HOT TOPICS

ONC BOCES

BOCES

A discussion of today's education issues...

About HOT TOPICS...

People are the core of Otsego Northern Catskills BOCES. Whether it is in a classroom or in a business office, ONC BOCES is about people collaborating to provide the best possible education for learners of all ages and abilities.

ONC BOCES administrators, program managers and faculty are experts in their fields who build effective partnerships with component school districts and with staff at the two main campuses in Milford and Grand Gorge. ONC BOCES focuses on ways to both lead and support our component school staff, students and communities. This Hot Topics publication features some of the people who make ONC BOCES a success, and they share their expertise on some of the key issues facing education today.

Inside...

New Visions Immerses Students in Engineering, Health Professions

Joe Booan

What is the New Visions program at ONC BOCES?

New Visions programs at ONC BOCES are a unique and exciting opportunity for eligible high school seniors to pursue a STEM pathway. Seniors looking to challenge themselves and begin their transition to the college level have the option to enroll in two programs: Engineering or Health Professions. In depth exposure to potential careers, collegiate level academics, immersion in job shadowing opportunities, and integration of theoretical and practical application are integral pieces of the program. Students make the commitment to learn in all-day environments that support both the completion of their secondary program while earning 8 to 15 college credits.

What are the benefits of the New Visions program?

New Visions programs provide opportunities not readily available in the typical high school program. They give a sense of closure to their senior year, while preparing students for college with advanced instruction and career exploration.

What is the Engineering program?

Designed for the college-bound senior wishing to explore higher level math, science or engineering careers, this program focuses on the beginning principles of engineering that all college freshmen explore. Students complete their high school requirements in English, government and economics, while taking college coursework in Calculus through Syracuse University, Physics through SUNY Oneonta and Composition through SUNY Cobleskill. Teamwork, collaboration and project based learning are critical components of this program as students explore manufacturing, rapid prototyping, green technology, bio/chemical technology, robotics and nanotechnology.

What is the Health Professions program?

Designed for the college-bound senior interested in entering the professional health field, this program immerses the student in a full-day medical environment through a rotational schedule, placing them in over 25 hospital departments. Students gain critical knowledge of the medical environment, work alongside doctors, therapists, technicians and nurses as they explore first hand many career opportunities. In addition to completing their senior requirements in English, government, and economics, students take college coursework in Physics and Human Anatomy and Physiology through SUNY Oneonta.

Joe Booan is the director of student programs at ONC BOCES. Student programs include Career and Technical Education, Alternative Education and Special Education. JBooan@oncboces.org

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Forecast5: Analytics Enhanced

Jennifer Bolton Carls

What is Forecast5?

Forecast5 is a web-based data analytics software system that is helping school leaders transform the way in which they can collect, process, collaborate and make decisions with data. Through the software, districts have access to relevant, focused analytics in an easy-to-access format, including charts and graphics to allow for the visualization of complex information.

Why analytics?

Schools can use data analytics to assist in making good decisions based on available information. Data can be used to benchmark a district's performance against their peers. Information about enrollment and demographical trends can be evaluated over time to project impact on educational services. Student achievement data over time can be reviewed to evaluate impacts of programing or new educational tools in the classroom. Data can be also be used to analyze expense and revenue patterns over time and forecast those numbers into the future to help leaders make good decisions on operational efficiencies, items for negotiations, or even to project fund balance changes. Analytics can help a district tell their story, based on facts, and assist school leaders in planning for the short-term and long-term future of the organization.

What kind of data is accessible?

Most of the data comes from both national and state data sources. Information on enrollment trends, including live birth data is available, as well as access to demographical information about resident students and state test results by grade and building for 3 – 8 and high school level regent exams. Financial information, including budgeted and actual spending patterns and revenue trends for multiple funds, is reported over time. Staffing data includes position reports, salary schedules and staffing ratios. Data not already reported to the state, can also be collected through the software's survey engine and has been helpful in collecting information for regional planning.

Who has access?

All of our schools in ONC BOCES have access to the full suite of Forecast5 products including 5Share (collaborative network to share ideas and analytics with peers), 5Sight (analytical tool to generate reports and insights), 5Maps (mapping application to visual data by location) and 5Cast (a forecasting and budgeting tool). Training has been provided both in person and through webinars. If you would like more information on this tool please contact my office and we will assist you in getting started.

Dr. Jennifer Bolton Carls is the deputy superintendent of ONC BOCES and also serves as a director with the Association of School Business Officials International. JBolton@oncboces.org

Library Media Specialists are Vital

Eileen Coryat

Why is there a shortage of certified school library media specialists?

When the Great Recession arrived, school districts facing fiscal constraints cut or reduced the FTE of certified school library media specialists and school library funding from their budgets. With these cuts to school librarian media positions, the number of eligible candidates declined due to the risk of pursuing the necessary degree and a negative job outlook. School aides and uncertified staff are manning many school libraries.

Why is having certified school library media specialists important for school districts?

The School Librarian Effect on Student Achievement in New York State Research Project is examining the causal effects of school librarians and library resources on student achievement in New York's public schools. Preliminary results from that research project are showing that English language arts performance is significantly impacted in a positive way by school librarians.

Is New York State proposing any new regulations regarding library media specialists?

Bills in the New York State Senate and Assembly seek to require schools to have and maintain a school library and employ a certified library media specialist. The Senate version of the bill would allow the State Education Commissioner to waive this provision if there is a shortage of school library media specialists and have the school's needs met through a written agreement with a public library. The Assembly version of the bill notes that, according to the New York Comprehensive Center, school libraries are successful in improving student achievement.

Are there any solutions for the shortage of certified library media specialists?

Our students need to be career and college ready, and having a certified school librarian impacts student achievement. At a time when many administrators are attempting to fill school librarian positions with aides or teachers with other certifications, we should be questioning the outcome of these decisions. A solution would be having interested teachers obtain a Supplemental Certificate, which is a temporary certificate valid for three years. Within the three years, all other requirements must be met including field work, practicum and a master's degree in Library Studies. School librarians and strong school library programs impact student achievement, and our end goal is student achievement.

Eileen Coryat is the coordinator of the ONC BOCES school library system and coordinates support for component school librarians.
ECoryat@oncboces.org

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A Blueprint for Helping Students

Lynn Gould

What is the New York State Education Department's Blueprint for Improved Results for Students with Disabilities?

The Blueprint was developed in consultation with stakeholders and is consistent with the mission of the Office of Special Education - supported by all offices within NYSED - to ensure students with disabilities have the opportunity to benefit from high quality instruction, reach the same standards as all students and leave school prepared to successfully transition to post-school learning, living and employment. As rigor and expectations for all students in New York State have increased, policy and practices must be adjusted to support students with disabilities to meet these challenges.

How does the Blueprint work?

The principles in the Blueprint were carefully selected as those that are essential to achieve the goal of improved results. This statewide framework is intended to clarify expectations for administrators, policy makers and practitioners to improve instruction to prepare students with disabilities for success beginning in the preschool years to lay the foundation for post-secondary readiness and success. This Blueprint will be used by the state to develop state policy and guidance and for schools to review their policies and practices to support students with disabilities.

What are the core principles in the Blueprint?

While there are many components or key principles that are important for students with disabilities and their families, this Blueprint focuses on seven core principles and practices supported by research for all students with disabilities. Improving results for students with disabilities requires a renewed focus on these core principles:

1. Students engage in self-advocacy and are involved in determining their own educational goals and plan.
2. Parents and other family members are engaged as meaningful partners in the special education process and the education of their child.
3. Teachers design, provide and assess the effectiveness of specially designed instruction to provide students with disabilities with access to participate and progress in the general education curriculum.
4. Teachers provide research-based instructional teaching and learning strategies and supports for students with disabilities.
5. Schools provide multi-tiered systems of behavioral and academic support.
6. Schools provide high quality inclusive programs and activities.
7. Schools provide appropriate instruction for students with disabilities in career development and opportunities to participate in work-based learning.

Lynn Gould is a special education school improvement specialist at ONC BOCES and works with school districts, teachers and CSE chairs to provide technical assistance with special education. LGould@oncboces.org

State Enacts New Counselor Regs.

Jo Boring

What are the new school counselor regulations put forth by the New York State Board of Regents?

The key changes have to do with guidance plans, counselor education and school counselor certification. The latter two are more pertinent to higher education and future school counseling professionals; while the first (Part 100.2j) will have some immediate implications for our current school counselors and schools. The basis for the new model looks to the American School Counselor Association model as a framework. The proposed Part 100.2(j) regulations are slated to take effect for the 2017-2018 school year and beyond, though there are several things schools can do to begin to prepare in advance.

Why are there so many changes?

The goal of the new Part 100.2(j) regulation as described by New York State School Counselor Association is to "ensure all students have access to a certified school counselor and a quality school counseling program." Consistency and quality are goals, as well updating the old regulations and bringing them in line with the profession's national standards.

How will these changes affect an individual school district?

The new regulations will require schools to have a pre-kindergarten through grade 12 program developed by certified school counselors based on student competencies. The regulations require district and school comprehensive plans. Schools are used to having such a plan, but the proposed plan has some key differences including an annual school counselor/building leader program agreement and annual school board presentation. Other key changes involve the creation of a program advisory council and the use of recommended ratios "to the extent practicable."

Where can someone turn for more information?

The New York State Department of Education will continue to release information regarding this issue. NYSSCA has been a leader in assisting stakeholders in developing an understanding of the proposed regulations and their importance for local schools. NYSSCA recently provided training for representatives from each BOCES region in order to aid in the dissemination of the information. They also presented at a regulatory update offered by the Catskill Area School Study Council during our most recent conference day. I anticipate we will continue to have such opportunities for discussion and I am certainly available to speak with anyone who wishes greater detail.

Jo Boring is the executive coordinator of the Catskill Area School Study Council, a partnership between SUNY Oneonta and ONC and DCMO BOCES component schools. JBoring@oncboces.org

Lack of Teachers Remains an Issue

Diane Matteson

What trends are you seeing when it comes to teacher shortages?

Teacher preparation program enrollment has decreased by more than 22 percent in the past two years, according to data from the State Education Department in New York State, teacher. State data also indicated that these programs are producing too many elementary school teachers and not enough teachers for specialty areas. At times, districts are unable to fill vacant positions with fully-certified teachers who meet the job qualifications. Many of the shortages that districts are experiencing are positions requiring special certifications and skills which are difficult to obtain and maintain. Declining enrollments in teacher preparation programs; lack of decent salaries and benefits; increased testing requirements, Common Core and new teacher evaluation guidelines; geographic constraints; and complex certification reciprocity regulations from state-to-state are all reasons behind the shortage.

Are other parts of the state or country seeing these shortages, or is it just in the ONC BOCES region?

The teacher shortage is a common theme across the county and placing a strain on schools. According to a survey by the University of Washington, 80 percent of districts surveyed indicated they had to hire under-qualified teachers. For example, states such as Arizona and Indiana are also feeling the crisis. The Arizona Department of Education reported in 2015, that in the last five years thousands of teachers have left the state. Arizona is concerned it will not be able to provide students a quality education. In Indiana, the Department of Education data shows that the percentage of teachers getting licenses dropped by more than 50 percent from 2009-10 to 2013-14.

Are there any different dynamics involved with substitute teacher shortages?

The teacher shortage crisis not only includes classroom teachers, but substitute teachers as well. A student will spend one full year with a substitute on average by the time they graduate from high school. Schools are scrambling to find people to fill these gaps for teachers when they can't fill a vacant position or when a teacher is absent. Certain classroom substitute vacancies, such as elementary and special education, are easier to fill like. Reasons for the shortages include limiting substitute hours due to the Affordable Care Act, low salaries, lack of benefits, increased teacher absenteeism, cost of fingerprinting, inactive substitutes and lack of training.

How are districts dealing with these shortages?

Districts are expanding their recruiting methods by using more online methods to reach a larger pool of candidates. Districts increasingly use pay perks for hard to fill positions. Some districts are even giving teachers a break on housing, loans and taxes to encourage them to work and move into their communities.

Diane Matteson is the human resources coordinator at ONC BOCES. She oversees the Regional Certification Office. DMatteson@oncboces.org

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Balancing Graduation Pathways with the Changing Workforce

Anne Pallischeck

In what ways are students today being prepared for college or careers?

More than ever, the field of education is placing value on both traditional and non-traditional pathways to graduation. The combination of 4+1 pathways and P-TECH secondary programs allows New York State students the opportunity to determine a specialized field on which to focus to prepare for a post-secondary education/career.

What is the 4+1 Pathways to graduation?

The 4+1 pathways is an option to all students who enter grade 9 in September 2011 and thereafter or who are eligible to graduate in June 2015 and thereafter. With the new regulations, students are required to take and pass four required Regents Exams, including one in each of the traditional subjects: math, English, science and social studies. The "+1" assessment allows students to take a comparably rigorous assessment to complement their interests in the Arts, Languages other than English (LOTE)/Biliteracy, Career and Technical Education (CTE), Humanities, and Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).

What is the P-TECH program?

Pathways in Technology, or P-TECH, is a rigorous and relevant "grades 9-14" educational program that focuses on the knowledge and skills students need for STEM-related careers. Through workplace learning, students work with professionals in a chosen career on projects that address relevant issues in the field. At the conclusion of the program, students earn transcript college credit toward an Associate of Applied Science degree in a high-tech field.

What are the goals of these programs?

The workforce is changing. A country that was once built on agriculture and industry is now shifting to highly technical fields. These two initiatives are representing the need to prepare students for the demands of the 21st Century workforce. With the structure of these two initiatives in place, students will be able to get a head start on the credentials necessary to succeed in a highly competitive workforce, all before incurring the expense of a post-secondary education and additional career preparatory programs.

Anne Pallischeck is the Coordinator of Instructional Support Services
At ONC BOCES. APallischeck@oncboces.org

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Tele-Practice Could Help Therapists Aid Rural Students

What is Tele-Practice and how can it be used to connect therapists and students?

Tele-Practice is a service delivery method being pursued by ONC BOCES Itinerant Services. The method began in rural areas, primarily in the healthcare field. Tele-Practice speech therapy will focus on speech improvement services and would serve to connect students and therapists electronically, thereby reducing travel and maximizing efficiency. For example, an entire kindergarten class can practice phonemic awareness through fully interactive video conferencing. Smaller groups of students whose goals are more specific may benefit more by using a laptop, iPad, or Chromebook, which creates a more personal setting with the speech therapist.

Why are some schools having a difficult time providing speech therapy needs?

Currently, ONC BOCES is able to provide all speech needs in districts that subscribe to our services. If the need for speech handicapped services increases throughout the school year when speech providers' schedules are already full, then speech improvement services - which are not mandated - would have to be dropped and the speech handicapped students would be scheduled in their place. Tele-Practice would allow for speech improvement services to continue electronically and potentially alleviate the need for therapists to travel to a school to work with students.

Anne Rode

Are there any applications of Tele-Practice that might be beneficial beyond those who are traditionally reached by speech therapists?

Tele-Practice might be used to assist with meeting Medicaid supervision requirements provided by the Speech Language Pathologist (SLP). The SLP could connect electronically with each student on her supervision caseload during the mandated number of times per school year. The electronic connection would also allow the supervising SLP to confer with the Teacher of the Speech and Hearing Handicapped who provides direct service to the students.

If I have questions about Tele-Practice, who can I turn to at ONC BOCES?

Please contact Anne Rode, Director of Itinerant Services and Administrative Programs, at 607-588-6291, ext. 150.

Anne Rode, director of Itinerant Services and Administrative Programs at ONC BOCES, supervises and evaluates all itinerant and related services staff. ARode@oncboces.org

Mitigating Employee Misconduct

Doug Favaloro

How important is it to conduct an effective employee misconduct investigation?

Conducting an effective employee misconduct investigation is vital for a number of reasons. One of the primary purposes of an investigation is to determine if any district policies have been violated by an employee. In addition, there are both federal and state workplace-related laws that require a school district to thoroughly and effectively investigate any employee complaints. If a complaint is not investigated or the investigation is conducted poorly, the school district may face legal sanctions and/or civil liability. Aside from potential legal ramifications, the affected school district's reputation is also at risk. Decline in workplace performance or employee morale are also concerns.

What types of actions trigger an investigation?

An investigation is triggered by the report of any inappropriate or unlawful conduct. This includes, but is not limited to, the following allegations or complaints: Harassment, sexual harassment, sexual misconduct with staff or students, discrimination, insubordination, violent or threatening behavior, theft, use of drugs and/or alcohol, poor work performance, bullying, falsification of records, unacceptable levels of absences from work, inappropriate or unlawful conduct outside of the workplace.

What are the different steps of a typical investigation?

The first step in any investigation is to gather information about the triggering incident, the alleged victim and the potential subject of the investigation. A plan must then be created for how the investigation will be conducted, who should be interviewed and in what order each person should be interviewed. If the subject is found to have violated district policies or federal or state laws, discipline can range in severity from a verbal warning to a counseling memo and up to suspension and termination, as well as law enforcement involvement. A report prepared by the investigator includes background information, findings, conclusions he or she has drawn and actions or discipline recommended as follow-up steps to the investigation

What do you do after the investigation to prevent recurrences of the misconduct among other employees?

Annual mandatory training seminars or workshops can be held for specific employees, employee groups or the entire district in order to prevent recurrences of misconduct. Additionally, training seminars can be held for administrators, managers and/or supervisors, which educate them on not only how to identify misconduct, but how to respond to complaints effectively. Employees should be encouraged and trained to report any misconduct that they witness or hear about, regardless of whether or not they are the target of the behavior.

Douglas Favaloro is the director of employee relations and provides solutions to component school districts in the areas of personnel, labor relations and contract management. DFavaloro@oncboces.org

New State Regs. for NY Schools

Josh Reiss

What are the new state regulations on carbon monoxide detectors?

By June 27, 2016, schools will have to install carbon monoxide detector/alarms in all rooms that have a CO source. If a non-classroom space contains a CO source, then additional detector/alarms must be placed outside those areas, where detection and notification can be maximized. Detector/alarms can be of several different styles: residential type with an integral 10-year battery; residential type, hard-wired to building power, with a standard battery back-up; or a commercial type connected to the existing building alarm/management system. The June 2016 deadline may be extended if the district can show the New York State Department of Education that a good faith effort to install is being made. Don't forget that any room designated for sleeping, such as elementary classrooms where naps are given, are already required to have a CO detector/alarm.

What should school district officials do if they have questions about the regulations?

The regulations have more specifics than can be detailed here, so it will be best to have a qualified person make recommendations for your specific buildings. If your district utilizes the BOCES Safety/Risk Management Service, then their code enforcement official/fire safety inspector will be able to provide any guidance needed. If you do not use this BOCES service, then ask your local code enforcement office, fire chief or fire alarm company for assistance. Just be sure those agencies are familiar with the requirements specific to K-12 schools.

What are the new requirements for CPR and AED for high school students?

A new regulation went into effect in October 2015, that all high school students must receive awareness training in hands-only cardio pulmonary resuscitation and the use of automated external defibrillators.

How are some districts planning to comply with this new requirement?

The requirement is for all high school students to be trained before they graduate. It will be up to each district to decide on a training schedule that best fits their needs. Some may choose to train the incoming freshmen, which means they should be training grades nine through 12 before the end of the 2015-16 school year. Others may choose to train the outgoing seniors, or perhaps provide the training more than once during the four high school years. Either way, districts will need to implement their plan as soon as possible to ensure this year's seniors will receive training before graduation.

Josh Reiss is the safety/risk management coordinator at ONC BOCES.
JReiss@oncboces.org

Dependent Eligibility Audits

Kevin Kreis

What is a Dependent Eligibility Audit?

With the implementation of the Affordable Care Act, being able to contain health care costs has become a major concern of school districts throughout New York State. Since many changes affecting health care costs are mandated by the ACA, such as additional required coverages, additional taxes and new reporting requirements, finding ways to cut costs has become increasingly challenging. A dependent eligibility audit is an audit of the dependents currently enrolled on an organization's health benefit plan. The audit is normally conducted on spouses, domestic partners, children (including adopted and step-children) or any other dependents included in the summary plan description or other plan documents.

Who is responsible for doing the dependent eligibility audit?

Typically these audits are conducted by third-party vendors but, in the case of CASEBP, they can be handled internally by the health plan in cooperation with the component school districts. The health plan sends out correspondence establishing the guidelines of the audit and the types of documentation that are acceptable as proof of a dependent's eligibility. The school district collects the documentation, verifies that the documentation establishes eligibility for coverage and sends the information to the health plan to update the members' enrollment file.

What types of documentation are acceptable as proof of dependent eligibility?

Acceptable proof of dependent eligibility includes, but is not limited to: birth certificates, social security cards, passports, copies of most recent income tax returns, marriage certificates (in conjunction with a marriage affidavit), legal adoption papers and legal guardianship papers.

What happens when a dependent listed on a members' coverage is not eligible for coverage?

If a member does not provide the proper proof for a dependent to remain on their health plan coverage by the deadline set for the audit, that dependent is removed from the plan effective on the date that is specified in the correspondence sent out at the beginning of the audit. For example, you could set a deadline to submit proper documentation by Dec. 31. If documentation is not received by Dec. 31, you state that all ineligible dependents will be removed effective Jan. 1.

What are the benefits of doing a dependent eligibility audit?

Typically, between 4 percent and 8 percent of dependents nationwide are ineligible for medical coverage. For CASEBP, which pays approximately $40 million in claims annually, the savings is between $1.6 million and $3.2 million per year. I believe that is reason enough to consider doing a dependent eligibility audit for your health plan as well.

Kevin Kreis is the health benefits and claims coordinator for CASEBP at ONC BOCES. He provides guidance to the component school districts in CASEBP. KKreis@oncboces.org

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about

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Otsego Northern Catskills Board of Cooperative Educational Services is based in the upper Susquehanna River valley and the northern Catskill Mountains. In addition to providing adult and continuing education, ONC BOCES assists its 19 component school districts with a wide range of educational and administrative services.

ONC BOCES is anchored by campuses in Milford and Grand Gorge, which provide parallel programming to the 1660-square-mile area, as well as unique offerings to component districts and beyond.

Our partnerships with school districts and our communities help us provide the best possible education for learners of all ages and abilities.

We encourage all district leaders, administrators and professionals to read and redistribute this Hot Topics publication and contact our staff members, who are more than happy to share their expertise on a wide range of education issues.

Otsego Area Occupational Center	**Northern Catskills Occupational Center**
PO Box 57 (mailing)	PO Box 382 (mailing)
1914 County Route 35 (street)	2020 Jump Brook Road (street)
Milford, NY 13807	Grand Gorge, NY 12434
(607)-286-7715	(607)-588-6291
WWW.ONCBOCES.ORG	WWW.ONCBOCES.ORG

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