

BOCES BITS

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Jessica F. Cohen, District Superintendent • Laurie Cook, Editor

From the District Superintendent

Dear Staff,

There were three phone messages one day last week. The first was from a colleague talking about the mid-year budget cuts; the second was from the Post-Standard asking for comments on the Comptroller's audit of our BOCES; and the third was from a parent. In many ways, these three messages are symbolic of my message for you this month.

Budget. There is no doubt in my mind that New York State's fiscal health is bleak and will have an impact on all of us, professionally as well as personally. I heard the Lt. Governor speak to the Board of Regents last week and he projected the state's deficit at \$3-4 billion for the fiscal year ending in March, an additional \$5 billion for the next fiscal year, and an **additional \$15 billion** in 2012. This will have significant impacts on the way schools and BOCES operate. The projected mid-year budget cuts to schools in our area are in excess of \$20 million dollars. The silver lining, if there is any, may be that our districts will turn to us to develop new cooperative cost-effective services.

Audit. The headline in the Syracuse paper about our audit sensationalized the actual content of the audit. This letter does not provide the space for me to truly explain what the audit said and what the reality of our financial practices are. If you are interested in the report, you can find it at www.osc.state.ny.us/localgov/audits/schools/2009/onondagacortlandmadison.pdf. Included toward the end of the audit is our BOCES response to the draft report. In addition, you may want to review a letter that our Board of Education recently sent to our component district boards of education. The letter, available on the Board to Board Newsletter page of the OCM BOCES website, explains our practices in more detail.

Parent message. Let me end this letter with the message that made me smile. A parent, who I didn't know, called and left a message that made me smile. She had been at an open house for our CTE programs and wanted me to know that "for the first time in his life, my son loves coming to school. He loves his teacher,

he loves his program, and he loves BOCES! BOCES has turned our lives around." That is a message that I hear repeated from parents and students.

In the midst of the doom and gloom in the news, there is so much to be thankful for. I am thankful for our wonderful staff and the great work they do everyday. Have a happy Thanksgiving!

Jessica

BOCES Teacher Goes to Extreme Heights to Promote Literacy!



Maintaining students' literacy throughout the summer months can prove to be a challenge for all teachers, but for teachers of deaf and hard of hearing children, it can be even more of a challenge. Rebecca Dadey, OCM BOCES

Teacher of the Deaf, therefore, challenged her deaf and hard of hearing students and their families to read a total of 100 books this past summer as well as raise money for WHOLE ME, Inc., a non-profit organization providing programs for deaf and hard of hearing children and their families. Dadey pledged to go skydiving if the goals were met and on September 3rd, she upheld her end of the bargain and made the big jump in Ovid, NY. Rebecca absolutely loved the experience and was pleased to share it with her students via DVD in the beginning of the school year. Who knows what literacy challenge she'll have for her students this year...or to what heights she'll go!

Cortland Alternative Students Reach High to Achieve Goals

The Cortland Alternative School began their year with the theme of “Achieving Your Goals.” To help begin the year in a positive way and to reinforce the theme of reaching for and achieving goals, the Army National Guard came to the school on September 11th. Guard members not only talked to the students about reaching their goals, they brought with them a mobile climbing wall and challenged the students and staff to reach new heights!



REACH Program Celebrates Red Ribbon Week



During the week of October 19th through October 23rd the REACH Program celebrated Red Ribbon Week. This national campaign is the oldest and largest drug prevention initiative in the United States. Throughout the week the students listened to a speaker from Prevention Network talk about drug and alcohol prevention. A presentation by adolescents at the Rose Hill Rehabilitation Center has also been scheduled. The students wore red ribbons and red clothing to support the campaign and they viewed videos about “natural highs” and real-life stories about battles with drug use. The REACH Program celebrated the end of the week with a Red Party

with students and staff wearing red and enjoying some red snacks. Students were also given information on the history of Red Ribbon Week and drug and alcohol facts and they took a quiz for prizes on Friday. Thanks to all of the people who participated in this important event!

Pastry Arts Student Places in First Annual Wilton Cake Decorating Contest



Congratulations to second-year Henry Campus Pastry Arts student, Clarissa Robinson, for recently having participated, and placing third, in Wilton's first annual cake decorating contest. The competition, held October 3rd at the Shops at Ithaca, consisted of six divisions for both children and adults. Clarissa received a third place medal in the teen division for her basket weave frosting technique along with royal icing flowers and gum paste pumpkins and acorns. An example of Clarissa's award-winning confection was displayed at the Henry Campus Open House and Meet the Teacher Night on October 9th. Congratulations Clarissa!



Career Academy and Solvay Alternative Students Visit Rosamond Gifford Zoo



On Thursday and Friday, September 17th and 18th, the students in Mrs. Hatt's Spanish class at the OCM BOCES Career Academy visited the Rosamond Gifford Zoo as part of their class lessons learning about animals of Latin American origin. On Friday, students from Mrs. Walsh's Spanish class at the Solvay Alternative High School joined the group. During the field trip, students had the opportunity to see the various animals they had researched and learned more about their habitats. Students also participated in the Zoo's contest to name the new baby penguin, born July 22nd. The birth of the penguin marked the first time a chick had ever hatched in one of the outdoor nest boxes on the shore of the Zoo's Penguin Coast. The winning entry, "Marisol," was submitted by a Cicero-North Syracuse High School student. Lorrell Walter,

Director of Public Relations for the Rosamond Gifford Zoo at Burnet Park, extends her thanks to all of the students who participated in the contest saying, "The participation was incredible and the names entered were very creative. Many thanks to everyone who took part in the contest."

Flexible Spending Account (FSA) Year-End Reminder



Your current Plan Year is ending soon!

As a participant in your employer's Flexible Spending Account (FSA) Plan, you know the value of paying for out-of-pocket medical and/or daycare expenses "tax-free". By electing an FSA, you saved money by not paying FICA, federal and state income tax on your election amount.

Use it – Don't lose it

Check your balance at the Benefit Resource, Inc. (BRI) website: www.BenefitResource.com. According to IRS regulations, you will forfeit any money left in your account at the end of the run-out period. Please check your Plan Highlights for information concerning claim submission details.

Account Information Available

- **www.BenefitResource.com, provides:**
 - Online Account Review: account balance and other detailed information about your FSAs.
 - Claim Forms: fill in online, print, sign and submit to BRI with supporting documentation.
 - Plan Highlights: provides information about the run-out period for claim submission after the end of your Plan Year.
 - SPD, Plan Document: provides additional detailed information about your Plan.
 - FAQ's: for the important information.
- **Participant IVR Account Review:** Available 24/7 at 1-800-473-9595. Press 4 for information regarding account balances, deposits and transactions, reimbursements.
- **Participant Service Call Center:** Representatives are available Monday through Friday from 8 am to 8 pm Eastern Time at 1-800-473-9595.
- **Participant Services Email:** participantservices@benefitresource.com

Re-enroll

In order to continue your tax savings, you will need to re-enroll in the Plan during your employer's open enrollment period. Use the BRI website to access Medical and Dependent Care worksheets to estimate your next Plan Year election(s). Don't forget to include over-the-counter items in your estimates.

CONGRATULATIONS! KUDOS! GREAT JOB! WELL DONE! BRAVO!

If you know of an OCM BOCES student or employee that has done a great job on a project or if you know someone that should be recognized for an achievement they've made, please let us know about it! We'd like to get the word out about the great things that are going on in our organization. Send your information to Laurie Cook at lcook@ocmboces or call at 431-8597.



Cortland Alternative Teacher Plans to Use Certification for Instructing Students

Congratulations to Cortland Alternative School's Sue Spenger! Sue recently became a certified Jazzercise Instructor and plans to use her certification to instruct students at the school. Congratulations Sue!



Children's Village Teaching Assistant Constructs A "Home" for her Students

During the 2008-09 school year, Children's Village Teaching Assistant Brenda Hazlewood watched her students use an old doll house at the school as a background *only* for their play. She noticed that the students never really made use of the inside of the house as a play area and wondered what was missing from the toy. Brenda saw a lot of potential in the house for the special needs children, so she took it upon herself to bring the doll house home with her this past summer and used donations, creativity, and love to turn the house into an appealing instructional tool for the students. Working with the generous and creative staff of Home Depot on Bridge Street in East Syracuse, Brenda gathered coordinating room decor, furniture, shingles and siding, and on her own time, made the doll house one that she is proud of and that the students now thoroughly enjoy. Brenda left no detail unfinished, even including moveable drawers on the furniture and hand-decorated books for the house's bookshelf. Children's Village students are now fully utilizing the doll house thanks to this dedicated and caring OCM BOCES employee. Great job Brenda!

October 13, 2009 – Not Your Typical Superintendent's Conference Day



Pictured above: OCM BOCES' Melissa Muller and Danielle Curtis took part in October 13th's Superintendent's Conference Day activities at Clear Channel Radio. They are pictured in one of the studios for WSYR Radio.

One of OCM BOCES' goals for the 2009-10 school year includes enhancing programs for students in order to prepare them for the skills they will need for post-secondary training or the workforce. Part of that goal includes building partnerships with businesses to enhance 21st century skills through problem solving-based learning with real world contexts.

As a way of involving our teachers directly in our efforts to connect student learning with necessary job skills, OCM

BOCES has developed a "Teachers in the World of Work" program, through which our instructors have the opportunity to learn directly from local businesses. OCM BOCES' Superintendent's Conference Day provided an opportunity to nurture the connections between our teachers and local companies. Instead of only taking part in typical conference day professional development activities, many of our staff had a chance to attend discussions, take tours and participate in activities at Clear Channel Radio, Home Builders and Remodelers of CNY, Syracuse University, and The MakeSense Shop. Additionally, several professional development opportunities were provided on-site at OCM BOCES' Henry Campus. Many thanks to everyone who helped arrange and participated in the day's activities.

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