

VOLUME 13: FEBRUARY & MARCH 2026

PORTRAIT OF A GRADUATE COMPONENT – CRITICAL THINKER/EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATOR

THE ESSENTIALS

ENHANCING EDUCATION WITH EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES

Dear Colleagues,

The New York State Portrait of a Graduate outlines six key components for student success. This issue of the ESS newsletter focuses on two of those components, Critical Thinker and Effective Communicator, and highlights how Educational Support Services supports teachers and educational leaders in helping students meet these expectations, while also providing direct programming that builds these skills in students.

The examples featured demonstrate how ESS works alongside districts to strengthen instruction, leadership practices, and student experiences aligned to the Portrait of a Graduate.

In appreciation,

Kate Davern, Director of Educational Support Services at Eastern Suffolk BOCES



AI Educate – Empowering the Future of Learning

Tuesday, May 12, 2026 • 8:30 am – 3:00 pm • ISC @ Sequoya

Driving Innovation in an AI World – Artificial intelligence is reshaping how we live, learn, and lead, and schools are at the forefront of this transformation. Building on two years of AI-focused professional learning, Eastern Suffolk BOCES invites you to a dynamic day of inspiration and action. **Join Thomas C. Murray and Dr. Adam A. Phyll III from All4Ed's Future Ready Schools®** for an immersive conference that helps educators navigate both the challenges and opportunities of artificial intelligence. Whether you're leading a classroom or a district, you'll gain practical strategies, authentic insights, and tools to lead with purpose in an AI-driven world.

Scan or click
[HERE](#) to register



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PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

For more information contact Bernadette Gentile, Program Administrator, at bgentile@eboces.org.



DR. DAN EVANS, former Chief Academic Officer for Pinellas County Schools, led curriculum and instruction for nearly 100,000 students, guiding the district to record-high achievement in reading, math, and science. A recognized turnaround principal and award-winning leader, he applies literacy best practices and high-yield instructional strategies to foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication in schools. Author of *The Instructional Soul* and an upcoming guidebook on instructional excellence, Dr. Evans continues to share practical strategies that prepare educators and students for success. **AREAS OF EXPERTISE:** Instructional leadership; Strategies for school improvement; Classroom levers to improve student proficiency



UPCOMING WORKSHOP: March 12 • [The Power of High-Impact Strategies that Drive Student Achievement](#)



DR. PAUL RICCOMINI is a distinguished mathematics education expert with 30 years of experience, specializing in high-intensity, evidence-based instructional techniques. He collaborates with teachers to design engaging, research-based activities that foster critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication in students. His work equips educators with practical strategies to promote deep understanding and prepare learners for success both inside and beyond the classroom. **AREAS OF EXPERTISE:** Building number sense, fluency and reasoning; Enhancing long term retention of essential concepts and skill; Supporting the cognitive process needed for mathematical language development



UPCOMING WORKSHOP: March 5 • [Using High Intensity Instructional Techniques to Enhance Retention and Support the Development of Algebraic Reasoning](#)



DR. MUBINA SCHROEDER, a professor at Molloy University, specializes in cognitive sciences and educational technology, preparing graduate and doctoral students to apply research-based strategies in real-world learning environments. As co-director of the Cognition and Learning Lab, she collaborates with leading institutions to integrate AI and emerging technologies into pedagogy, fostering critical thinking, problem-solving, and effective communication. Her advisory roles with organizations such as the United Nations CTAUN Committee and Rosh.ai reflect her commitment to shaping innovative, technology-driven educational practices. **AREAS OF EXPERTISE:** Artificial intelligence in education; Leveraging virtual reality as a learning space; Educational technology; Using educational technology to promote social emotional learning skills; Digital STEM curriculum



UPCOMING WORKSHOP: February 2 • [AI for Differentiation and Assessment: Practical Tools to Reach Every Learner](#)

To access the Professional Development Calendar and the Consultant Catalog: www.esboces.org/programs-services/ess/pd
To inquire about booking In-District Professional Development: pdreferrals@esboces.org

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MODEL SCHOOLS



For more information contact Heather Ciccone, Program Administrator, at hciccone@esboces.org.

Empowering Critical Thinkers and Effective Communicators with Model Schools

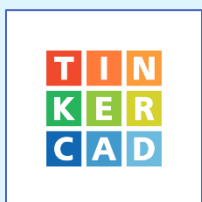
The ESBOCES **Model Schools** program helps teachers bring the **New York State Portrait of a Graduate** to life by supporting students in becoming **critical thinkers and effective communicators**. Through hands-on professional development, innovative instructional strategies, and technology integration, teachers learn to design lessons that spark inquiry, encourage problem-solving, and help students clearly express their ideas. Check out the workshops below that offer practical ways to put these skills into action!

UPCOMING WORKSHOPS

(Click the workshop title or scan the QR code below to register.)

Curriculum Meets Creativity: Canva Projects for K-12 Teachers • 2/11/26

Explore how to use **Canva for Education** to create engaging, standards-aligned projects in any subject area. Teachers will leave with ready-to-use templates, interactive student tasks, infographics, digital journals, and the confidence to bring visual learning into their curriculum.



Layer by Layer: Building Learning in 3D • 3/3/26

Discover how **3D printing** can transform your curriculum. Participants will learn Tinkercad design, slicing software, classroom management tools, and strategies to integrate 3D printing into lessons that let students demonstrate understanding and apply real-world skills.

Unlocking Google AI for Educators: A Two-Part Workshop Series

Learn to leverage AI tools to enhance teaching and foster student inquiry.

March 11, 2026 • Part 1: Use **Gemini** to streamline lesson planning, differentiate instruction, and create assessments.



March 24, 2026 • Part 2: Use **NotebookLM** to help students act as researchers, interact with trusted sources, and practice critical thinking through inquiry-based learning.



Through these workshops, educators gain strategies and tools to inspire students to think critically, solve problems, and communicate effectively.

ARTS-IN-EDUCATION



For more information contact Loretta Corbisiero-Drakos, Administrative Coordinator, at lcorbisi@esboces.org.

Junior Achievement of New York, Inc.

The **JA Career Speakers Series** connects students with real-world professionals who share their career journeys, insights, and advice. This program is designed to inspire students by exposing them to a wide range of career paths, helping them to understand the skills, education, and personal qualities needed to succeed in the workforce.

<https://newyork.ja.org/programs/index>

<https://artsined.esboces.org/Programdetail.aspx?id=13627>



EAC, Inc. In-Person Circles Training:

A Restorative Approach

The practice of **Circles** is helpful for building and maintaining a healthy community where all members feel connected, respected, and heard. By utilization of the circle process your students, staff and or clients will:

- Build stronger relationships
- Create an environment that honors trust and nurturing
- Foster a sense of community
- Formulate a decision-making process that is inclusive
- Craft agreements that benefit all
- Help resolve difficulties through inclusion and respect
- Increase social emotional learning.

Students feel accepted, valued, respected and included in this environment.

<https://eac-network.org/>

<https://artsined.esboces.org/Programdetail.aspx?id=9327>



Limitless Learning LLC

The **Student Peer Leadership Program** is a dynamic and interactive program designed to empower students as role models, advocates, and allies within a school community. This program equips students with leadership skills and knowledge to promote respect, community, and belonging for all, so that every student feels valued and supported. The student peer leadership program is not just about leading – it's about listening, learning, and lifting others to build a stronger, more united school community.

<https://artsined.esboces.org/Programdetail.aspx?id=13510>



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SCHOOL YEAR ENRICHMENT



For more information contact Danielle Hudek, Program Administrator, at dhudek@esboces.org, or, Nancy Dowdy-Adams, Assistant Administrative Coordinator, at ndowdy@esboces.org.

CRITICAL THINKING AND COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN COMSEWOGUE

Students in Norwood and Clinton Elementary's K-2 Enrichment Program participated in a bridge-building activity after reading *The Three Billy Goats Gruff*. Using the Portrait of a Graduate concepts of Critical Thinker and Effective Communicator, students worked together to design and construct a bridge strong enough for the "goats" to cross. They discussed ideas, tested materials, and revised their plans through teamwork, problem-solving, and the students practiced essential communication and reasoning skills.



EAST ISLIP CRITICAL THINKERS AND EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATORS

Students in East Islip's Timber Point Elementary Enrichment Program explored the story, *Room on the Broom*, and then worked together to plan and design their own broomsticks. Using the Portrait of a Graduate concepts of Critical Thinker and Effective Communicator, students planned, constructed, and tested their broomstick models to see how many pumpkins each design could carry. They shared ideas, problem-solved, and refined their creations through teamwork and thoughtful discussion. This hands-on challenge encouraged creativity while strengthening essential communication and reasoning skills.



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SCHOOL LIBRARY SYSTEM

For more information contact Carl Vitevitch, Administrative Coordinator, at cvitevitch@esboces.org



CREATING INCLUSIVE LIBRARY SPACES FOR SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENTS

March 3, 2026 • 8:30 am – 2:30 pm

Suffolk Cooperative Library System, 627 North Sunrise Service Road, Bellport



USING LIBRARY RESOURCES TO
SUPPORT SPECIAL NEEDS
STUDENTS

School libraries should be places where every student feels seen, supported, and inspired to learn—and that includes our students receiving Special Education services. In this powerful, full-day workshop, school librarians will discover how to transform their library into a truly inclusive space that reflects the strengths and needs of all learners.

Click [HERE](#) or scan the QR code to register



Questions? Call us at
631-286-0891 or
email SLShelp@esboces.org.

SCHOOL DATA BANK SERVICES

For more information contact Vanessa Biagioli-Dittrich, Program Administrator, at SDBS@esboces.org.



Advancing Critical Thinkers and Effective Communicators Through Data-Informed Practice

ESBOCES School Data Bank Services and our Staff Developer/Shared Data Experts partner with districts to help educators leverage data as a tool to strengthen teaching and learning aligned to the Critical Thinker and Effective Communicator component of the NYS Portrait of a Graduate.

By working directly with educators, our team supports the use, collection, and interpretation of data to inform instructional decisions, identify student needs, and design learning experiences that cultivate critical thinking and effective communication skills.

Through collaborative data inquiry, targeted professional learning, and practical data tools, we help translate data into actionable strategies. In doing so, School Data Bank Services empowers educators to foster a classroom culture where students develop the analytical and communication skills essential to succeed in school, careers, and civic life.

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THIRD PARTY ASSESSMENTS

For more information, contact Jonathan Marron, Asst. Administrative Coordinator, at jmarron@esboces.org.



Beyond Proficiency: Using Benchmark Data to Build Thinkers and Communicators

Third-party benchmark assessments offer data that goes far beyond measuring proficiency. When used effectively, they provide actionable insight into students' cognitive skills, communication abilities, and readiness to engage in complex learning tasks, making them powerful tools for advancing the Critical Thinker and Effective Communicator components of New York State's Portrait of a Graduate.

These assessments also provide norm-referenced growth data, helping educators understand how students' reasoning and comprehension develop over time. Because critical thinking is built gradually, growth data supports better alignment of instruction, coaching, and professional learning to student readiness. In addition, benchmark assessments offer diagnostic insight into reading, language, and writing readiness, including understanding text structure, citing evidence, and identifying main ideas, informing instruction that strengthens both written and verbal communication.



UPCOMING EVENTS: (Click the title or scan to register.)

- [LAS Links Spring User Meeting](#) • March 11, 2026
This session will focus on using LAS Links reports to guide instruction and track student growth.
- [i-Ready Regional Teacher Training: Growth & Differentiated Instruction](#) • March 12, 2026
Participants will review growth data from the fall and winter i-Ready Diagnostics and learn to use Diagnostic and Instruction reports to differentiate instruction effectively.



WORDS OF GRATITUDE:

EDUCATIONAL SUPPORT SERVICES SHINE



Professional Development

- "The workshop provided great detail on upcoming changes to APPR-STEPS. I will share this information with my district." – Getting Ready for the 3012-eNYS STEPS (NYS System for Teacher and Principal Support) Evaluation System, Facilitated by Dr. Peggie Staib
- "I learned so much - such valuable information. This will truly benefit our students and our community." – Understanding Work-Based Learning (WBL) & Advisory Board Frameworks for Long Island School Districts Series, Presented by Bridget Lopiccolo

School Library System

- "He was very engaging and knowledgeable. I walked away with some good ideas from this day." – gratitude for presenter Dr. Dan Evans at the October 22, 2025 Liaison meeting
- "Thank you for everything you create and do for us – the community you've created is invaluable!!"

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SUPPORTING OUR DISTRICTS

MODEL SCHOOLS

*Kate Davern and Heather Ciccone pictured with **Mr. Robert Farenga of the Port Jefferson School District, winner of The Most Innovative Use of Technology Award at the Long Island Technology and Education Summit, held October 24, 2025 at the Huntington Hilton in Melville.***



SCHOOL LIBRARY SYSTEM

Long Island School Library System Regional Institute

November 4, 2025 • Hyatt Regency in Hauppauge



This unique professional development opportunity for school librarians covered timely topics of interest. Attendees developed their knowledge from a variety of administrators and colleagues during the course of the day to improve their curriculum and practice for the upcoming year. You can find more information on the sessions on the LibGuide: <https://nasboces.libguides.com/FallInstitute>



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UPCOMING EVENTS: FEBRUARY & MARCH 2026



FOR MORE INFORMATION ON ANY OF THE EVENTS LISTED ON THE FOLLOWING PAGES, PLEASE USE THE COLOR-CODED KEY BELOW TO CONTACT EACH PROGRAM DIRECTLY. **CLICK THE EVENT TITLE TO VIEW DETAILS AND REGISTER ON FRONTLINE, OR SCAN THE QR CODE TO ACCESS THE ENTIRE CATALOG.**

PROGRAM	CONTACT
Arts-In-Education	artsined@esboces.org
Curriculum Development	curriculumservice@esboces.org
Model Schools	mspd@esboces.org
Professional Development	pdonlinesupport@esboces.org
School Data Bank Services	sdbs@esboces.org
School Library System	slshelp@esboces.org
Third Party Assessments	thirdpartyassessments@esboces.org

FEBRUARY 2026

START DATE	EVENT	PROGRAM
2/2	AI for Differentiation and Assessment: Practical Tools to Reach Every Learner - Dr. Mubina Khan Schroeder	Professional Development
2/3	Code, Create, and Innovate: Spheros and Ozobots into Your Classroom	Model Schools
2/3	Tackling NYSSLS with Cooperative Learning for All High School Science Teachers - Richard Slesinski	Professional Development
2/3	Vocabulary Instruction for Durable Learning - Amy Benjamin	Professional Development
2/3	NYSCAME Suffolk: Happy Teacher, Happy Students with Keelan Muscara	Arts-In-Education
2/4	Bridging Language Gaps - Farrah Mozawalla	Professional Development
2/4	The Science of Reading: A Deep Dive into Comprehension - Lauren Kolbeck	Professional Development
2/4	LLA: Ready to Dive into Sora, the Student Reading App	School Library System

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START DATE	EVENT	PROGRAM
2/4	Collegial Circle for Special Education and Co-Teachers the Collaborative Classroom: Fostering Adult Relationships in Diverse Learning Environments - Diane Ripple	Professional Development
2/4	Supercharge Student Success: Unlocking the Power of Microsoft Learning Accelerators	Model Schools
2/5	Learning Technology Grant: Project-Based Learning and Artificial Intelligence Academy	Model Schools
2/5	FREE Virtual Learning Preview Session: Analyzing Teaching for Student Results (ASTR) Training - Research for Better Teaching	Professional Development
2/5	LLA: Partnering for Impact: Empowering Librarian-Teacher Collaboration with Gale Resources	School Library System
2/5	Learning Technology Grant: AI for Educational Leaders and Administrators	Model Schools
2/5	NYSCAME Suffolk- Musical Theatre: 1980's to present day with Steven Altinel	Arts-In-Education
2/10	LLA: Get to Know Britannica	School Library System
2/11	Curriculum Meets Creativity: Canva Projects for K-12 Teachers	Model Schools
2/11	PEACE Critical Community of Practice (CCoP) February	Arts-In-Education
2/12	Desmos For New Users - Andy Malbouef	Professional Development
2/12	Desmos For Experienced Users - Andy Malbouef	Professional Development
2/26	The Innovative Schools Summit New York: Super Bundle Option - Accutrain The Innovative Schools Summit New York: Bundle Option - Accutrain The Innovative Schools Summit New York: Conference/Summit Only - Accutrain	Professional Development
2/26	Aspiring Administrators Collegial Circle - Dr. Deborah De Luca	Professional Development
2/27	The Dignity for All Students Act (DASA): Best Practices to Ensure a Culture of Dignity in Schools - Dr. Anne Rullan	Professional Development

MARCH 2026

START DATE	EVENT	PROGRAM
3/3	Illuminating NYSSLS Through Geometric Optics for High School Physics Teachers - Richard Slesinski	Professional Development
3/3	LLA: Creating Inclusive Library Spaces for Special Education Students	School Library System

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START DATE	EVENT	PROGRAM
3/3	The Rigor-Relevance-Resilience Learning Model - Adam Wallenfang, Successful Practices Network Team, a Dr. Bill Daggett Company	Professional Development
3/3	Unraveling Dyscalculia: Understanding and Supporting Students - Christa Van Tronk and Jennifer Orlowski	Professional Development
3/3	Layer by Layer: Building Learning in 3D <i>Spring Session</i>	Model Schools
3/5	From Anxious to Adaptable: Strengthening Frustration Tolerance Through Connection - Dr. Kelly Zinn, DSW, LCSW	Professional Development
3/5	Using High Intensity Instructional Techniques to Enhance Retention and Support the Development of Algebraic Reasoning - Paul Riccomini, PhD	Professional Development
3/6	The Science of Reading: Morphology, Spelling, and Latin Roots - Amy Benjamin	Professional Development
3/10	Building World Language Proficiency Across Communication Modes: From Frameworks to Classroom-Ready Activities - Joshua Cabral	Professional Development
3/11	Creating Positive Paths for Early Learners Through the Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS-I) Integrated Framework - Dr. Maureen Martin	Professional Development
3/11	LAS Links Spring User Meeting (ESBOCES-LAS Links Cohort Only)	Third Party Assessments
3/11	Creating Shared Solutions - A Collaborative Approach to Behavior Support - Dr. Bonni Cohen, PTS Coaching, LLC	Professional Development
3/11	Unlocking Google AI for Educators: A Two-Part Workshop Series (<i>Spring Session</i>)	Model Schools
3/12	The Power of High-Impact Strategies that Drive Student Achievement - Dan Evans, Ed.D. Author & National Trainer; Former Chief Academic Officer	Professional Development
3/12	i-Ready Regional Teacher Training: Growth & Differentiated Instruction	Professional Development
3/12	Teaching ENL Students in the Content Areas and Utilizing Effective Strategies for Students with Interrupted Education (SIFE) - Pamela Solomon	Professional Development
3/13	Writing for High-Stakes Tests - Annie Taranto, The Living Literacy Network	Professional Development
3/16	The Role of Connected Phonation in Learning to Read - Lea Rascona, Literacy Matters	Professional Development
3/17	Classroom Strategies to Meet the Rigor of the New Biology Regents - Glen Cochrane	Professional Development
3/18	PEACE Critical Community of Practice (CCoP) March	Arts-In-Education
3/19	Dyslexia: What It Is; What It Isn't; How to Assess It and What to Do - Concetta Russo, Ed.D.	Professional Development
3/21	PEACEout: Long Island Museum	Arts-In-Education
3/23	Designing and Using Authentic Performance Tasks and Projects: Tools for Meaningful Learning and Assessment - Jay McTighe	Curriculum Development

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START DATE	EVENT	PROGRAM
3/24	Building a Thinking Classroom in Mathematics - Nicolle Santaromita	Professional Development
3/24	Preparing for NYS Portrait of a Graduate Financial Literacy Requirements: Wealth, Risk, and Investing - Philip Dituri, Ph.D.	Professional Development
3/25	Seal of Civic Readiness: Strategies, Sharing, and Practice - Nicole Moriarty, Ed. D	Professional Development
3/25	LLA: Books of Choice - Thematic Discussions of Literature	School Library System
3/25	LLA: Science of Reading: What School Librarians Need to Know	School Library System
3/26	Learning Technology Grant: Project-Based Learning and Artificial Intelligence Academy	Model Schools
3/30	Practice, Analyze, and Write NYSSLS Physics Cluster Questions - Richard Slesinski	Professional Development



Follow us on our **Educational Support Services** Instagram Page for professional development opportunities and program highlights!





The Professional Development Listserv: PDESS



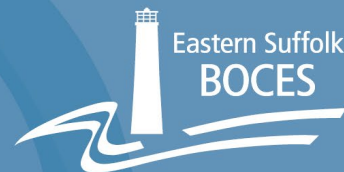
SCAN TO JOIN TODAY!

Interested in staying up to date on upcoming workshops, conferences, and events? Subscribe to the PDESS listserv today to receive the latest Professional Development opportunities from the Educational Support Services Department!




Educational Support Services

Working Together for Excellence



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