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Erie 1 BOCES
JOURNAL

Winter | 2026



BOCES

Unlocked

Turning Data into Action
Pg. 6

Your
School is
Being
(Ethically)
Hacked!

Pg.
8-9

Creating
250 Miles
of
Budget
Mailers

Pg.
10

Working
Together
to Keep
Students
Safe

Pg.
11

Focus on STARS

STARS Offers Solutions
for Substitute Shortages
Pg. 12



Erie 1 BOCES

AROUND E1B



The West Regional Bilingual Education Resource Network (RBERN West) of Erie 1 BOCES hosted a powerful day of learning and dialogue focused on the legacy of Indigenous boarding schools and culturally responsive-sustaining education at the Castellani Art Museum at Niagara University. During the event, educators got a tour of an Indigenous art exhibit on display at the museum.

Erie 1 BOCES is proud to be one of the founders and backbone organization for the Supporting Mental Health by Advocating for Resources Together (SMART) Collaborative.



The SMART Mental Health Impact Awards shone a spotlight on outstanding individuals and organizations dedicated to improving youth mental health across Western New York. This year's honorees from left to right: Marie Sly, Erie County Office of Mental Health; Kayla DeLeon, Hamburg CSD; Mental Health Advocates of Western New York (MHAWNY); Anne Nowak, Sweet Home CSD; Dr. Anna Ball, University at Buffalo School of Social Work; Mike Cornell, Hilbert College.



Ross Szabo, nationally recognized mental health advocate and author, addressed attendees at the SMART Youth Mental Health Summit in November at the Buffalo Convention Center. The event gathered nearly 300 participants for sessions on resilience, online safety, and grief support.



Hundreds of WNY students attended the inaugural "Unleash Your Greatness" event, a two-day conference exploring leadership and student voice. Students walked away empowered, inspired, and ready to lead with confidence. Hosted by Erie 1 BOCES in partnership with nationally recognized resiliency leader Duncan Kirkwood.



More than 180 high school theatre students from nine districts gathered at Erie 1 BOCES for the inaugural Theatre Jam. This day-long event featuring hands-on workshops in audition techniques, stage combat, costume design, and choreography was hosted by Erie 1 BOCES Arts in Education in partnership with Second Generation Theatre.

Advancing Education Through Collaboration

Dear Erie 1 BOCES Community,

Welcome to the winter edition of the E1B Journal. This issue highlights how Erie 1 BOCES continues to serve as a regional convener, bringing school districts together to address shared challenges, elevate student voice, and scale effective practices across Western New York. The stories and examples featured reflect the strength and impact of our collective.

We are particularly excited to share progress on the expansion of our Exceptional Education school. This new Instructional Services campus, designed to serve students of all abilities, marks a significant investment in our region's future. After a well-attended community groundbreaking, construction is underway on this 219,000-square-foot campus, which will serve more than 500 students and is expected to open in 2027. Updates are available at e1b.org/expansion.

Throughout this edition, you will see the values that guide our work and the intentional choices we make each day on behalf of students, educators, and communities. At Erie 1 BOCES, we believe that meaningful progress in local education comes from strategic actions and strong relationships. Working together, through purpose-driven collaboration and a shared commitment to growth, we will continue shaping an educational future that is built to serve students for generations to come.

With appreciation for your partnership,



Michael Capuana, Ed.D.
District Superintendent/CEO
Erie 1 BOCES



Erie 1 BOCES leaders cut the ribbon to the new eSports Arena at the Calspan CTE Center.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

- 4-5** A Place For You: Erie 1 BOCES Breaks Ground on New Instructional Services Campus
- 6** Turning Data into Action
- 7** Powering Education
- 8-9** Your School is Being (Ethically) Hacked!
- 10** Creating 250 Miles of Budget Mailers
- 11** Working Together to Keep Students Safe
- 12** STARS Offers Solutions for Substitute Shortages
- 13** Online Parent Portal Streamlines Home School Monitoring Process for Districts
- 14** Erie 1 BOCES Celebrates Increase in State Funding to CTE Instructors
- 15** Facilities Team Supports Career-Ready Learning
- 16** Board of Education Welcomes Ex Officio Student Members



An Erie 1 BOCES Licensed Practical Nursing student celebrates graduation with her instructor.





Erie 1 BOCES leaders, project partners, and elected officials smile for a photo during the September 19th groundbreaking ceremony.

A Place For You:

Erie 1 BOCES Breaks Ground on New Instructional Services Campus Specially Designed for Students of All Abilities

On Friday, September 19, Erie 1 BOCES hosted a special groundbreaking ceremony at 2911 Walden Avenue in Depew for its new Instructional Services campus.

The beautiful morning event brought together Erie 1 BOCES staff, component district leaders, special education families, elected officials, and our many valued business partners to celebrate the beginning of construction for a school specially designed for students of all abilities.

“We are committing to you, our families, our community, that we are going to build the most incredible place where your children have a place to feel safe, a place to belong, and most importantly, a place to thrive,” said Anedda Trautman, Erie 1 BOCES assistant superintendent of Instructional Services.

The 219,000-square-foot campus will serve more than 500 students and is designed to meet the region’s growing need for special education services. Referrals to Erie 1 BOCES Special Education programs have increased by 14% in the past decade, and this new school will provide expanded opportunities for learning, growth, and community partnership.

“
*The true
impact
of this
campus
will not be
measured
in numbers,
but in lives
changed.*

- Erie 1 BOCES District Superintendent/CEO
Michael Capuana, Ed.D.

"This new Instructional Services school represents a thoughtful, forward-looking response to a real and growing need," said Michael Capuana, Ed.D.

"Every inch of this campus is being built intentionally with research-backed designs that will host six interior courtyards for safe play, and three outdoor playfields, including a one-mile walking path," shared Trautman.

During the groundbreaking ceremony, Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz surprised Erie 1 BOCES with a formal Erie County proclamation, to proclaim September 19th, 2025, Erie 1 BOCES Day!

"On behalf of Erie County, I want to congratulate and thank the Erie 1 BOCES team for the work you do and on behalf of Erie County, I am really proud to have signed, with my deputy county executive, a proclamation to officially declare today as Erie 1 BOCES day in Erie County," said Poloncarz.

The \$65 million project, supported by all 19 component districts in partnership with Benderson Development, will eventually house Special Education, Alternative Education, Career and Technical Education programs, along with higher education and community partnerships. It is expected to open new opportunities for students and educators across Western New York.

"What you all have accomplished under BOCES in the last 75 years will continue to transform on this campus, with this project," said New York State WNY Regional Director Bonnie Lockwood.

"Today we are not only breaking ground on a new campus, but we are also laying the foundation for generations of students across Western New York that will call this their school, their place for many years to come," continued Capuana.

The new campus is expected to open in September of 2027.



Erie 1 BOCES District Superintendent/CEO Michael Capuana, Ed.D. and Assistant Superintendent Anedda Trautman with Deputy County Executive Lisa Chimera and Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz.



Erie 1 BOCES Board of Education members and District Superintendent/CEO Michael Capuana, Ed.D.



For updated information on this project, please visit www.e1b.org/expansion



Erie County Executive Mark Poloncarz addresses the crowd at the groundbreaking ceremony.





Turning Data into Action:

How the WNYRIC Data Warehouse Supports Schools Across Western New York

At the Erie 1 BOCES Education Campus in West Seneca, the Western New York Regional Information Center (WNYRIC) Data Warehouse team knows it all! Each year they collect millions of data points from school districts across the state and transform them into reports for New York State and internal district use. Currently, the WNYRIC Data Warehouse serves 108 districts across seven counties in Western New York, 15 charter schools, Buffalo Public Schools, Rochester Public Schools, and provides support to other regional information centers statewide by sharing best practices for data collection.

One of the primary functions of the WNYRIC Data Warehouse is supporting districts with data reporting. Schools must submit a wide range of data to meet state and federal requirements. This data includes enrollment, graduation rates, free lunch eligibility, and counts of English Language Learners (ELLs)- among many others. These data points influence school funding and program support. Timely and accurate reporting ensures essential resources continue to flow to schools.

Another essential component of the Data Warehouse is assessment data. The team collects test scores and provides reporting tools that allow districts to track student performance over time. Districts can use this data to drive decision making around curriculum and instruction as well as identify points of success and areas for improvement. With the vast data collection the WNYRIC has, districts have access to reports that compare their assessment performance with other districts of similar size and student population to see how they are measuring up. Data Warehouse

Supervisor Jill Schottman explained, “While data doesn’t tell the whole story, it is non-emotional and concrete,” and added, “it can lay the foundation for informed decisions that improve student outcomes.”

The WNYRIC team does more than collect and store data—they help districts understand and use it effectively. Over the past year, they have expanded teacher access to data, enabling educators to incorporate insights into curriculum planning and instruction. They also host numerous training sessions to ensure districts maximize the value of their data for both state reporting and internal decision-making. Schottman emphasized, “Our goal is to make data accessible and useful. When teachers and administrators can see the story behind the numbers, they can take action that truly matters.” Recent initiatives include opening access for teachers to pull assessment reports, launching new district-level reports for enrollment tracking and demographic analysis, and hosting ongoing training sessions to promote data-driven practices. The WNYRIC Data Warehouse continues to innovate, finding new ways to integrate data into everyday school operations and decision-making.



Powering Education

In 2026, technology is woven into every aspect of the educational experience. Chalkboards have been replaced by smartboards, pen and paper swapped for tablets and laptops, and even lunch payments are now made with a swipe card. These innovations have transformed the educational landscape. As these changes unfolded, the Western New York Regional Information Center (WNYRIC), a division of Erie 1 BOCES, has remained dedicated to ensuring schools have the power to innovate and integrate new technology.

WNYRIC provides schools with a wide range of technology solutions, from visitor sign-in systems to training teachers on the latest educational apps. In total, WNYRIC offers more than 1,500 services and connects schools with technology vendors worldwide, offering the best, safest, and most cost-effective options. Behind this work is a team of more than 360 technology experts serving districts across the region. These professionals install and maintain internet and Wi-Fi, host and secure servers, and manage data and software applications. They also assist districts in procuring laptops, screens, printers, and phones, and some districts even have WNYRIC field techs working alongside their teachers and students doing day-to-day tech support. The Service Desk receives tens of thousands of calls and emails annually to help support everything from password resets to resolving larger issues and outages. “The depth of knowledge within our teams is extraordinary,” said WNYRIC Network Manager Lynn Reed. “From infrastructure to instructional technology, WNYRIC brings unmatched knowledge and commitment to every district we serve.” Powering technology for 108 school districts is no small feat.

Where WNYRIC truly shines is in cooperative purchasing and resource sharing. By negotiating contracts and licenses regionally, WNYRIC secures lower rates than individual districts could achieve on their own. Districts also benefit from the immense wealth of knowledge housed at WNYRIC, allowing school personnel to focus on students while WNYRIC handles the tech. Dave Kajdasz, WNYRIC associate director of security and networking remarked, “...technology evolves rapidly, and WNYRIC stays ahead of the curve. It’s our ability to adapt and

innovate that ensures schools have cutting-edge solutions that meet today’s needs and anticipate tomorrow’s challenges.” This pooling of resources ensures greater access to technology for students and teachers, driving equity across districts and preparing learners to leverage the tools of tomorrow.



“From infrastructure to instructional technology, WNYRIC brings unmatched knowledge and commitment to every district we serve.”
- WNYRIC Network Manager
Lynn Reed





Your School is Being (Ethically) Hacked!

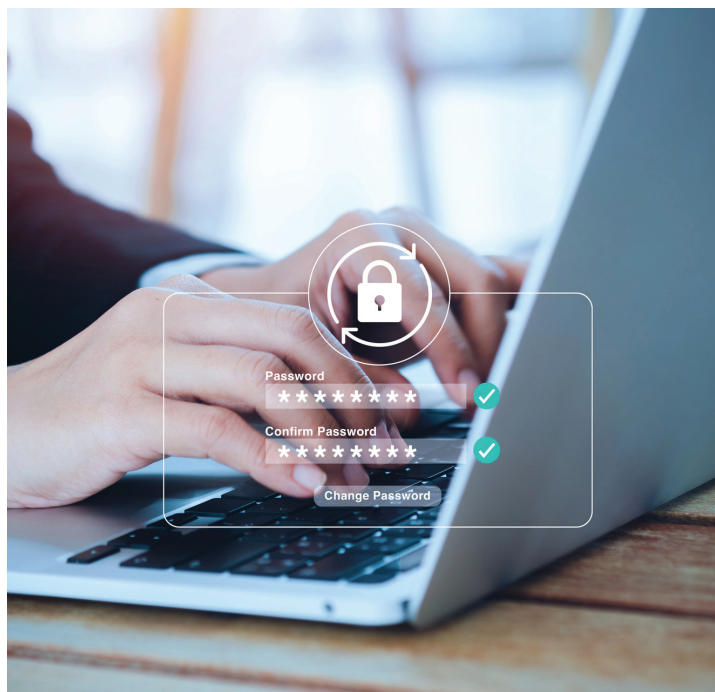


Rich Drzaz

Schools are places to learn, connect, and grow—a space for good things to happen. Unfortunately, to cybercriminals, they're also prime targets for attacks. One way schools can stay cyber safe? Voluntarily get hacked.

It's called ethical hacking: when a cybersecurity expert, the good guy, tries to infiltrate a school's network. Known as a penetration test, or "pen test," it's essentially someone spending time trying to crack passwords, access sensitive data, or uncover software vulnerabilities that could let a real hacker in.

At WNYRIC, that expert is Rich Drzaz, an 11-year cybersecurity veteran. Drzaz's journey began when he learned about elderly people being scammed online. "It frustrated me," he recalled. "They were already vulnerable, and I wanted to do something about it." His love of video games made hacking feel like a fun challenge, and he started teaching himself ethical hacking techniques. From open-source intelligence to advanced certifications, Drzaz immersed himself in learning how operating systems, networks, and applications work and where they break.



"I'm trying to capture email addresses, crack a password, or access data that should be locked down."
- Data Protection, Security, Compliance Specialist, Rich Drzaz

One milestone was a grueling 48-hour hacker's exam: 24 hours of hacking followed by a detailed report. "It was as much a time management challenge as it was a hacking one," Drzaz said, but he passed and earned an Offensive Security Experienced Penetration Tester (OSEP) certification. This advanced credential validates his skills in "penetration testing, focusing on evasion techniques and real-world adversarial tactics," according to OffSec.com.

So why are schools such attractive targets? Drzaz points to two main reasons. First, schools rely heavily on technology. If ransomware freezes their systems, districts often pay up to resume operations. Cyber insurance, meant to ease financial burdens, ironically makes schools more appealing because it ensures funds are available to pay ransoms. Second, schools have people, and people fall for scams. Hackers exploit this by crafting phishing emails that mimic superintendents or business officials, tricking staff into sharing financial or personal data.

A typical pen test starts with a vulnerability scan to identify weak spots. Then Drzaz gets to work. "I'm trying to capture email addresses, crack a password, or access data that should be locked down," he explained. And what's a good day for him? "When I fail. If I can't get in, that means the district is doing all the right things." If he does succeed, Drzaz provides detailed reports and helps

districts strengthen defenses, even offering guidance and resources for staff conversations about cybersecurity.

When he's off the clock, Drzaz still hacks ethically. He enjoys "bug bounties," online challenges where companies and organizations invite hackers to find vulnerabilities within their own systems. "It's practice," he said, "and it keeps me sharp on the latest tricks attackers use and the latest defenses to stop them."



Rich Drzaz's Tech Tips



Don't store your passwords in your browser

"The easiest way into a system is through saved passwords," Drzaz warned. Avoid storing passwords online or on work computers, especially in shared spaces. It's like leaving your house key under the welcome mat!



Use Multi-Factor Authentication (MFA)

Yes, it takes a few extra seconds, but MFA adds that extra layer of security that makes all the difference.

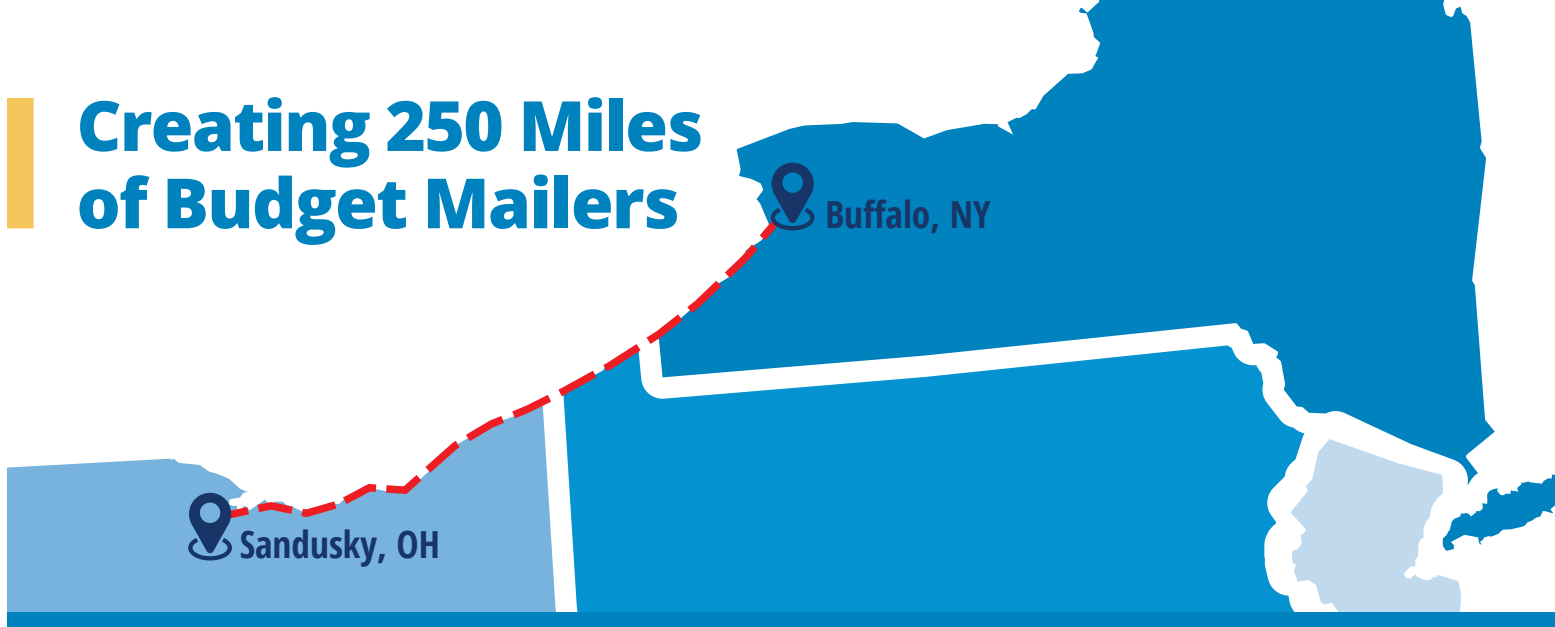


Utilize a password manager

The best passwords are complex and hard to remember. A password manager lets you keep one strong primary password while generating unique, complicated passwords for every account.



Creating 250 Miles of Budget Mailers



Senior Print Technician Eric Christ and Printing Technician David Duffy work as a team to process 250 miles of budget information.

“If you were to place each 11-inch sheet of paper end-to-end, you could stroll from Buffalo, New York, straight to Sandusky, Ohio, on a paper trail of school budget transparency.”
- **Coordinator of Communications Services**
Michelle Rozanski

At the start of 2025, Erie 1 BOCES Communication Services set out to solve a yearly challenge familiar to every school district in New York State: the race to get budget information printed, mailed, and into residents’ hands within an incredibly tight two-week legal window. With nearly every school district on the same schedule, the pressure was real. The goal was simple: help districts stay compliant, stay organized, and avoid unnecessary expenses.

The effort kicked off in January 2025 with a full education session designed to demystify the budget mailing process. Led by Michelle Rozanski, coordinator of Communications Services, the

team pulled together a cross-department collaboration involving public relations, graphics, and print. Out of that partnership came a clear, accessible collection of best practices presented through a webinar, a refreshed webpage, and a suite of supporting documents—all built to help district teams understand what must be mailed, when it must be mailed, and how to do it without scrambling.

Behind the scenes, the team worked to make the process more intuitive and less stressful. Districts received guidance on organizing content, tips informed by legislative research, frequent email reminders, and clarity on what is and isn’t required by law—like the surprising fact that districts do not have to print board candidate bios. Tools such as downloadable templates, planning aids, and streamlined instructions for submitting materials helped keep everyone aligned. When questions arose, districts had a clear list of who to contact at each step, from design to printing to shipping.

By May, the results spoke for themselves. An impressive 90% of partnering districts submitted print-ready budget mailers within the recommended timeframe, a return to pre-COVID production speed that helped keep communities informed. Communication Services’ Print Shop handled an astonishing volume of work, about 250 miles of paper in just a few short weeks.

“If you were to place each 11-inch sheet of paper end-to-end, you could stroll from Buffalo, New York, straight to Sandusky, Ohio, on a paper trail of school budget transparency,” said Rozanski. “What began as an effort to help us all meet a statewide deadline has grown into a collaborative process—one we’re refining together to strengthen communication and build confidence across Western New York.”

The 2026 Budget Mailer Regional Calendar is now available on Erie 1 BOCES’ website, guiding another season of smooth, successful planning for the benefit of our communities.



Visit e1b.org/budgetmailer to access the information.

Working Together to Keep Students Safe

School districts across the country have implemented the Sandy Hook Promise (SHP) Say Something program to train students in grades 4-12, educators, and school communities to recognize the warning signs of potential violence, self-harm, and other concerning or unsafe behaviors – and to take action immediately.

Communities are taught how to identify risks, take them seriously, and either tell a trusted adult or take advantage of the safe and confidential reporting options available through the accompanying Say Something Anonymous Reporting System (ARS), an accessible reporting technology that allows students and adults to submit reports via a mobile app, text message, phone hotline, or web portal. Thanks to the generosity of SHP donors, this program is offered to districts at no cost.

“This proven prevention program gives communities a proactive, structured way to address bullying, cyberbullying, mental distress, as well as potential threats of school violence,” shared Erie 1 BOCES Senior Health & Safety Analyst Kevin Burd. “SHP’s National Crisis Center is always open – at night, on weekends, and throughout all school breaks – to connect young people to trained crisis counselors who respond within seconds.”

No warning sign goes unnoticed

Maintaining the safety of students and school communities requires timely information and an effective reporting structure that empowers individuals with multiple ways to speak up.

“We always encourage students to report to a trusted adult first. If they don’t feel comfortable doing that, they can use the tip line,” explained director of school culture for Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda School District Dina Ferraraccio. “Bringing the Say Something ARS to Ken-Ton has helped to remove stigma and barriers to reporting, allowing students, families, and staff to share concerns safely while reinforcing the district’s commitment to structures that prioritize student safety.”

A growing regional impact

Erie 1 BOCES first introduced the Say Something ARS to districts in the fall of 2024. Since then, 11 districts have begun implementing the program in their schools. To support a regional approach to student safety, Erie 1 BOCES hosted an impactful information session earlier this fall at the Education Campus.



(left to right) Dina Ferraraccio, director of school culture for Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda School District; Lori Hamula, director, partner success, Sandy Hook Promise; Holli Clark, customer success manager, Sandy Hook Promise; JC Montroy, assistant principal, athletic director, and Dignity Act coordinator at Oakfield-Alabama Central School District.



Dina Ferraraccio, director of School Culture, Kenmore-Town of Tonawanda School District, offers insight into the SHP Say Something ARS at the 2025 Sunrise Seminar.

“It’s important to keep the conversation going,” explained Burd. “One of our goals is to offer districts a forum where they can learn more, ask questions, and share best practices.”

Assistant Principal, Athletic Director, and Dignity Act Coordinator at Oakfield-Alabama Central School District JC Montroy, highlighted why collaboration is so essential, “We know that our students participate in the online social media community and that they are connected across districts in more ways than ever,” explained Montroy. “As a school administrator I truly believe in our efforts to create a regional environment where all students are aware of the Say Something ARS and reach out whenever there is a student in crisis.”



JC Montroy, assistant principal, athletic director, and Dignity Act coordinator at Oakfield-Alabama Central School District, shares his perspectives on implementing the SHP Say Something ARS.



Sandy Hook Promise was founded to protect America’s children from gun violence in honor of the precious lives that were taken at Sandy Hook Elementary School.



Nationwide Numbers: SHP shares on its website that the Say Something ARS has helped more than 5,700 students during mental health crises, responded to more than 344,000 anonymous tips, and saved more than 1,050 lives.



Districts interested in bringing the SHP Say Something ARS to their schools can reach out to **Kevin Burd at kburd@e1b.org or 716-821-7441.**



STARS

Substitute Training And
Recruiting Services

STARS Offers Solutions for Substitute Shortages

Introduced to the WNY community in 2023, E1B's Substitute Training and Recruitment Services (STARS), is a innovative program that has supported multiple districts in the effort to combat substitute shortages.

"Finding, training, and hiring substitutes has been a persistent challenge throughout our region" explained Michael Lichtenberger, STARS coordinator. "What we've created with the STARS program is a one-stop-shop for districts to get support with the process of filling vacancies of substitute teachers, teaching assistants, teacher aides, nurses, and other essential school personnel."

The development of STARS was guided by a collaborative advisory committee made up of school district administrators, human resources leaders, and school business officials. This group contributed its practical expertise and district-level perspectives to shape a service that meets both immediate needs and long-term workforce goals.

Levels of Service

STARS Level 1 service provides districts with ongoing visibility, a steady flow of applicants, and access to essential online training resources, while STARS Level 2 service (also referred to as STARS 360), builds on Level 1 by adding comprehensive applicant vetting and exclusive in-person training for substitutes.

"At both levels of service, our focus is on adding value for districts by strengthening the quality and depth of their substitute pools," explained Lichtenberger. "From there, the focus shifts to applicant training. We work to ensure that substitutes are well prepared for the responsibilities ahead."

A cornerstone of the training offered by STARS is its Substitute 101 Training. This two-hour learning opportunity focuses on helping substitutes understand student behavior and deescalation strategies, simple classroom engagement techniques, and practical technology tips. Participants leave with hands-on strategies and a stronger sense of readiness for the classroom. Schools appreciate the uniform training that substitutes arrive with.

➔ **To learn more, districts are encouraged to reach out to Michael Lichtenberger, STARS Coordinator, at 716-821-7264 or mlichtenberger@e1b.org. Those interested in applying to become a substitute may do so at www.e1b.org/STARS.**

“

One of the most helpful aspects of STARS is the seamless communication and responsiveness. The process feels efficient and well-coordinated, and helps us fill vacancies quickly and reliably. STARS 360 has saved us time, improved efficiency, and significantly strengthened our substitute pipeline.”

**- Director of Human Resources
Sweet Home Central School District
Finune O. Shaibi, Ed. D.**

“

I have appreciated the number of connections to potential employees the STARS program has provided our district. The additional advertising for hard-to-fill substitute positions has been beneficial. Also, the staff at BOCES connected to the STARS program have always been responsive and helpful.”

**- Deputy Superintendent
Lockport City School District
Lisa M. Schrader**

**YES, YOU
CAN BE A
SUBSTITUTE!**

Career Opportunities

Instruction, Food Service, Clerical,
Maintenance, Transportation



STARS
Substitute Training And
Recruiting Services
e1b.org/STARS



Apply today!

Free online training provided for all applicants



Online Parent Portal Streamlines Home School Monitoring Process for Districts

Erie 1 BOCES (E1B) Home School Monitoring Service (HSMS) has supported districts, students, and families, for decades. Offering two levels of support, the service ensures that each student's program meets NYS requirements, including the submission and review of a letter of intent, an Individualized Home Instruction Plan (IHIP), quarterly reports, and an annual assessment demonstrating appropriate instructional progress.

Level 1 service provides districts with expert compliance oversight while allowing the district to remain the primary point of contact with families. An E1B home school monitor reviews all required documentation for regulatory compliance, provides expert guidance on home instruction questions, and communicates approvals or any areas needing attention to the district liaison, who collects and forwards documents.

Level 2 service offers a more comprehensive approach, with HSMS staff managing the full monitoring and paperwork process. Home school families submit all required documents directly to E1B through the Home School Parent Portal, and parents may contact the home school monitor directly for questions or concerns, helping districts meet NYS obligations while significantly reducing the district's administrative workload.

This school year, as the service continues to grow, it has succeeded in onboarding six school districts to a reimagined documentation management process as part of its Level 2 service. The result has been a faster, more seamless process for both district staff and the families they serve.

Process automation

By automating the intake and review of home school documentation through a customized online Parent Portal, the E1B HSMS team, led by Janell Hallgren, has improved the timeliness, accuracy, and security of its review process.

While internal process improvement is certainly an important win, what's even more meaningful to the team is its impact on students.

"The biggest benefit of implementing our new workflow is that it has streamlined the processing of home school documentation, allowing for more time to be spent working directly with families," said E1B Manager of Home School Monitoring Services Janell Hallgren. "We're also pleased to hear that parents/guardians appreciate having all of their children's home school records all in one place and more easily accessible."



HSMS Manager Janell Hallgren, a 23-year E1B employee with over 14 years of dedicated home school monitoring experience.

What's next

With a focus on regional collaboration, HSMS continues to seek innovation, partnering with other BOCES to bring consistency to home school monitoring across the state.

"With several other New York BOCES embracing the Parent Portal, a BOCES home school providers' consortium has been formed," shared Hallgren. "Collaborating with our colleagues who offer home school monitoring has been both informative and invaluable. Together, we're sharing insights, learning from one another, and generating new ideas to continuously enhance the Parent Portal."

➔ **District representatives can get in touch with E1B's HSMS by calling Janell Hallgren at 716-821-7084.**

E1B HSMS Service at a Glance

Erie 1 BOCES' Home School Monitoring Service provides expert monitoring of home school instruction.

Supporting



24
Districts



2,000+
Students



Potter CTE Center Welding Instructor Dan Feeney works with a student on a project.

Erie 1 BOCES Celebrates Increase in State Funding to CTE Instructors

On September 30, 2025, Erie 1 BOCES welcomed New York State Assemblyman Bill Conrad to the Kenton Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center to celebrate the state's funding of his legislation to increase the salary reimbursement cap for BOCES' career and technical education teachers.

Conrad first introduced the legislation during the 2022 session. For nearly 20 years prior, the bill was carried by Bronx-based Assembly Member Michael Benedetto, chair of the Assembly Committee on Education, of which Conrad is a member.

The legislation was at last successfully incorporated into the 2025-2026 state budget. The budget, which included a \$60 million allotment to fund Conrad's bill to increase the salary cap for BOCES instruction, was adopted by both houses in June and immediately signed into law by Governor Hochul.

The state reimbursement cap of \$18,000 had not been changed since 1990. With inflation, the reimbursement percentage of a teacher's salary has drastically decreased in the past 35 years.

The bill and its \$60 million allocation provides for a \$10,000-per-year increase in the instructor reimbursement rate for the next three years, bringing the rate in line with current salaries and reducing the amount BOCES must charge each school district. This reduces the cost barrier that previously discouraged districts from promoting student participation in Erie 1 BOCES programs.

"As a former high school teacher, I've long been a proponent of BOCES and its CTE programs, so this budget win was especially gratifying for me," said Conrad. "This aid will help districts more easily afford kids' participation in BOCES – and that is our way toward higher graduation rates, a stronger workforce, and a more resilient economy."

"This is an investment in education," said Erie 1 BOCES District Superintendent Michael Capuana, Ed. D. "It's a statement in our belief in our students and their potential. Across Erie County and New York State, more and more young people are discovering the powers of Career and Technical Education."

At Erie 1 BOCES alone, enrollments in CTE programs have grown by 34% over the last five years.

"Career and Technical Education programs work," said Erie 1 Professional Education Association President Donna Walters. "We see it every day. Students in CTE graduate

at higher rates, and they leave with skills and certifications and confidence that set them up for good-paying careers in healthcare, construction, IT, manufacturing, and so many other fields our state desperately needs."

This additional funding will allow Erie 1 BOCES to continue to deliver high-quality education to those who wish to attend a Career and Technical Education program. Students attending BOCES graduate at a higher rate, 93% versus the state average of 86%, and are better equipped for college or to enter the workforce.

"Together, we're not just reimagining what education can be, we're building what it must be: relevant, inclusive, and rooted in community," said Capuana. "This funding is both a policy win and a promise that every student will have support, resources, and opportunity to thrive. Because when our students succeed, our communities grow stronger."



New York State Assemblyman Bill Conrad with students and Erie 1 BOCES educational leaders at the Kenton Career and Technical Education Center.

Facilities Team Supports Career-Ready Learning

The Facilities department plays an important role in bringing Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming to life at Erie 1 BOCES. By renovating, refreshing, and maintaining safe, functional, and industry-relevant learning environments, the department ensures that CTE spaces reflect real-world workplaces.

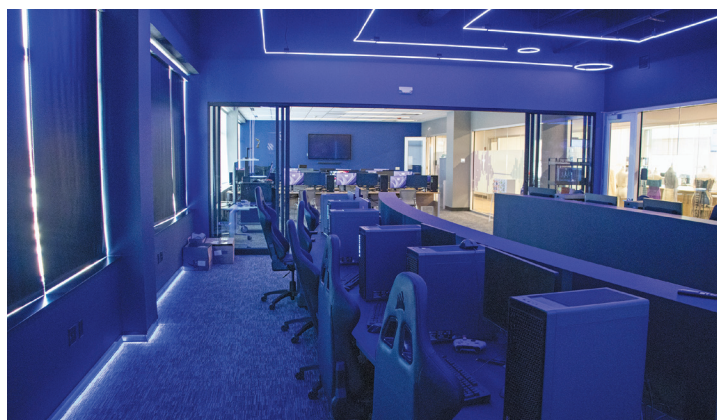
Here's a peek inside some of E1B's recently updated spaces!

*Emergency Medical and Fire Services
(Fire Safety Lab) at Kenton CTE Center*

Calspan CTE Center



Fashion Design Technology



eSports Management and Game Development

The Facilities team was integral in meeting with the landlord, architect, and contractor during the planning and implementation phases for the new eSports arena and classroom, as well as for the new fashion program classroom. The team worked diligently to ensure timelines were met and spaces were fully functional for student use.

Kenton CTE Center



Early Childhood Education

Improvements to the Early Childhood Education classroom included new flooring, refreshed walls, and kitchenette upgrades to create a safe, comfortable learning environment. Facilities also partnered with instructors and school leadership to begin development of a new Fire Safety Lab, adding new flooring and paint, with custom equipment lockers currently in planning through the Building Trades program.

Harkness CTE Center

By converting an underutilized space into a purpose-built learning environment, the Facilities team has helped meet local labor market needs and ensured that students have access to a high-demand, skilled trade. This project required careful planning and coordination to reconfigure the space, including the installation of appropriate ventilation, electrical upgrades, and new plumbing infrastructure to support hands-on instruction.



Plumbing



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Board of Education Welcomes Ex Officio Student Members

- **Harkness CTE Center:** Brooke Dalton, Arina Edwards, Brandon Shiner
- **Potter CTE Center:** Ciara German, Sydney Girard, Guy Holtz, Jillian Marshall, Katie Mason
- **Kenton CTE Center:** Jossaline Ettinger, Gianna Golosimo, Brinlee Greco, Giovanna Haas, Jaren Williams
- **Calspan CTE Center:** Farhan Amin, Luke Bunce, Jonathan Colley, Sianna Crooks, Kailyn Keicher, Muhsin Munassar, Aislyn O'Malley, AJ Viola, Leela Wood

Since its inception, the Erie 1 BOCES Board of Education has worked tirelessly and diligently to put the needs of students first. Now, those students will join the conversation with the addition of ex officio student members to the governing board.

In accordance with New York state law, ex officio student board members will now be present at each board meeting. These students, seniors who attend Erie 1 BOCES Career and Technical Education programs, will serve as the primary voice for the student body on the school board. They will ensure that student perspectives, concerns, and interests are represented in all board decision-making processes.

"It's exciting to see our students join the table and provide their input and perspective to discussions," said Anedda Trautman, assistant superintendent of Instructional Services.



Harkness senior Arina Edwards attends the September board of education meeting.