



WINTER 2026

ONTEORA

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



Grade 7 student Prem Villanueva and Grade 6 teacher Karen Hadley enjoy a game of chess together.

A DAY OF DISCOVERY:

Middle School Celebrates Community Connections

The Middle School recently hosted a lively Community Connections Day, bringing students together with volunteers from the Onteora community and school staff for a day of hands-on learning and fun. With activities ranging from cooking (crêpes and cookies—yum!) to arts and crafts, video making to movement and performance, there was truly something for everyone—and every learning style.

Students, who chose their own activities to attend, explored karate with community volunteer Sean Schenker, took part in a powerful DWI (driving while intoxicated) simulation led by School Resource Officer Tom Sharon, learned CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) awareness with Health teacher Brandon Harkin, drummed with Music teacher Marilyn Dizon, and tried improvisational acting with Board of Education member Rick Knutsen and wife Frances Knutsen. They also enjoyed yoga with Board member Jenny Jared, chess with Grade 6 teacher Karen Hadley, photography and vision board-making with School Athletic Trainer Katie Klercker, birdhouse building with Grade 6 teacher Kelly Downs and Technology teacher Doug Sanders, and candle dipping with Ben Schachter from “Candlestock” in nearby Woodstock.

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Grade 7 student Hattie Wolfe gets creative with a “paint by numbers” activity.



Message from the Superintendent

Now that we have entered the month of February, I’m beginning to look forward to spring and seeing our students spending more time outside. We used more snow days in December and January than we have in the past several years, but I’m still hopeful that we will have enough to get us through, and that Spring Break will not be reduced because of weather.

BUDGET

We have begun the annual budget process, and will share information in as many ways as possible throughout the process. All budget presentations can be found on the School Board page of our website, and can also be accessed directly from the home page.

Similar to what all of our community members have experienced, we have seen some of our costs rising significantly, including our electricity costs. Our health insurance increase is also higher than we have seen in recent years, but we are just at the beginning of the budget process, so we remain hopeful that we can continue to offset rising costs with reductions in areas that will not negatively affect our students. We also know that our legislators are working with the Governor and advocating for increases in school aid beyond the Governor’s proposal.

I will be presenting a final budget to the Board on April 7. The Board is scheduled to adopt a budget to present the community on April 21.

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This December, “Macintosh” from the Ulster County SPCA visited with Grade 4 students, who collected an impressive amount of food, supplies, and monetary donations for the shelter.

PAWS, CARDS, AND KIND HEARTS: Bennett Students Give Back to Local Animal Shelter

On December 18, Grade 4 students at Bennett Elementary School welcomed a very special guest—Macintosh, a canine resident of the Ulster County SPCA!

As part of a much-loved tradition in Adam LaFera’s and Liz Corsitto’s classes, students first established a connection with the UCSPCA by perusing its website to learn about the animals being sheltered there. They then selected a few of the pets to “adopt,” making them heartfelt holiday cards.

While enjoying Macintosh’s company, the students learned about what the shelter does. They were very curious and had lots of good questions, including *What is the biggest dog they ever had?*, *How old is Macintosh?*, *Do you have any dogs that get along with cats?* and *Do you have any snakes?* Some students even shared that their own pets were adopted from the UCSPCA.

Many of the students wanted to know how they could help. Volunteers discussed the UCSPCA’s thrift store in Saugerties, where purchases help to support the shelter. They also suggested donating blankets, stuffed animals, pet

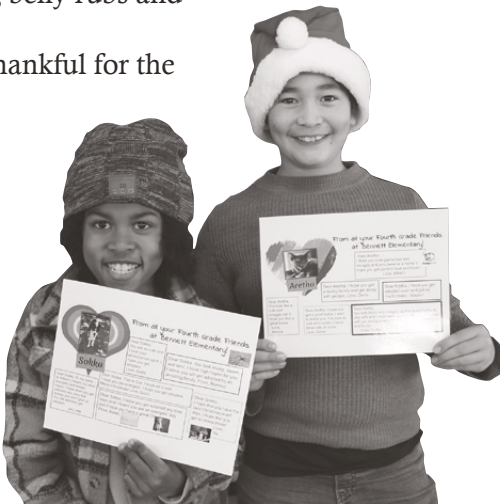
food, and other items. Young people, they learned, can even help animals in need by making dog biscuits or cat toys from household items.

Then it was time to officially present their holiday cards, along with the impressive amount of food, supplies, and monetary donations the class had collected, to the UCSPCA volunteers. In their personalized cards, students mentioned specific wishes for the pets, reflecting the likes and dislikes they had read about in the animals’ profiles. Some cards expressed the hope that the pet would be welcomed into a wonderful, loving, forever home, enjoy plenty of space to play, or receive lots of satisfying belly rubs and head pats.

Macintosh and his friends at the shelter were no doubt extremely thankful for the thoughtfulness and generosity of the students!



“Macintosh” meets and greets some of the Bennett Grade 4 students during her visit to the school.



Bennett Grade 4 students Xavi Zarcone (left) and Romeo D’Ambrosia pose with the holiday cards they created with their classmates for feline and canine residents of the Ulster County SPCA.

ONTEORA SEEKING PROPOSALS FROM COMMUNITY-BASED ORGANIZATIONS FOR UNIVERSAL PRE-KINDERGARTEN

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS: The Onteora Central School District is now seeking proposals from Community-Based Organizations interested in hosting the Universal Pre-Kindergarten program for Onteora students for the 2026-2027 school year.

The District’s Board of Education has approved plans to offer Universal Pre-Kindergarten through Community-Based Organizations (CBOs), pending State approval, beginning in the 2026-2027 school year. The program will follow the Onteora school calendar and will run for 180 days. A full-day option will provide at least 5 hours per day, and a half-day option will provide at least 2.5 hours per day.

Proposals will be accepted through April 17, 2026 at 2 PM at the Onteora District Office. All proposals will be evaluated by a committee appointed by the Superintendent of Schools, and contracts will be awarded based on the agency’s ability to fulfill the goals and curriculum guidelines set forth by the Board of Education as well as New York State regulations and the New York State Education Department learning standards.

Full criteria for evaluations of proposals can be found on our website at: <https://www.onteora.k12.ny.us/departments/pupil-services/universal-pre-kindergarten-program/requests-for-proposals>.

LEARNING THROUGH THE SEASONS:

Winter Wonders and Year-Round Discovery for Pre-K Students

The cold, wintry weather has opened up exciting opportunities for fun and learning at Woodland Playhouse! Students spend time outdoors every day, collaborating to build snowmen, explore ice, and take part in gross motor activities. Teachers also help connect outdoor experiences with indoor learning. Recently, students froze a variety of objects by leaving them outside overnight—and even turned watercolor paint into ice cubes. Painting with the frozen colors created a multisensory art experience, engaging students through touch while strengthening their fine motor skills.

At First Steps Early Childhood Education Center, Pre-K have been learning their way through the seasons as well. In October, they enjoyed pumpkins and observed the changing fall leaves. In November, students



focused on gratitude, learning about themselves, as well as their families and traditions, while continuing to explore nature through walks, songs, and creative projects.

In December, students welcomed winter by observing the first snowfall, learning that every snowflake is unique, and then creating snowflakes and snowman “traps” inspired by the book *How to Catch a Snowman* by Adam Wallace. This January, the young learners delved into the topic of Arctic animals and how they survive in cold climates.

Do you want to build a snowman? Henryk Lovelace Amenta and Emmitt Davis, Onteora students enrolled in the Pre-K program at Woodland Playhouse, worked diligently with their peers and teachers to roll snow into giant balls and make snowman bodies.



Mia Suozzo, a Pre-K student at First Steps Early Childhood Education Center, practices the number “2” in her own unique way.



Universal Pre-Kindergarten Registration is Open!

It’s time to register your child for Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK)! In order to be eligible for the program, children must be four years of age on or before December 1, 2026.

The District’s online UPK registration system is now open. To register online, parents or guardians should go to www.onteora.k12.ny.us and click on “Registration & Displaced Families.” The link for online registration is in the middle of the page. Please be sure to choose the 2026-2027 school year.

Once your child is completely registered, their name will be placed in the lottery, which will be held in May.

If you have any questions, you may contact Margaret Harkin, Secretary to the Director of Pupil Personnel Services, at mharkin@onteora.k12.ny.us.



Register for September 2026 Kindergarten Now!

The District’s online registration system for Kindergarten is now open for September 2026. Visit www.onteora.k12.ny.us/registration, and please be sure to choose the 2026-2027 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 1, 2026.

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.

A DAY OF DISCOVERY: Middle School Celebrates Community Connections

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As a high-energy finale, students were treated to an exciting BMX (bicycle motocross) performance that had the crowd cheering. Community Connections Day was a meaningful celebration of learning, creativity, and the strong community partnerships that make Onteora such a special place.

“Days like this remind us that learning does not live only in textbooks. It lives in our community, in shared experiences, and in the generosity of the people who give their time and talents to our students,” said Middle School Interim Principal Dr. Don Solimene. “I am deeply grateful to our staff, volunteers, and community partners whose commitment made this day possible and made our students feel seen, supported, and inspired.”



Grade 6 student Andrew Martin attempts to pick up a coin while wearing DWI (driving while intoxicated) simulation goggles.



Grade 6 student Julian Dunnege practices karate techniques with a community volunteer, while classmate Connor Peer and Grade 8 student Keagan Baloy await their turn.



Middle School students practice CPR techniques during a demonstration activity led by Health teacher Brandon Harkin.

EXTRA! EXTRA!

Grade 5 Students Publish the News!

GRADE 5 STUDENTS IN KARLI DENTER’S ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS (ELA) CLASS AT WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY SCHOOL were hard at work this winter developing their journalism skills—and to cap off the learning unit, they created their very own newspaper, *What’s Up, Woodstock?*

During their writing block, students learned the essentials of reporting, including the Five W’s—who, what, when, where, and why—which help journalists clearly convey the most important facts of any story. They also practiced organizing their articles using the inverted pyramid, a structure that places the most crucial information at the top of an article, followed by supporting details, and ending with additional, less essential facts.

To build these skills, the class studied professional news articles, as well as Onteora High School’s newspaper, *The Talon*. They also practiced editing and paraphrasing—key tools not only for journalism but also for strong writing in every subject.



Lucas Hochman (left) and Conrad Nasello wrote the front-page articles.



Marlowe Peterman wrote about how Therapy Dog Gidget helps with social skills.



Willa Hernandez wrote about a special Kindergarten craft project.

High School Science Olympiad Team Shines at Invitational Competition

Congratulations to the Onteora High School Science Olympiad team for its strong showing at the invitational competition held at The Mount Academy in Esopus on January 2. The team’s hard work and dedication were on full display as students competed in challenging, college-level events across science, technology, and engineering domains.

These budding engineers and scientists have been preparing for competition since September. Students competed in 23 rigorous events that extended well beyond the New York State Science curriculum and mirrored collegiate-level expectations. Events included in-depth study challenges, engineering builds such as robots and helicopters, hands-on lab experiments, and combined lab-study competitions.

Well done to the following team members on their impressive performances: Jenny Albright, Fern Bernhardt-Waldo, Lahnna Bernhardt-Waldo, Shaun Bonan, Shelby Buryk, Erik Chazik, Charles Denton, Finnegan Douma, Esme Drucquer, Fenwick Fredericks, Rama Gabriel, Ruby Gahagan, Connor Gierloff, Saige Gierloff, Fiona Green, Foster Knoche, Walker Melville, Madison Murphy, Dylan Pace, Jesper Peacock, Jake Slater, Leo Sorbellini, Indi Soter, and Nico Stackpole. Kudos are also due to Advisors Bryan Keenan and Doug Sanders!



High School students Fenwick Fredericks (left) and Walker Melville test the electric vehicle they worked on for the Science Olympiad invitational competition.

Medalists included:

- Jenny Albright and Foster Knoche
“Disease Detectives”
- Walker Melville and Jake Slater
“Write It–Do It”
- Finnegan Douma
“Robot Tours”
- Ruby Gahagan and Jenny Albright
“Designer Genes”

Additional notable results included:

- Fern Bernhardt-Waldo and Lahnna Bernhardt-Waldo
7th place, “Write It–Do It”
- Rama Gabriel and Madison Murphy
7th place, “Helicopters”

Finally, the budding reporters put their newly acquired skills into action. Each student visited one of the school’s other classrooms to observe a lesson and conduct one-on-one interviews with teachers and students. They reported on a wide range of activities, including Spanish lessons, gym classes, parade preparations, and even a Hebrew-writing lesson being conducted by a community parent! Lucas Hochman and Conrad Nasello explored current happenings around their school for front-page features, and Marlowe Peterman delved into how School Counselor Candice Sosler and Gidget, one of the District’s beloved therapy dogs, help students with social skills.

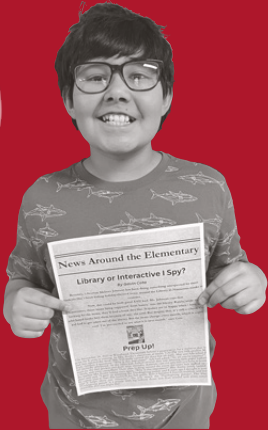
One thing is clear: these young journalists are ready to make headlines!



Woodstock Grade 5 students Iris Harrigfeld (left) and Marlowe Peterman, who studied journalism skills with their ELA teacher, Karli Denter, interview Grade 2 teacher Molly Heekin.



Lyla Scott (left) wrote about a Kindergarten class activity, and Ada Speck wrote a feature about the interactive library.



Gavin Cota also chose to do a feature on the school’s interactive library.



Iris Harrigfeld wrote an article on a Hebrew-writing lesson for Grade 2 students that was conducted by a community parent.





ONTEORA HIGH SCHOOL EARNS GOLD STATUS ON THE 2025 AP SCHOOL HONOR ROLL

CONGRATULATIONS TO ONTEORA HIGH SCHOOL, which was named to the 2025 Advanced Placement (AP) School Honor Roll. Onteora High School is a GOLD member of the Honor Roll.

The AP School Honor Roll recognizes schools whose AP programs are delivering results and broadening participation for students. Schools can earn the Honor Roll recognition annually based on criteria that reflect a commitment to increasing their college-going culture, providing opportunities for students to earn college credits, and maximizing college readiness. The AP School Honor Roll offers four levels of distinction: Bronze, Silver, Gold, and Platinum.

Onteora High School had 65 percent of seniors who took at least one AP exam during high school, 52 percent of seniors scoring a three or higher on at least one AP exam, and 18 percent of seniors who took five or more AP exams!

High School Principal Lance Edelman remarked, "Being named to the AP Honor Roll as a Gold Member is an achievement of which we are incredibly proud. This recognition reflects the hard work and dedication of our students, who continue to take full advantage of the rigorous academic opportunities available to them."

College Board's Advanced Placement Program enables students to pursue college-level studies—with the opportunity to earn college credit, advanced placement, or both—while still in high school. Through AP courses in 40 subjects, each culminating in a challenging exam, students learn to think critically, construct solid arguments, and see many sides of an issue—skills that prepare them for college and beyond.

FUTURE BUSINESS LEADERS SHINE:

Onteora DECA is Successful at Regionals



We are incredibly proud of our Onteora DECA students for their outstanding performances at the Regional Competition held on January 9 at Hudson Valley Community College. DECA is an international organization that aims to prepare emerging leaders and entrepreneurs for careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management.

Our students' professionalism, preparation, and dedication were on full display. They competed against schools from across the region by completing a rigorous 100-question exam and presenting solutions to a challenging business scenario before a judge in the areas of Business Administration, Marketing, Finance, and Hospitality.

Special congratulations to Grade 11 student Anthony Christofora, who placed third in the Business Finance event. We'd also like to recognize seniors Gemma Holstein and Alex Young, who both placed in the top six teams overall in Business Law and Ethics and will advance to the State competition in March.

Great job, DECA students!

Message from the Superintendent

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BOARD GOALS

The Board has worked diligently to establish their goals, and the goals are intended to be in place for this school year, and next school year. This allows for a more consistent focus on specific areas. Please check the Board webpage to review the goals. They focus on: 1. Health and Safety related to Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Technology; 2. Culture and Climate; 3. In-Person Learning; 4. Academics; and 5. Fiscal Planning and Oversight.

KINDERGARTEN REGISTRATION

It is time to register for Kindergarten in September! This is the time of year when we can start to plan for our incoming cohort of students, and we are excited to welcome them and their families into our schools. If you or anyone you know in the District has an incoming kindergartener, please encourage them to register for the 2026-2027 school year!

BOARD MEETINGS

Our community members are always invited to attend Board meetings, and are welcome to speak at the Public Be Heard section of the agenda. In addition, Board meetings are also live-streamed and recorded for those who may want to watch from their home, and for those who may not be able to watch in real time but would like to see the work of the Board.

Victoria McLaren
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

An Update on the Former West Hurley Elementary School Building

We're happy to share with the community that the sale of the former West Hurley Elementary School building has officially been completed.

Since the contract to sell the West Hurley property was executed in 2017, the Board has been working through a long and often complicated process with the buyer and town to bring this to the finish line and complete the final steps for closing the sale. Much of that work involved regulatory reviews and approvals outside the District's direct control, and while progress wasn't always visible due to confidentiality, the Board remained committed to seeing this property move forward in a responsible way.

Thank you to our neighbors for their patience. With the sale now finalized, the building will be repurposed as housing—something our community truly needs—and will be added to the tax rolls, ultimately contributing to the local tax base for the benefit of everyone who lives here. We are so pleased to see this property enter its next chapter and begin serving the community again.

Interested in Becoming a Board Member?

The process to run for a school board seat in 2026 has begun. If you care deeply about public education and want to contribute your skills and perspective, consider running for one of the three seats that will be up for election on May 19. Each seat carries a three-year term, beginning on July 1, 2026, and ending on June 30, 2029.

To appear on the ballot, candidates must personally submit a petition with original signatures from 54 eligible Onteora Central School District residents. Petitions must be submitted to the District Clerk no later than Monday, April 20, at 5 PM. Candidates are also required to submit biographical information for publication in the Budget Newsletter this spring.

Complete details and requirements, along with information from the New York State School Boards Association about the roles and responsibilities of a school board member, are available on the District's website at www.onteora.k12.ny.us.

Budget Development has Started

Budget planning for the 2026-2027 school year is underway. Over the coming months, budget proposals will be discussed and refined at Board of Education meetings and an official budget proposal from the superintendent is expected to be presented to the Board

for approval on April 7.

Recent budget discussions at the February Board meeting included a review of what a "rollover budget" would look like. This presentation provided an "apples-to-apples" comparison, showing how current costs and inflation would impact the budget if existing programs and services were carried forward with no changes into next year. Upcoming discussions will focus on refinements based on current priorities, with the goal of supporting the District's commitment to support the robust educational programs offered to students in the most fiscally responsible way possible.

It is important to understand that the budget process is still in its early stages, as several key factors—including the tax levy limit ("tax cap") and State Aid—have not yet been finalized. Budget discussions will continue at upcoming Board meetings until the Board adopts a proposed budget on April 21. The proposed budget will then be presented to the community for a public vote on May 19.

A budget calendar is available on the Business Office page of the District website under "2026-2027 Budget Presentations." Community members are encouraged to stay engaged, and all Board meetings are available to watch on the District's YouTube channel, @OnteoraCSD.

Capital Project Update

We received an update on the voter-approved Capital Project from our construction manager from Schoolhouse Construction Services, LLC at the January Board meeting. He provided an update on the planning and an anticipated timeline for next steps, including the recommendation to approach the planned work in two phases, which allows them the most flexibility for efficient planning.

We were excited to learn that Phase One began in January and is currently in the design phase, which includes working closely with District staff to assess programmatic and operational needs so the final design aligns with instructional, safety, and facility priorities. Submission to the New York State Education Department (NYSED) for approval is expected this September, with the project anticipated to go out to bid in December 2026. Phase One construction would span across two summers and be completed by September 2028. Phase Two of the voter-approved project would follow.

Stay Connected

There are so many ways to connect with us and hear what has been happening in Onteora Central School District. You may email your questions or comments to us at OnteoraBOE@onteora.k12.ny.us, sign up for our monthly Board Briefs, and follow the District on Facebook and Instagram @OnteoraCSD.



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](mailto: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.

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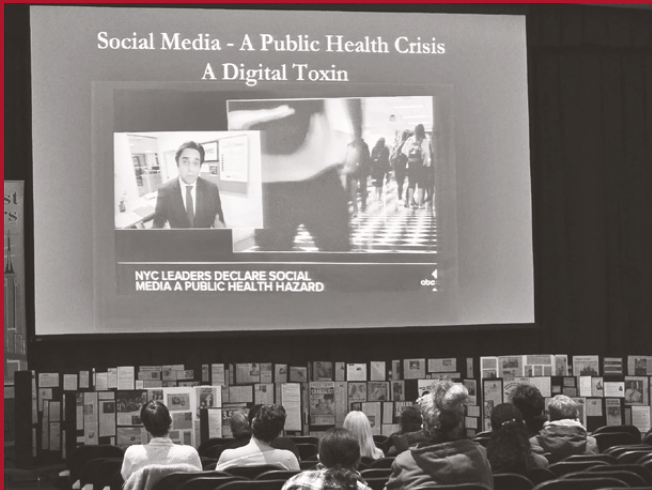
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EMPOWERING FAMILIES THROUGH CYBER AWARENESS AND DIGITAL SAFETY

THE ONTEORA CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT HOSTED A CYBER AWARENESS WORKSHOP for parents and guardians of students in Kindergarten through Grade 12 on January 8. The workshop featured guest speaker Thomas Grimes, who has had extensive experience educating students and families about online behavior and the real-world consequences of digital choices. Earlier that day, Mr. Grimes had worked directly with students in Grades 6-8.



Guest speaker Thomas Grimes discusses the importance of cyber awareness and online behavior safety with students in Grades 6-8 during a visit on January 8.



Parents, guardians, community members, and staff gather to discuss social media safety for students with guest speaker Thomas Grimes during a District workshop held on January 8.

The community session highlighted current online trends and risks, shared practical steps families could take at home to promote online safety, and addressed such topics as how to recognize and respond to cyberbullying and the importance of making responsible choices as digital citizens. At the end of the event, participants were invited to ask questions.

The workshop provided a valuable opportunity for families to begin meaningful conversations at home. These discussions help reinforce school expectations and support safer online habits.

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

Director of Pupil Personnel Services

Carol Grima 845-657-3320

Interim Assistant Director of Pupil Personnel Services

Ariel McGrath

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

Raymond Clinton 845-657-2537

Director of Food Services

Christine Downs 845-657-6383 x2181

Director of Facilities

Kyle Harjes 845-657-6384

HIGH SCHOOL • 845-657-2373

Principal, Lance Edelman
Assistant Principal, Sarah Turk

MIDDLE SCHOOL • 845-657-2373

Interim Principal, Dr. Don Solimene

BENNETT ELEMENTARY • 845-657-2354

Principal, Gabriel Buono

WOODSTOCK ELEMENTARY • 845-679-2316

Principal, Scott Richards

District Clerk

Amanda Gates 845-657-6383 x1030