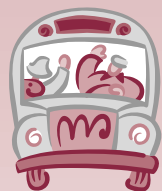


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Preparing World Class Citizens

February/March 2011

Teachers turn to Google Apps web sites to heighten home-school communications

Home-School communications is certainly a lot different than it used to be.

Once upon a time, it was common practice for a teacher to hand a student a folded piece of paper and say: "Johnny, please take this note home to your mother."

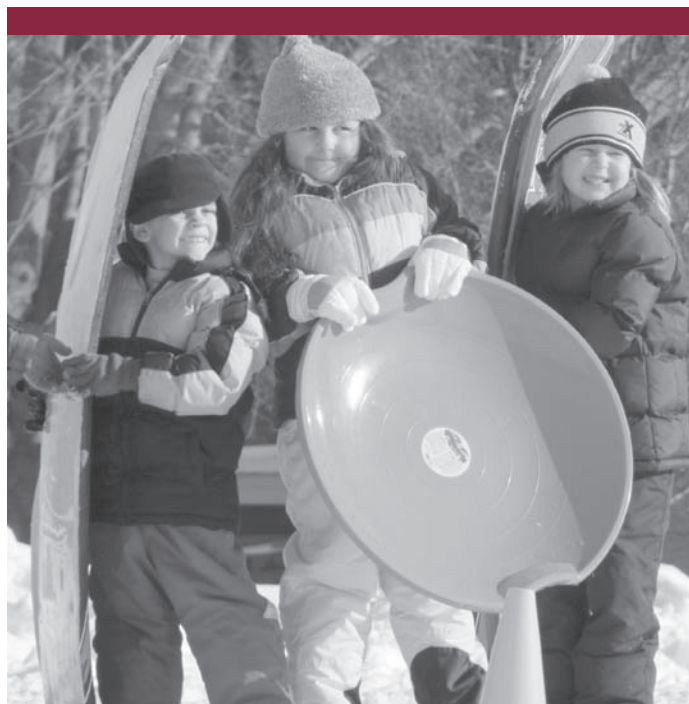
But in today's modern world, communications between school and home is just a mouse click away as more and more teachers in the South Colonie Central School District are developing web sites of their own.

This growing practice is enabling parents and students of all grade levels to gather classroom information, homework assignments, music lesson schedules, library research tools, etc. — any time, any where.

"Having my own web site has given me a way to reach out to my students, develop lessons differently and update information in a timely manner," said Shaker Road Elementary School Librarian Lisa Marinucci. "It is different than the district web site so it gives my students a more personalized feel."

Marinucci was one of the first to introduce her own teacher web site using a South Colonie template created by the district's

Continued on page 2 ... teacher web



Students get ready to tackle the hill at Shaker Road Elementary School during P.E. classes.

Winter sledding provides fun and exercise during elementary P.E.

The Physical Education staff at Shaker Road Elementary School provided a unique opportunity for every student to participate in sledding during their Physical Education classes this winter.

View a photo gallery on Shaker Road's web page

Students practiced getting their snow gear on as quick as possible then headed to the back of the school for a great time on the hill. For an entire week, the students spent their Physical Education classes having a great time outdoors (not to mention getting a great deal of exercise) with their teachers and friends.

... teacher web

Continued from page 1

Information Technology (IT) Department in a program called Google Apps. What makes Google Apps attractive over the many classroom information management systems is that the web site creation software “is very user friendly” and the program is free, said District IT Director Jack Adams.

“Cost is always a factor, especially in these times when aid cuts to schools continue to dominate the headlines, Adams said. “But the product is very good and it has really taken off around here.”

IT began offering teacher web site training sessions in Google Apps last spring and today there are more than 120 teacher sites live and running in South Colonie. Instrumental in the South Colonie Google template/program creation and teacher training were IT staffers Darko Sedlar and Matthew Veino. Some more tech savvy educators have created classroom web sites in other design programs but use South Colonie’s Google Apps program to link to their sites. All of the teacher sites are now linked to the South Colonie district web site for easy access.

How are they being used?

South Colonie teachers are using their classroom web sites to post online homework assignments, classroom calendars, daily announcements, parent newsletters, photographs, student work and more. These teacher web sites are intended for use by South Colonie students, teachers and parents. To access a site, you must have a Google account with a username and password.

Some of the teacher web sites include:

- Mr. (Joel) Miller’s World of Brass. The Colonie Central High School band instructor features weekly assignments and music lesson calendars, concert schedules, news and online tips for student brass instrument players.
- Mrs. (Erin) Govel’s Universal Pre-K Connections at Roessleville Elementary School. Her site includes UPK news, educational things to do at home and a feature on Nursery Rhymes like Humpty Dumpty and Jack and Jill.



- Art with Miss (Kathryn) Chandler features student art galleries from three elementary schools and Sand Creek Middle School.
- Mrs. (Delynn) Wickham’s La Pagina de la Sra – eighth grade Spanish teacher for the Sand Creek Middle School Jedi Knights – features projects, videos and more in Spanish, of course!

The high school Technology Department has even used the Google Apps program to create a unique online curriculum guide it formally launched (as a link to the district web site) in January. The online web site complements the traditional paper course book distributed by the CCHS Guidance Department.

This was the project of Lisa Eichholzer, who has been teaching web design at the high school for 12 years. “Our department focuses on many hands-on activities to help students learn Technology, Math, Science and Communications concepts,” Eichholzer explained. “These things are more interesting when pictures and videos are able to be included in the presentation.”

The paper version of the curriculum guide is mostly text-based, she added, produced and printed once a year as a listing of all CCHS courses. The Technology Department’s online version is ever-evolving.

“This online guide will allow our department to post photos, videos, animated sequences and links of articles of interest for students and parents,” she said. “It will be a much richer experience for viewers/readers and help students/parents make more informed decisions on course choices.”

Other benefits of Google Apps

In addition to the web site creation program, Google Apps also offers South Colonie teachers free online software called Google Docs. Google Docs enables educators to create and share documents, spreadsheets, calendars and presentations in real time. The programs are accessible on any computer with Internet access.

With Google Docs, teachers can share documents with students and parents, comment on student work, grade students online, collaborate on assignments and lesson plans with other teachers, and post homework, handouts and student work to their classroom web sites. Students can also use Google Docs to keep track of their grades, collaborate with other students on projects and view homework, handouts and notes 24/7.

Congressman Tonko tours CCHS Technology classes

One day after President Obama called for greater investments in education and innovation in his 2011 State of the Union address, Congressman Paul Tonko toured several classes of aspiring engineers at Colonie Central High School.

Tonko, who represents the 21st Congressional District and is one of the few members of Congress with a college engineering degree, spent two hours at CCHS in January getting a firsthand look at the Project Lead The Way (PLTW) program and other 21st century Technology offerings.

As he walked about the technology classrooms, computer rooms and design labs talking with students and South Colonie faculty, he reminisced about the "Space Race" of his generation and how it encouraged young people of his time to get involved in science.

"I am an engineer today because of President Kennedy's message (of the 1960s)," said Tonko, a member of the Congressional Committee on Science, Space and Technology. "And now we are challenged by our sitting President toward the same goal. That's why it's so encouraging to see a school system like South Colonie so invested in Project Lead The Way, where they're offering untold opportunities to so many students here to enter into the exploration of science and technology careers."

In a memorable moment from his State of the Union address, President Obama told Congress, "We need to teach our kids that it's not just the winner of the Super Bowl who deserves to be celebrated, but the winner of the science fair."

Programs like Project Lead the Way do just that, encouraging hands-on experience in STEM curriculum: Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics. It is a national curriculum that forms partnerships among public schools, higher education institutions and the private sector to increase the quantity and quality of engineers and engineering technologists graduating from our nation's college and universities.

Back in 1997, Colonie High was one of the first public schools to offer a full array of PLTW courses to its students and now it's being taught in more than 3,000 high schools



Congressman Paul Tonko learns about robotics from Colonie Central High School students on his tour of the Technology Department in January.

in the nation. PLTW offerings at CCHS include courses in Design and Drawing for Production (CAD), Principle of Engineering, Digital Electronics, Computer Integrated Manufacturing, Engineering Design and Development and Aerospace Engineering.

"During your visit," CCHS Principal David Wetzel told the Congressman, "you are going to meet a group of educators and students with a vision for all that the future holds in store for us. I think you will be excited to learn that these people represent all that is possible in our future. As a result of this experience, these young people will be our leaders of tomorrow."

A program that really works

"This program works," added PLTW teacher Barry Witte. "I support it and I'm proud to have you in my classroom to witness it."

On a back wall of Witte's classroom hangs several plaques with the names of CCHS graduates who have gone on to study science and engineering in college as a result of what they learned under the Garnet and Gold. Other students are planning to follow that same path, some day adding their plaques side-by-side the others.

"I come here and I learn things that I'm told kids in their second and third year of college are just learning this stuff and I'm like wow, I couldn't get a better opportunity," added senior Michael Fitzgibbon, who plans to enter the U.S. Navy on a scholarship and study mechanic engineering.

During a busy morning, Rep. Tonko toured several CCHS Technology classrooms seeing and learning about students' study of robotics, computer design, bridge engineering, aerospace and more. Joined on his tour by several PLTW officials, Tonko said it's curriculum like this that exemplifies the President's message of an emphasis on innovation in the classroom that can lead to the jobs of the future.

"If we're going to win this global race, we need to enter it with investments in human, capital and physical infrastructure, and the way to begin with that is to really introduce it into the learning curve," he said. "I wish I had programs like this when I was in high school."



Jaimee Walters and Sidney Archie meet President Obama.

CCHS students meet Obama on his stop in capital area

Two students from Colonie Central High School had a unique opportunity to meet President Barack Obama on his visit to the Capital District in January.

Jaimee Walters, 17, a CCHS junior, and her niece, 15-year-old CCHS sophomore Sidney Archie, 15, attended a VIP greeting at Albany International Airport when Air Force One landed there January 21 on the President's speaking engagement at the General Electric Co. How did they get in?

Well, according to Sidney's mother Delisa Archie, it seems Sidney's Godfather works for the Secret Service and he was kind enough to get both girls a good spot to meet the President. They two CCHS students were also the only ones to get President Obama autograph on a newspaper — a copy of the *New York Post* they had saved from when Obama was first elected President of the United States.

Sidney remembers it was cold waiting for the President that day. "After we checked it with the Secret Service we waited in a CDTA bus for about 30 minutes," she said. "They we were interviewed by all the local TV stations and had to wait 45 minutes outside because they 'froze the tarmac' (meaning no one is allowed to move around from a certain section)."

"But once (the President) walked off the plane you completely forgot just how cold you were," Sidney added. "Then he came over and shook every one's hand and thanked me for coming out. it was the best day of my life."

"It was so exciting to actually meet him," Jaimee added. "He shook my had and when I asked him to sign the newspaper we bought when he was elected he took the paper and asked for a Sharpie. Then he sign. That was special We were the only ones who got his autograph that day. I will never forget this day. I'm glad I could get out of school for a little while to meet the man who changed history."

Governor proposes drastic cuts in school aid

District faces \$2.3 million loss for 2011-2012 year

On February 1st, Governor Cuomo presented his proposal for the 2011-12 New York State budget. The Governor is proposing a total of \$19.39 billion in state support for public schools.

This represents a year-to-year decrease of \$1.535 billion (-7.3%) statewide and about a 10.2 percent or \$2.3 million cut is aid to South Colonie, as compared to the approved 2010-11 state budget. The total decrease represents a \$1.537 billion reduction in formula aids and a \$1.75 million increase in grant programs.

According to Superintendent Jonathan Buhner, the South Colonie School District will "continue to take responsible steps to address the shortfall in state revenue. Basically, state aid has decreased about 23 percent over the last three school years."

"That being said," Buhner added, "the district has worked hard to keep the local tax levy low by making difficult decisions in a timely manner. While we certainly cannot control the general operations of the state, we will continue to do everything in our power to maintain the quality of programs in an efficient manner."

The Governor's budget proposal also contains a series of other elements that would impact school districts across the state, from limiting reimbursements for Special Education summer school to the prospect of some relief from mandated expenses that drive up costs.

Another massive loss of \$2.3 million in aid for South Colonie in the proposal,

Continued on page 5 ... school aid

... school aid

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combined with regular contractual obligations, means that the district is facing another difficult process developing the 2011-12 district budget. Even with efforts to keep the budget-to-budget increases low or "flat," the large loss in state revenues creates a gap.

The district and Board of Education began the budget development process in January. A complete list of public meetings is posted on the district web site.

Superintendent Jonathan Buhner noted that it is at an early stage in both the district and state budget processes, and said the district will continue to refine its projections in the coming weeks. Soon, the State Education Department will be mailing school districts including South Colonie detailed descriptions and "backup" data that explains how the proposed State Aid estimates were calculated for each district.

For a brief summary of the major elements of the Governor's 2011-2012 proposal for State Aid to public schools visit the district web site.

If the Governor's budget is approved by the state lawmakers, this would represent the second straight year that South Colonie saw a significant decline in educational funding from the state, and aid was essentially flat the year prior to that. Federal stimulus funding for education, which helped offset some of the aid shortfalls of the previous two years, is no longer available.

The district has made numerous budget cuts and operational efficiencies over the last couple of years, which limits the available options to reduce spending going forward.

CCHS team captures eight awards at Science Olympiad

Colonie Central High School captured eight awards at the annual Science Olympiad competition held in February at the College of Saint Rose in Albany.

The team competed against 23 area schools in 18 different science events. This was, by far, the team's most successful year as it earned awards in eight events.

Congratulations to first place winners Chris Desmond and Jon Wyatt in Technical Problem Solving and Kelsey Roberts and Courtney Benoit in Ecology. Also Kelsey Roberts, Sarah Wang and Catie Miller captured second place in the very complex Protein Modeling event. Third place finishers were Matt Olson and Will Kellogg in Chem Lab and Chris Desmond and Will Kellogg in Optics. Sarah Wang and Catie Miller finished fourth in Disease Detectives. Fifth place finishers were Ann Vachaparambil and Matt Olson in Anatomy and Physiology and Eric Altman for the Helicopter Levitation build event.

Other students contributing to the team's success were Mike Fitzgibbon, Diana Hart, Ashleigh Hutton, Marsel Shushe and John Ziamandanis. The team was coached by Mrs. Schrader and Mr. Witte, with special thanks to Mr. Goldberg and Mrs. Villa.

Science Olympiad is an international non-profit organization devoted to improving the quality of science education, increasing student interest in science and providing recognition for outstanding achievement in science education by both students and teachers. These goals are accomplished through classroom activities, research, training workshops and the encouragement of intramural, district, regional, state and national tournaments.

Science Olympiad tournaments are rigorous academic interscholastic competitions that consist of a series of team events, which students prepare for during the year. These challenging and motivational events are well balanced between the various science disciplines of biology, earth science, chemistry, physics and technology. There is also a balance between events requiring knowledge of science concepts, process skills and science applications.



Members of the Colonie High School Science Olympiad team.

South Colonie joins list of EPA Energy Star Leaders

Top \$3 million energy savings mark

South Colonie Central Schools is proud to join EPA's list of Energy Star Leaders, an elite group of organizations that have improved energy efficiency across all of the buildings in a portfolio. To date, Energy Star Leaders include organizations such as schools, hospitals, supermarkets, commercial real estate businesses and hospitality companies.

"We are pleased to be named an EPA ENERGY STAR Leader," said District Energy Educator, James Brown. "Through this achievement, we have demonstrated our commitment to environmental stewardship while also lowering our energy costs."

South Colonie's very successful Energy Conservation and Management program has now topped the \$3 million mark in energy savings.

In his annual report to the Board of Education in November, Brown said since the conservation program was implemented district-wide in September, 2001, South Colonie has avoided \$3,125,671 in energy expenditures for electric, natural gas and propane use. And, while the cost of these utilities continues to go up each year, the district, nevertheless, continues to pay less for electric, natural gas and propane from one year to the next.

Energy Star Leaders manage energy strategically across an entire portfolio of buildings using EPA's standardized measurement tool for tracking building energy use. These select organizations are recognized by EPA for improving the energy performance of their portfolio by 10 percent or more. The highest leaders recognition identifies those organizations with portfolios that perform in the top 25 percent of energy efficiency nationwide based upon the average of the buildings in the portfolio.

Energy Star was introduced by EPA in 1992 as a voluntary, market-based partnership to reduce greenhouse gas emissions through energy efficiency. Today, the Energy Star label can be found on more than 60 different kinds of products, new homes and commercial and industrial buildings.



Cozy reading day at Veeder Elementary

Veeder Elementary School students in Laura Backus' Kindergarten class have been learning about the winter habits of animals. They've also been improving their reading skills as part of the school-wide Parents As Reading Partners (PARP) campaign. The class decided to combine the two events recently by having a cozy reading day. After making hibernation caves for their stuffed animals, the children invited their family members to school where everyone got cozy, read their favorite books and enjoyed snacks.



Roessleville Math Night

Roessleville Elementary School hosted its second annual Math Night in January. Families traveled through 13 stations challenging students to complete various math games and activities. Upon completing each station, students received a stamp on their "Math Port." More than 80 families participated in this fun and educational evening.

Sand Creek records Top 10 finish at MATHCOUNTS

Lisha Kill Middle School students also participate

Sand Creek Middle School students captured eighth place at the annual MATHCOUNTS competition held in February at the GE Global Research Center. It was the first Top 10 finish for a South Colonie team in more than 10 years.

The event is sponsored annually through a joint effort of the National Society of Professional Engineers (NSPE) and the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). More than 140 middle school students in grades 6-8 representing some 20 local schools took part in the event which is intended to identify the top middle school math talent in the nation. Top finishers from each local competition move on to state finals, with hopes of possibly advancing to the regional and national finals.

Sand Creek team members were eighth graders Peter Jones, Ronke Osipitan, Oneida Shushe and Michael Ziamandanis. Other participants included seventh graders William Marcklinger and Katie Yee and sixth grader Samee Mushtak. Staff advisors were Chris Balkwell, Ruth Brady, Rachel Pollay and Katie Skanes. Five students from Lisha Kill Middle School also competed at MATHCOUNTS this year and finished 15th overall. Lisha Kill's Jackie Frank was the teacher representative who, along with Gregory Bearup, South Colonie Supervisor of Math and Science, attended the competition.

MATHCOUNTS is a national middle school coaching and competitive mathematics program that promotes mathematics achievement through a series of fun and engaging "bee" style contests.



Capital District Region, NY Future City Competition 2011 - Ian Domes Photography

Sand Creek Engineering Club captures two awards at national competition

The Sand Creek Middle School Engineering Club captured two awards at the National Engineer's Week Future Cities Competition hosted by Hudson Valley Community College in January.

The Sand Creek team placed high out of the 22 schools from the Capital District that entered the competition and was recognized with two special awards: "Rookie of the Year", for being the best first-time school to compete, and "Best Air Transportation Design," for having the best air transportation design of all of the cities. Sand Creek earned \$400 in rewards for these achievements.

Representing South Colonie at this event under the direction of Sand Creek teacher Charles Nagel and Engineer Mentor Chris Babin were students Sarah Bailey, Connor Cragon, Justin DeRusso, Peter Jones, Noah Jones and Carlee Wood.

For the Future Cities Competition, the Engineering Club used Sim City 4 to design their "city of the future" on the computer, using "cheetah speed" to advance the city, which the team named Sanitas (the Latin word for "health"), to the year 2210. This city was worked on by eighth graders Connor Cragon and Carlee Wood.

Students also had to choose a disease or illness and write an essay describing how their city would accommodate/treat people with that particular disease. Eighth grader Sarah Bailey wrote an essay describing how Sanitas would help patients with the disease Epilepsy. On top of those two tasks, these Sand Creek students also had to build a 50" x 25" scale model of their city, requiring the use of recycled materials and a moving part to add difficulty. Eighth graders Peter Jones, Noah Jones, and Justin DeRusso headed the building of the model.

During the competition, students Sarah Bailey, Connor Cragon, and Peter Jones gave a seven-minute presentation about their school's city, Sanitas, and answered five-minutes of questions from a panel of three judges.



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Don't forget to follow South Colonie on SNN and Facebook today

Don't forget to follow South Colonie School news by signing up for SNN



today. The district's launched the "School News Notifier" or (SNN) in November – a system designed to help keep parents, staff and the community more in touch with what is happening at South Colonie Central Schools. SNN is an opt-in email alert system for which parents and residents can sign up to receive email alerts from the district. With SNN, district officials have the power to send updates and reminders about district activities or information about school closings and delays. Users can choose to receive any or all of the alerts, and they can unsubscribe at any time. Sign up today by clicking on the SNN icon on the district web site. Also,



you can now follow South Colonie news and announcements on Facebook.com.



Displaying their horse art are Lisha Kill Middle School students (L-R front row) Sarah Novak and Giovanna Raponi (L-R back row) Emma Gleason, Madison Judge, Jamie Lam and Kevin Ritz (not pictured is Katie Scott).

Lisha Kill student artwork in 'Horsing Around with the Arts'

Several Lisha Kill Middle School students have been selected to have their artwork displayed at the 17th annual National Museum of Racing equine art show in Saratoga Springs. The show, entitled "Horsing Around with the Arts," will be held February 25 to March 20. The children, students of art teacher Betsy Ryan, created horse sculptures using wire and wood scraps as part of grade 5-6 Art Club. Featured will be the works of Emma Gleason, Madison Judge, Kevin Ritz, Jamie Lam, Giovanna Raponi, Sarah Novak and Katie Scott. The equine art show gives young horse lovers an opportunity to showcase their artistic talents. Best of all, equine art contest winners will receive \$50 U.S. Savings Bonds from the National Museum of Racing.

The juried horse art show includes two divisions, accommodating entries from younger students (3rd through 7th grades) and older students (8th grade through 12th grade). Equine artwork may include ceramics, drawing, painting, sculpture or textiles for the 2010 "Horsing Around with the Arts" contest.