

DUTCHESS BOCES Spotlight

September 2026

Students, Staff Greet First Day With Excitement

Students from Dutchess BOCES' Career & Technical Institute, Resilience Academy and Salt Point Center were welcomed back to school Sept. 8 for the first day of classes by principals, teachers and other staff guiding them to their classrooms and wishing them well for the 2026-27 school year.

CTI

Nursing Assistant Teacher Maureen Seipp and Security & Law Enforcement Teacher Steve Price were among the many CTI staff to greet this year's crop of seniors in the hallway as they entered, while waiting for the students in their respective classes to arrive. They both agreed that their favorite part of the first day was seeing their students come back and being able to get them over the finish line as they prepare for life after high school.

Second-year nursing assistant student Isabella Caraballo is excited for this coming year, especially to participate in clinicals, the supervised hands-on patient care experiences students are required to do in order to compete the program. "I can't wait to go out to clinicals in a real healthcare facility," Caraballo said. "I'm looking forward to putting into practice all of the knowledge and skills I've been learning here at BOCES."

Resilience Academy

This year, 146 students will be attending RA. Returning students gave high-fives and hugs to their favorite teachers, support staff and crisis intervention staff while new students asked how to get to classes, as some of the classrooms recently moved to the upper F-Wing hallway. Staff were also readily available to help students with their new locker combinations. "It's always good to be a helping hand," Principal Kiesha Tillman said.

Tillman is excited to see more adolescent day treatment (ADT) classes being offered and representatives from the Mediation Center of Dutchess County return to talk with students about restorative justice

practices. She hopes students and staff will lead restorative justice circles by the end of the school year. She noted that while students have first-day jitters, they were excited to see their friends and teachers and ask how their summer was. "The best part of the first day is seeing students and their smiles, happy to be in the building," Tillman said. "It's really great to have them back."

Christopher Plant spoke with his first class of the day, a mixture of returning RA students and high school freshmen, about the expectations he has and important events, such as Regents exams and the fall open house. He hopes his new students do well and predicts his returning students will be good role models. "They (freshmen) are wide-eyed and shocked because this is information that is brand new to them," Plant said. "I enjoy when the students hit their stride and really start to know the routine and see success, that's what keeps me going."

Senior Jared "Jax" Durso is most excited to graduate at the end of the year and looks forward to taking one class that he knows will be helpful for his future. "I'm hoping that financial math goes well because it's something that's really important," Durso said.

SPC

At SPC, teachers and staff greeted students enthusiastically as they got off the buses and welcomed them back to school for the start of the school year.

"This is my first year teaching third, fourth and fifth grade," Teacher Michelle Santini said. "I'm excited to have the kids back and to get to know them as students."

Santini distributed cards to students, each with the name of a month. She then asked them to identify which month was first and second and put them in order at another desk. Once that assignment was completed, she handed out cards with numbers on them and asked them



Top: Teacher Michael White and Social Worker Erin Wiesenthal welcomed students to CTI.

Center: TA Vincent Giandalone fist-bumps with a RA student.

Bottom: SPC Teacher Michelle Santini takes a number from a student.



what day it was. Receiving the correct answer from a student, she asked who had eight and placed it on the calendar on the board. She then asked students for the number before eight and so on until numbers one through eight were appropriately placed on the calendar.

Second-year teacher Nicole Pastre had calming music playing in the background as students chose items from the sensory bins to start the school day. She welcomed them before they began their breakfast of mini waffles, syrup, orange juice and milk.

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Pastre's class is a mix of students she had last year and two new students. "I'm excited to get to know the new students and to build on what I did with the others," she said.

John Joseph was in Pastre's class last year and was happy to hear of some of the schedule changes. "I'm excited about the changes because now we have PE at 10:30 because now we have it before lunch," he said, adding that, "I'm in second grade now."

For the morning meeting, classmates learned how to greet each other. Pastre shared what she did over the summer and asked students about their favorite summer activity. Being at the beach or lake was a common theme, though

Joseph said his favorite was going to the Mid-Hudson Discovery Museum. The class also learned to identify their regulation zone so others would know how they are feeling during the course of the day.

There were many changes and improvements made to the building over the summer, which staff certainly appreciated.

"Our students adjusted wonderfully (to all the changes and improvements made to the building over the summer) and our staff did an amazing job remaining flexible, supportive and focused on making every student feel safe and welcomed,"



SPC staff greeting buses on the first day.

Principal Melissa Murphy said. "We are so happy to have our students back with us. We are looking forward to an amazing school year ahead."

Program Helps Prepare New BOCES Teachers

Last month, Dutchess BOCES welcomed 12 new teachers for two days of professional training under the moniker of "New Teacher University."

Educational Resources Professional Development Specialist Daniel August and Resilience Academy Instructional Coach Jonathan Aker discussed classroom management and instruction with the new teachers, who were encouraged to share their thoughts and experiences. The teachers will work at BOCES' three schools and off campus, with August adding that the training focused on best principles, as opposed to the basics, due to the wealth of experience they bring.

"There's different kinds of experience, whether that's trade work, whether that's work with students with disabilities ... we're not here to teach you like you've never done this before," August said. "It's important to support new teachers to be able to adapt to the needs of the different programs."

Aker emphasized the importance of teachers focusing on matters they can control, assuring everyone has a voice and using asset-based language, where both students and adults feel empowered.

"We want to try to build people up and talk about the positives and strengths that they bring to situations," Aker said. "Everybody has something to say and what they have to say is valuable."

The teachers participated in a series of activities including "Wild Brainstorm," where teachers wrote down ideas of how to reduce misbehavior on individual sticky notes.

They then determined whether the ideas were proactive or responsive strategies and resorted them into categories of how they relate to a classroom's physical space, daily routines, instruction and community. August encouraged the teachers to have proactive and responsive strategies, as life is unpredictable.

"You need both of those ... kids are going to come in, they didn't have breakfast and they're going to act out because they're children and that's OK and we're going to respond," August said. "The way you set up your room, impacts your classroom management."

Cathy Suraci will teach third through fifth grade students at BOCES' in-district program at Alden Place Elementary School in Millbrook. She previously taught special education for 19 years at Putnam Northern Westchester BOCES and appreciated the training's interactive nature, as it emphasized that teachers are always learning.

"Gaining this knowledge is very important," Suraci said. "Asking for support from other teachers will definitely be how I'm starting my year, just because it's a new role for me."

Juanella Colburn is more than familiar with BOCES – she was a resident substitute teacher at the Career & Technical Institute (CTI), and this school year, she will teach two new programs. One is Career Explorations, where sophomores will be introduced to careers and CTI classes, and the other is Work-Based Learning Hospitality, where students will work on customer service skills in the CTI Café. She enjoyed the training's activities, as she put into practice what she learned with her fellow teachers.

"I love the BOCES programs," Colburn said. "Getting to interact with the students and building those relationships is fun."



L: Daniel August talks with teachers, R: teachers exchange sticky notes during a New Teacher University activity.

Changes Enhance Engagement

Professional Development and preparing for the start of the 2026-27 school year is what the first Superintendent's Conference Days were all about.

Dutchess BOCES staff learned about NY Inspires and the New York State Portrait of a Graduate and what elements are being implemented this year and in years to come. CTI faculty learned about becoming a Full SkillsUSA CTE Program while receptionists, program assistants, typists and other learned about reception safety. Plus there were other sessions covering topics specific to different roles in the organization.

Portrait to Practice

Teachers, teacher assistants and aides looked at the New York State Portrait of a Graduate through the lens of their roles and discussed what it would look like in the classroom for each of the six attributes:



- Academically Prepared
- Creative Innovator
- Critical Thinker
- Effective Communicator
- Global Citizen
- Reflective and Future Focused

During the session, Director of Educational Resources Janet Bisti said that in creating NY Inspires and the Portrait of a Graduate, New York State recognized the individuality in every student. "People across New York State will understand more about what you do in the special education world - individualized work for students."

In the Resilience Academy session, Teacher Stephen Blair said students could show mastery of a subject by articulating and demonstrating what they've learned by talking in front of the class, which touches on being academically prepared and communicator attributes.

For the Critical Thinker, Teacher Amy McCann said that students who engage and speak with a teacher, question things, or want to know more would be demonstrating that attribute.

Teacher Assistant Mike Clark added, "Students could showcase their skills and replicate or show them to peers."

Coordinator of Educational Resources Kathleen Schneck, who led the session, ended with, "Think about the next steps. How can you push the initiative forward with students?"

After the session, Clark, who has been with BOCES for three years, noted that the session was valuable.

"It gave me an opportunity to look at our students in a holistic manner and see them as individuals and see what and how

they can showcase different attributes in the classroom."

He also praised the convocation itself. "I think it is valuable to hear all the updates from the summer and the goals. It pumps you up about it and gets you excited for the school year."



Culinary Arts Teacher Amanda Scoca discusses SkillsUSA.

Culinary Arts Teacher Chef Amanda Scoca discussed with her CTI colleagues how this year all students, juniors and seniors, are eligible to participate in SkillsUSA, which unites students from varied trades with a common purpose - to become skilled professionals, career-ready learners and responsible community members.

Students are not required to participate in the regional, state and national SkillsUSA competitions or attend every monthly meeting, but all are now able to participate without the financial burden of having to pay to participate in the competitions. This means students can join midway through the year if they want.

Scoca would like to see up to four students from each class be enrolled as members who attend monthly SkillsUSA meetings and inform classmates about its events to drum up participation. "They're going to be the voice of your class and bring that information back, saying 'Hey, we're doing a coat drive,'" Scoca said. "It doesn't mean that those students are going to go and compete in a competition, it just means that they are the ones representing your class in the monthly meetings."

Scoca said the program's framework can align with career and technical education, as trade teachers are already instructing their students how to be professional and responsible, communicate and work as a team. Teachers can use prompts from the SkillsUSA framework to engage students. "It's not anything extra that you're going to have to do... it's just integrating this framework into your daily objective," Scoca explained. "What it can look like in your classroom - it could be as easy as putting up a learning objective."

CTI Assistant Principal Brian Conte told the teachers that they know best who would shine in SkillsUSA, adding that many who participated in the competitions succeed post-high school. "I had a kid who got a free ride to Ohio Tech because he participated ... that's a big deal," Conte said. "Skills is a lot about confidence too."

New Year Orientations



First- and second-year students at Dutchess BOCES' Career & Technical Institute learned the requirements to be successful in their respective trade programs during an orientation this week.



New and returning Resilience Academy students were informed of expectations for the upcoming school year and received a brief presentation from the Mediation Center of Dutchess County on the continued implementation of restorative justice practices at the school.

Learning Technology Staffer Excels Beyond the Screen

Rob Alexander has proven to be an exceptional addition to Dutchess BOCES' Learning Technology department and the agency in his role as Special Programs System Specialist, also known as Data Coordinator, so much so that he was recognized for his efforts by the Board of Trustees during its Sept. 9 meeting.

Director of Technology Mark Stein praised Alexander for his hands-on and personal approach to all of his responsibilities, which was greatly needed in the position. He works closely with the school building teams to ensure that student data, report cards, course codes and other data points are accurate and useful to teachers, while also ensuring that the New York State Education Department's data reporting deadlines are met.

"He has brought stability to this role through his near-perfect attendance and proactive positive attitude when accepting new challenges," Stein wrote in his recommendation letter for Alexander. "Rob's contributions extend across the entire agency, making a noticeable difference every day."

District Superintendent Dr. Jodi DeLucia was excited to honor Alexander as he is someone who immediately brought positive change when he started. She touted how Alexander participated fully in all activities during administration's Leadership Week this summer and is patient no matter how difficult the request is.

"The role is so critical and foundational to literally every operation we have here in the agency and he really came in and filled it with this exceptional customer service that brings joy to our principals and staff," DeLucia said.

L-R: Assistant Superintendent for Human Resources Dr. Norah Merritt, Rob Alexander, Director of Learning Technology Mark Stein and District Superintendent Dr. Jodi DeLucia.



"Please join me in recognizing Rob and celebrating what really positive change and the right people can do."

Alexander was surprised, but thankful to be recognized for his work, especially during his first year of service when new recruits are perfecting their skills.

"You spend a year trying not to be a nuisance, catching up and being good at everything and then you get an appreciation for the work that you did, it made me feel like I was doing what I was supposed to be doing," Alexander said. "I worked in tech support for a long time, so I'm used to if somebody tells me something, I just go ahead and I do it."

What Alexander most appreciates about his role is seeing how the tasks he does helps students and the wider school community, as opposed to making those efforts just to increase profits.

"It makes you feel good about going to work," Alexander said. "You actually have a purpose as part of a team."

Facilities Projects Make BOCES Campus Feel Brand New



Top: Classroom updates. Bottom: Staff doing a final deep clean across campus.

Dutchess BOCES has seen significant facilities work completed this summer from Salt Point Center (SPC) to the campus' exteriors, all in time for the first day of classes Sept. 8.

SPC received new lighting fixtures and ceiling tiles, painting and in-depth cleaning. New blinds were installed for

the windows and the exterior fencing work was completed during the week of Aug. 24. Workers from Always Moving & Storage spent Aug. 21 moving furniture from the Resilience Academy (RA), where the Extended School Year was hosted this year, onto a truck to be delivered back to SPC, just in time for teachers to begin setting up their classrooms.

"You take a walk around each day, you'll see forward progress," Assistant Director of Facilities and Operations Gregg Caruso said.

On Aug. 11, workers from Avello Asphalt & Construction Corp. and Bonded Concrete Inc. poured fresh concrete on several pads located near the entrances of SPC, RA, the Career Technical Institute (CTI) and the Conference Center so benches can be placed on them. Additionally, Avello blacktopped the road leading to the facilities warehouse.

The facilities team removed furniture from classrooms at CTI, RA and SPC so the floors could receive a proper cleaning and, in some instances, fresh waxing and

a new coat of paint. The CTI Café, which saw a renovation last year, will get new tables and chairs this month to give it a contemporary feel.

"The furniture is ordered and the vendor is working through that," Caruso said. "The final deep clean is across campus."

The ground outside of the administration building was dug up and new piping was laid down, as part of an ongoing project that will bring municipal water to campus this fall.

"That's where they have to tie in the water to what piping is already on site," Caruso explained. "The water project is still on track."

On the inside of the building, Assistant Superintendent for Business & Operations Mike Skerritt noted that a moisture mitigation emergency project, which was approved by the Board of Trustees at a February meeting, is complete. The New York State Education Department is reviewing architectural design plans to rebuild and improve the building's use, with work expected to begin this fall.