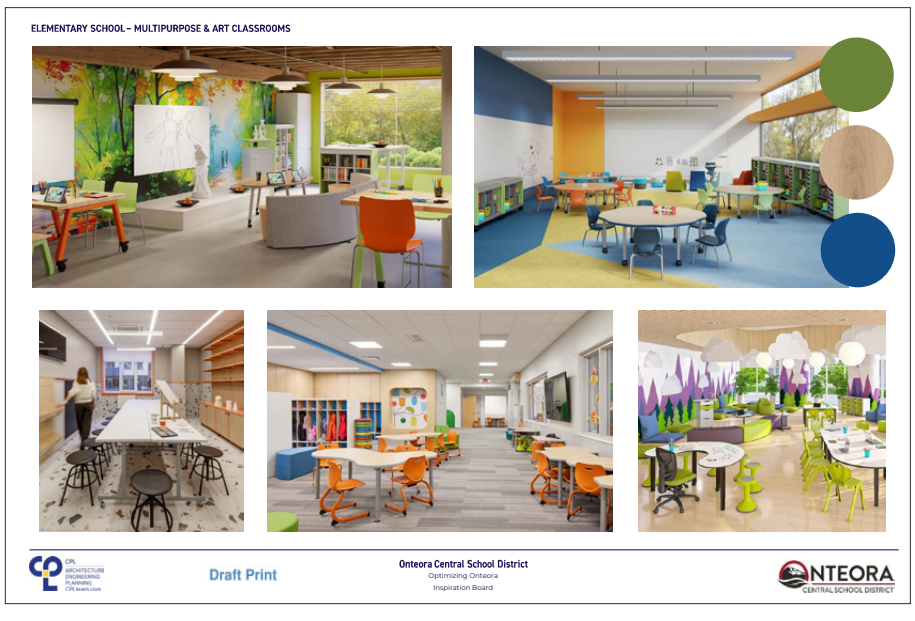
Fiscally Responsible

With Community









Voters Asked to Consider Proposition 2 for Central Campus Upgrades to Optimize Onteora:

FUNDING STRUCTURE ANTICIPATED TO HAVE NO TAX LEVY IMPACT

In March, the Onteora Central School District Board of Education unanimously approved a tax neutral $70.5 million Capital Project proposition designed to create a modernized K-12 centralized campus in Boiceville that was designed to enhance learning for all of our K-12 students. The project has the added benefit of being possible with **no anticipated increase** to the tax levy, as well as reducing long-term costs into the future.

The Capital Project, which will be listed on the May 20 School Budget Vote ballot as Proposition 2, was designed over a series of facilitated public forums and visioning sessions that began over a year ago, in which our District administrators, architects, and engineers listened closely and then brought the hopes, dreams, and imaginations of the participants to life in their concept designs. These meetings, which were open to all interested community members, were facilitated by Sharon Lipovsky of Point Road Studios in Woodstock. She also conducted additional focus group discussions with students, staff, and administrators.

"The collaboration really reflected our shared values," explains Superintendent Victoria McLaren, "We centered on putting students first, supporting staff, and being fiscally responsible — all while fostering connections with our Onteora community."

Driving the decision to move to a central campus was the desire to ensure our students receive the best education the community can provide. A significant consideration in this decision was the impact of changing enrollment. In September of 2004, there were 2,111 students enrolled across four buildings. Today, the District serves just over 1,000 students. Other considerations include the effects on teaching and learning, social/emotional impact on students, staffing needs, aging facilities, and budget.

"The Board has emphasized from the start that this move is not just about the numbers, but rather about ensuring that every student in our District receives the best possible education with the resources available. The central campus proposal is rooted in this directive," said McLaren.

She also added that although she's excited for the expanded opportunities a central campus can provide, she also knows that there is a great sadness in the closing of Woodstock Elementary School, and in closing Phoenicia last year. "I remind myself often, though, it is not the bricks and mortar or the street address that make Onteora the amazing place it is, but rather the people that are a part of this District….the staff, the students, and the community who take such pride in our schools."

A VISION FOR THE FUTURE:
An Optimized Onteora

After collecting the initial ideas, feedback, and revisions of the participants in our series of community forums, three general themes emerged. These themes shaped the concepts and designs that were incorporated into the project.

Learning spaces that inspire creativity and growth

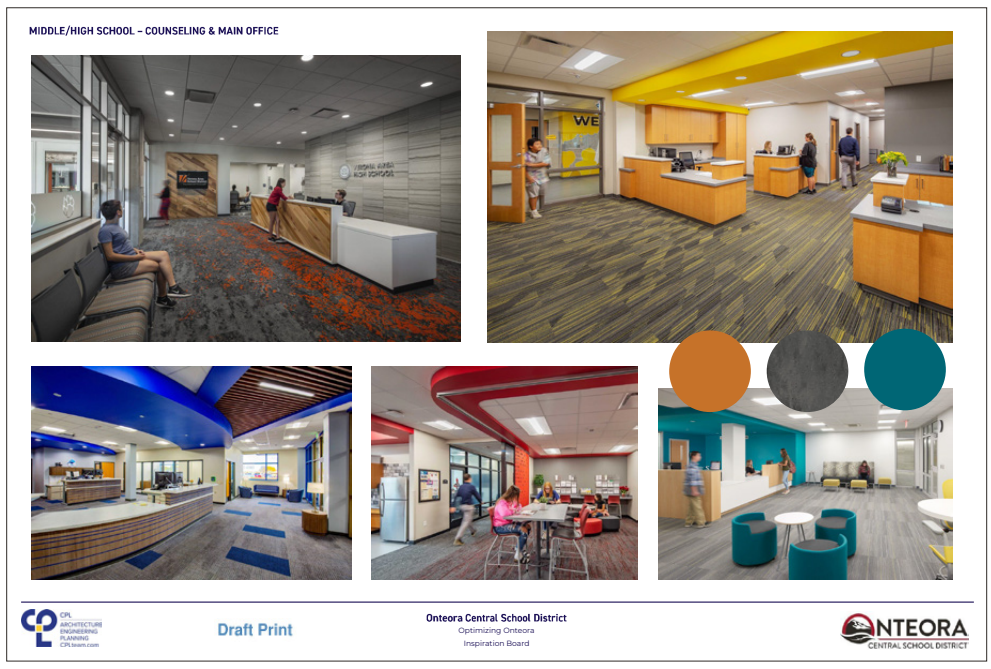
Healthy environment for a sustainable future

Catskills-inspired school campus

The vision came to life in the following proposed updates:

- **Additional classrooms** in the elementary school that include **in-class bathrooms** for our youngest students, a **new gymnasium and cafeteria, expanded visual and performing arts classrooms**, a **welcoming lobby** that can be used as an **adaptive use space**, and a **new intentionally designed security entrance**.
- Relocation and **expansion of play space at the elementary school** that will connect students to the woodland, nature paths, garden, and establish new recreation areas.
- **Space for student-led gardens** and expanded green spaces and **outdoor classrooms**.
- **New science classrooms** at the High School that will honor the academic requirements of students and provide the state-of-the-art equipment for rigorous scientific coursework.
- **Refurbished auditorium** to ensure an up-to-date and inspiring space for students to perform and experience arts performances.
- **Redesigned counseling center and nursing offices** at the Middle/High School that will create a nurturing space to **promote student wellness**.
- **Upgraded athletic fields, lights, and grounds**, to promote year-round play and greater access for student-athletes.
- Improved resources for outdoor school gatherings, including **separate entrances to restrooms and hookups for food trucks**.
- **New drop-off loop and entrance** to the elementary building with a security vestibule to enhance student safety and create a **barrier between traffic and students**.
- **Additional parking and improved traffic flow** at the Middle/High School.
- **Pedestrian zone in the center of campus** to create a more peaceful, safe, and naturalistic environment and connection between the two school buildings. Cars and buses will move on the exterior of the campus, with separate vehicle entrances for the elementary and middle school/high school buildings.
- **Shared resources across campus** that not only create operational and cost efficiencies, but more importantly expand opportunities for student and staff access and foster deeper connections across all grades and experiences. For example:
  - An art gallery in the new elementary school lobby can be used as exhibition space for older students to display art
  - Elementary students can perform on stage in the Middle/High School building
  - Modified sports teams can practice in the enlarged elementary school gym, which also offers more indoor play space when the weather is inclement
- **Improved spaces for faculty and staff** to collaborate, work independently, and connect virtually.
- **Infrastructure updates**, such as electrical, plumbing, HVAC, efficient windows, and more that support a healthy environment for a sustainable future.
- **Adaptive meeting spaces** for students, staff, and community groups.

AND MORE!



A Look Back at the Journey to this Capital Project

2018:
Board Established a Goal Focused on the Need for Long-Term Planning and Begins Research

OCTOBER 2022:
Board Adopted a Goal to Support Developing a Long-Term, District-Wide Plan (a plan that would address declining enrollment, staff shortages, facilities needs, budget, student achievement, community impact, and the expansion of the middle school to add Grade 6)

JANUARY 2023:
New Middle School Grade Configuration Approved

JANUARY-MARCH 2023:
Community Engagement

MAY 2023:
Board Resolution to Consolidate to a Central Campus by 2028 Approved

SEPTEMBER 2023-JUNE 2024:
Transition Planning for Closing Phoenicia and Moving Grade 6 to the Middle School Underway

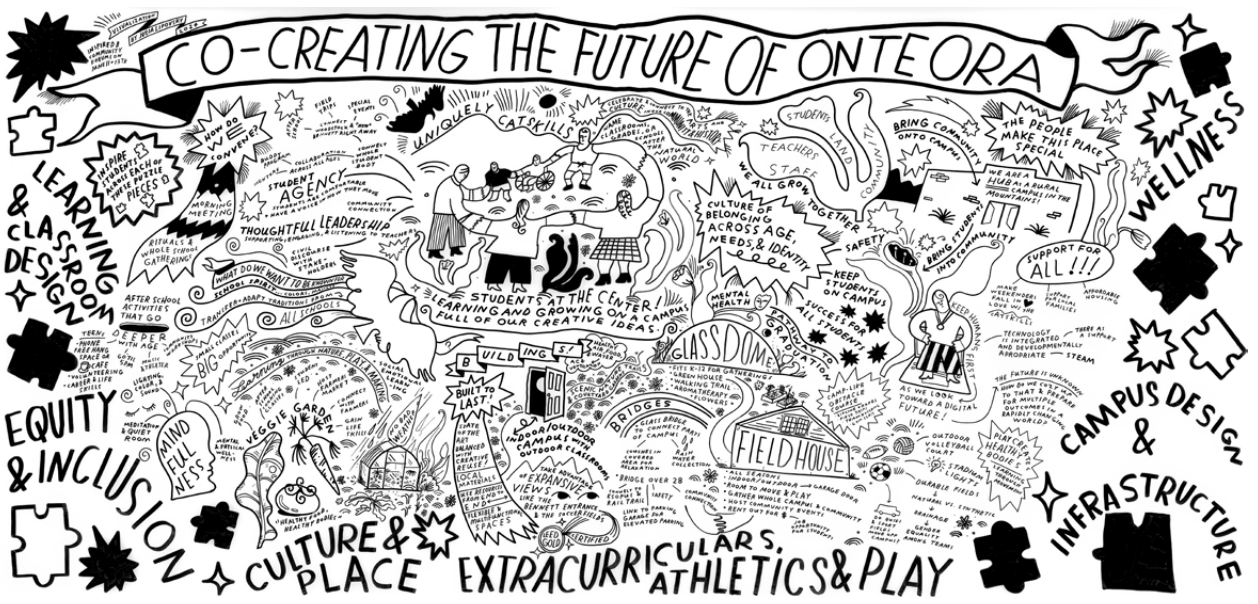
MARCH 2024:
Point Road Studios Engaged to Lead a Series of Community Engagement Experiences

MAY 2024:
Community Sharing Sessions Held

How can we fund this project without an increase on the tax levy?

Our District leadership has worked closely with its financial advisors to strategically structure the $70.5 million project so it can be funded **without an anticipated increase in the tax levy**.

To accomplish this, we will first apply $15 million that is saved in our voter-approved Capital Reserve (a savings mechanism for projects like this one) and cash already on hand, which will reduce the level of borrowing to $55.5 million and save on interest costs. Borrowing will be done through bonds in increments as phases of the project need funding. The bonds will be repaid over 20 years, starting in 2028.

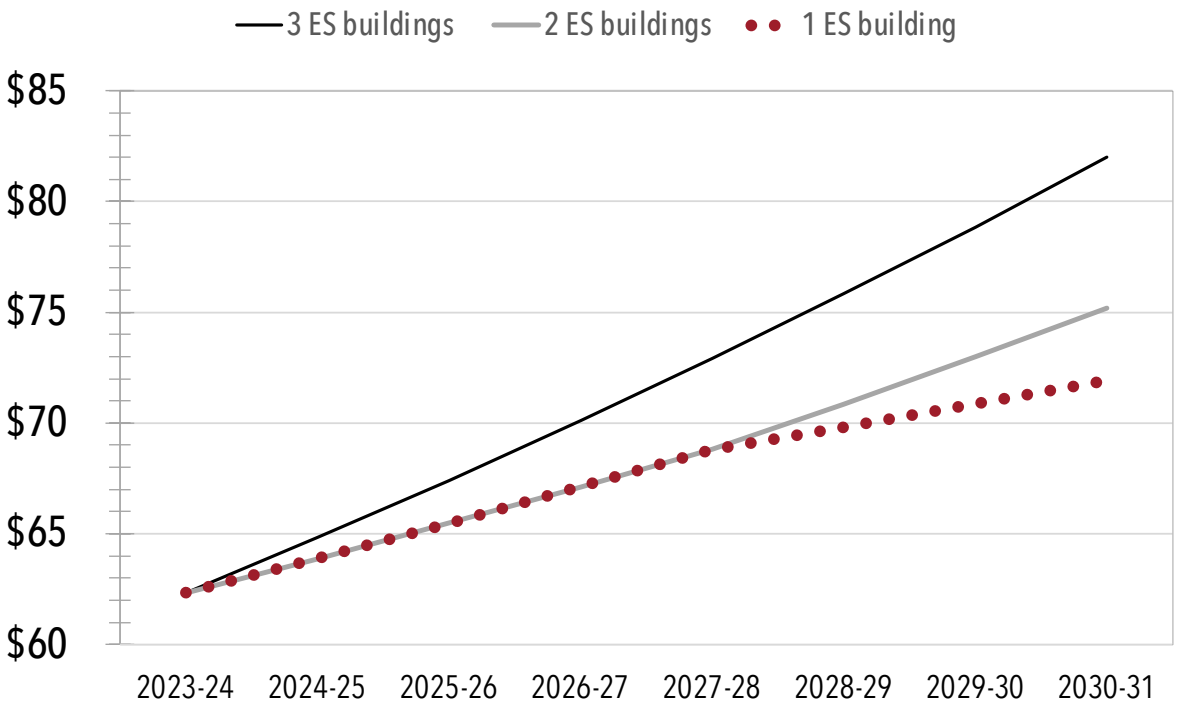


A visual distillation of the passions, hopes, and dreams shared at the community forums.

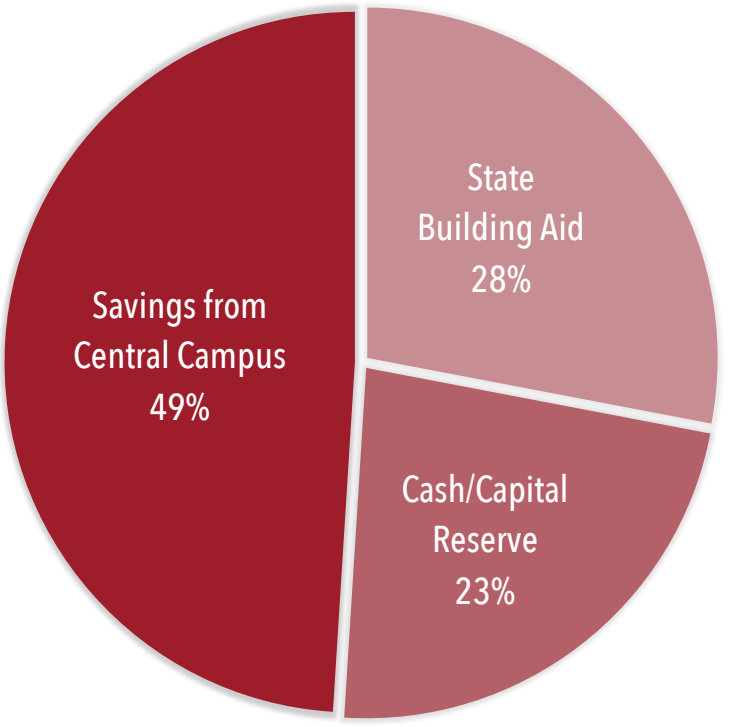
Each year of the repayment, we will receive approximately $1.3 million of State Building Aid. If we factor in an expected annual savings of more than $3 million achieved through the efficiencies of a central campus, we anticipate being able to repay the bonds **without increasing taxes**.

In addition, the cost savings of consolidating to a central campus will continue to grow and help offset future budget increases — which is especially important as we anticipate significant changes to the New York State Foundation Aid formula and a possible reduction in federal funding. The loss of these existing revenues could force the closure of Woodstock in a manner that is reactive and does not include the benefits of a thoughtful Capital Project plan designed with the voices of diverse stakeholder groups.

PROJECTED SAVINGS OF A CENTRAL CAMPUS



HOW IS THE PROJECT FUNDED?



JUNE 2024:
Community Forum Sessions Held

JUNE 2024:
Phoenicia Elementary School Closes

SEPTEMBER 2024:
Grade 6 Moves to Middle School and Phoenicia Students Join Bennett Elementary School

DECEMBER 2024:
Community Forum to Prioritize Ideas Held

JANUARY 2025:
Community Forum to Revise Concepts Held

FEBRUARY 2025:
Community Forum to Refine Plan Held

MARCH 2025:
Resolution to Support Capital Project as a Single Proposition Approved

MAY 2025:
Community Vote on Capital Project to be Held

OPTIMIZING ONTEORA

What happens after a successful vote?

If passed, we will begin to work with our architectural and construction professionals to develop the final designs. This process will take about a year and will include faculty, staff, and students in the design process. The designs will then be submitted to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) for approval. Once NYSED approves, a competitive bidding process will be executed. After bids are awarded, work can begin. Construction will be phased in a manner to create minimal disruptions to teaching and learning, with nights, weekends, holidays, and vacation times being used for updates to student-occupied spaces. The project is anticipated to be complete by September of 2028.

Community Engagement Continues

In addition to the logistics planning that happens after a successful vote, we also will remain committed to working closely with key stakeholders and subject matter experts to refine the campus design with input. We will continue to show up alongside our community to honor the legacy of Woodstock Elementary School and support students, staff, and families through this transition. Guided by our mission, we will approach the future use of closed school buildings with care and in collaboration with the community. Throughout this process, we will keep you informed with updates on the campus plans, share the building schedule, and create meaningful opportunities for community dialogue.

The community was invited to attend a series of sessions led by Sharon Lipovsky of Point Road Studios in Woodstock to offer input into the priorities for a central campus design.

WE'RE HERE FOR QUESTIONS

Email your questions or comments to optimizing@onteora.k12.ny.us or call Superintendent Victoria McLaren at 845-657-6383.

LEARN MORE ON OUR WEBSITE

Visit www.onteora.k12.ny.us

VOTE MAY 20!

Vote on the annual school budget and Capital Project and elect two members to the Board of Education.

TUESDAY, MAY 20 FROM 2 PM - 9 PM
at Woodstock & Bennett Elementary Schools

Applications for Early Mail Ballots are also available online!

Answers to Some Common Questions

We have a full section of questions and answers on our website, but here are a few of the most frequently asked. Visit www.onteora.k12.ny.us/optimize to find more information.

Will rejecting the proposition prevent the closure of Woodstock Elementary School?

No. If the vote fails, the Board and administration will analyze data from a planned exit poll to determine what next steps should be taken to realize a central campus. In the past year, we've been made aware that it is highly likely that changes will be made to the New York State Foundation Aid formula in which Onteora is predicted to soon lose a significant amount of funding. Although the loss of Foundation Aid was not a consideration when this journey began, it is very much a part of our current realities. The loss of Foundation Aid could drive the need to consolidate in the very near future. The District has the opportunity to prepare for a likely scenario of funding cuts by creating a central campus that is both tax neutral and was imagined through a community visioning and design process. Voters are encouraged to complete the exit poll when they vote on May 20.

When will Woodstock Elementary School Close?

All K-5 students would come together at the reimagined elementary school in Boiceville after the central campus upgrades are complete. Given that renovations are anticipated to be completed by the start of the 2028-29 school year, we expect Woodstock Elementary School to close at the end of the 2027-28 school year.

What is happening with our closed school properties?

Our hope is for school buildings that are no longer in use to continue to serve and benefit the community. While each property has unique considerations, our priority is to explore options that preserve their value as local assets.

PHOENICIA: We initially agreed to sell Phoenicia to the Town of Shandaken for $1. There are some limitations to doing so, so a lease is also being explored. Either option allows it to remain as a community resource, which is a priority. These conversations are ongoing.

WEST HURLEY: This property has been under contract since 2017. The purchaser is working through various issues, but we still anticipate that this sale will close and this property will return to the tax rolls and provide housing.

WOODSTOCK: Future uses would be explored if the Capital Project is approved. While we have no immediate plans, we do know that restrictions included in the deed only allow school or residential use, and using it for additional housing would be a benefit to our community. The purchaser's options are limited to only these two uses unless they are able to successfully gain a deed alteration.

How will the integration of Bennett and Woodstock Elementary Schools be managed?

We view the integration as the creation of a new school and not the absorption of one school into another. Considerations include updating culture markers like the school name. In preparation for the elementary school integration, we will partner with building leadership to create a thoughtful and well-communicated transition plan for students and staff at both Bennett and Woodstock Elementary Schools. Staff reassignments will be done thoughtfully and should there be the need for any reductions, we will make them through attrition wherever possible. It is our priority to ensure that all students and staff feel connected to their new school.