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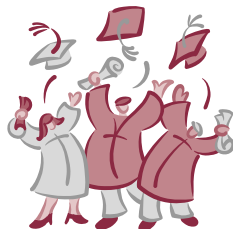


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focus

Preparing World Class Citizens

February 2008



Students helping students at Lisha Kill

A new mentoring program was initiated at Lisha Kill Middle School this year by the Character Education Committee. Some 35 students in grades 6-8 were trained to work with fifth graders, helping them to feel comfortable with their new school and subjects. The program is building confidence and responsibility.

District sees first student MRSA case

What you can do to help infection from spreading

In spite of a widespread campaign to prevent it, South Colonie Schools encountered its first case of MRSA when a Lisha Kill Middle School student was diagnosed with the infection in January.

Community-Associated Methicillin-Resistant Staphylococcus Aureus or MRSA is a type of "staph" bacteria usually carried on the skin and in the noses of healthy people. MRSA has been in the news because it is different than most infections in that it takes a specific class of antibiotics to treat and eradicate it.

Since the fall it has been detected at schools in the Capital District and nationally, leading to the death of at least one student in Virginia.

As the cases were being diagnosed in other areas, South Colonie began a comprehensive campaign months ago to deal with this serious health matter — emphasizing greater personal hygiene among students and staff in our schools and offices (handwashing and covering of wounds) and increasing disinfecting

Keeping children safe

District to launch new automated emergency telephone alert system for parents/guardians

With school safety in the forefront of everyone's mind these days, the South Colonie Central School District is taking one more step to ensure its children and families are protected.

In February, the district will launch a new Emergency Alert Information System that will automatically notify parents and guardians by telephone or text message in the event of an unforeseen school closing, early dismissal, evacuation or other unexpected event.

The new computerized telephone system will not replace but complement other notification methods parents have become accustomed to using over the years like radio and television announcements and postings on the district website. The telephone message will add a new dimension to emergency notifications because it will be quicker and personal.

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... emergency alert system

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"Not everyone has instant access to a computer, radio or TV during the work day," said Superintendent Michael Marcelle, "so this will give us one more avenue to ensure we reach parents in the unlikely event of an emergency. Timely communication is the key because the last thing we want is for a young student to arrive home to an empty house."



Over the years, many South Colonie schools have used a volunteer PTA "phone tree" as a backup to media and web emergency notifications. The phone trees rely on parents to call other parents to spread important information.

Although the phone trees have been systematically structured to make them as reliable as possible, "there are many pitfalls," said Roessleville PTA President Denise Platt. "Some test runs have revealed a very low success rate in contacting people in a timely manner."

In the case of an emergency, it is estimated that most children arrive home within 30-45 minutes. During two PTA phone tree test runs at Roessleville this school year, a good number of the phone tree callers were not able to be reached, forcing other parents to make many more calls than expected. As a result, it took three hours before every parent could be contacted.

"That's just too long when you're talking about a child's safety," Platt said.

The South Colonie Safe Schools Committee has spent the better part of a year investigating and listening to proposals from telephone emergency alert service providers to secure the best features and price for the district.

They chose a service provided by the company — Virtual Ed Link. This service was developed by Viyya Technologies last year in the wake of the tragic shootings at Virginia Tech University. It is a computer application that provides timely distribution of information at any time, but especially in times of crisis.

Here's how the system works:

- Phone numbers parents have supplied to their child's school for their home, mobile phones, PDAs and emergency contacts are stored in a database.
- When an emergency message is disseminated from the District Office or remote location, it automatically rings the parent's primary contact number.
- If no one answers at that number, the message bounces to a second contact number, to a third and so on until someone is reached.
- If no one can be reached, it alerts the district so that the school is aware of the situation and a child is not sent home unattended until a parent, guardian or emergency contact can be notified.

"So it's extremely important that all parents know their child's emergency contact information is up to date for this system to be truly effective," Marcelle said. "Parents should also know that their numbers will be kept confidential (not shared with companies or agencies) and used exclusively for emergency notifications."

Try the online sports notifier

www.highschoolsports.net



Would you like to have the most up to the minute information on your favorite sports teams? There is no more waiting around to see if the game is cancelled, no more wondering what time the game starts, no more speculation on where the game is being held.

You can go to www.highschoolsports.net, choose New York, then choose Colonie Central High School from the menu. The web calendar shows the week's activities. At the bottom of the page are a number of options. You can choose a specific team and get individual schedules. You can also sign up for Change Notification and receive an email or a message on your cell phone letting you know that a game has been postponed or cancelled.

The first step is to sign up. You will get an email with instructions to complete the sign up procedure and to choose what teams you want to receive notices for. You can sign up for any number of teams. You will also have a direct link to MapQuest for directions to away games. You can even get information on other high school sports in the state.

CCHS scholarship deadline March 27

Applications for a 2008 South Colonie Dollars for Scholars scholarship award are due in the Colonie Central High School Counseling Center no later than **March 27**. An applicant must be a CCHS senior who plans on attending a full-time accredited two-year or four-year college or university by the fall of 2008. For more information and an application, contact CCHS Counselor Kimberly Leva.

CCHS to stage Into the Woods

Spring musical March 27-29

Rehearsals have begun for Colonie Central High School's March spring musical *Into the Woods*, and it looks to be a spectacular production. There is a Line & Cue cast of 25 – about half of them appeared in the production of *Les Miserables* at Cohoes Music Hall in January. There will be a mostly student orchestra of 20, and people are going to be talking about the set for years.



Due to a conflict, the production dates have been changed to March 27, 28 and 29 at 7 p.m., and March 29 at 2 p.m., in the Mark Cornell Auditorium. The senior citizens performance will be at 6:30 p.m., on Wednesday, March 26, at CCHS.

Presale tickets are \$5 and may be purchased until March 15. Early buyers will be given prime reserved seating in the auditorium. A presale order form may be downloaded on the district website at www.southcolonieschools.org or obtained at CCHS. Tickets will also be sold at the door for \$8. South Colonie Dollars for Scholars will be selling bottled water to benefit their various scholarship funds.

... MRSA

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of all Physical Education areas especially where equipment is shared. Those efforts continue today.

Parents can help by encouraging their children to wash their hands thoroughly with soap as often as possible. This action, health authorities say, is the best preventative measure for spreading the infection.

Also, be aware of the MRSA symptoms. The infection commonly causes boils and soft tissue infection. The symptoms may include redness, areas warm to the touch, pain, drainage, discomfort and swelling.

If your child is displaying any of these symptoms or if you have concerns about your child's health, please contact your family physician. It is very important to report a diagnosed or a suspected infectious condition to the school nurse. As always, health information is kept strictly confidential. More information on MRSA can be found on the district website at www.southcolonieschools.org.

Taking action to prevent communicable diseases

The South Colonie Central School District has established a committee of school, medical and safety personnel to provide information to prepare for any possible flu or influenza pandemic.

The goal of the committee is to work with the New York State Department of Health, New York State Education Department, local, county and Colonie emergency personnel to increase awareness of information about pandemic flu and to develop a school district-wide action plan. Those efforts have been ongoing since last summer.

In the meantime, schools have taken positive steps to encourage preventative healthy habits to decrease the spread of germs. These methods of self-care and healthy habits are being taught and encouraged every day. For tips in the event of a pandemic flu, again, visit the South Colonie website.



The Veeder Elementary School community raised more than \$5,000 at the first Amy Tish Memorial Basketball Game in January. The fundraiser honors Amy, a former teacher, who died unexpectedly last year at 32, and supports a family dealing with a catastrophic event. This year's proceeds went to help the Rossetti family. Danny is a second grader, whose sister, Sophia, was diagnosed with leukemia. The Veeder teachers defeated a team from the Colonie Police Department 42-37.

District begins lengthy '08-09 budget process

Annual budget vote on May 20

The Board of Education and South Colonie administration began putting together a district budget for the 2008-09 school year in January. For a complete list of budget meetings and activities visit the district website at www.southcolonieschools.org.

The annual budget vote and Board of Education elections will be held on Tuesday, May 20. Polls will be open 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. at the five elementary schools.

Poll volunteers needed for vote

South Colonie Schools are in need of volunteers who can work the polls during the 2008-2009 district budget vote on Tuesday, May 20. Voting hours are 11 a.m. to 9 p.m. at the district's five elementary schools. Hours are flexible. For more information, contact the District Office at 869-3576, Extension 2443.

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Roessleville Elementary students are 'bully free'



Roessleville Elementary School children learned about the dangers of bullying one another during the school's "Bully Free Day" in January. The day kicked off with a school-wide assembly where students were treated with a performance by the Puppet People's Bully Buster program. Later, the children participated in various grade-level workshops where facilitators from Roessleville's bully prevention coordinating committee read stories relating to bullying, lead discussions and engaged students in activities reinforcing with them the importance of standing up for themselves and others.

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