

A look at BOCES SCHOOL

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A head start in healthcare

At Sullivan BOCES, the Career and Technical Education: Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program is doing more than just preparing high school students for the healthcare field—it's shaping futures and filling a vital workforce need in Sullivan County.

Taught by Amy Wolcott, RN, BSN, the Health Occupations II program enrolls 22 students this year, most of whom will graduate with their CNA certification. That means these students will be able to go straight into the workforce or pursue higher education while already having valuable hands-on experience.

"Anywhere in healthcare, there's a huge need," said Wolcott. "CNA is entry-level, but it's a great way to start. And we want to keep as many people here in Sullivan County as possible."

Students in the program begin with Health Occupations I in their junior year, learning anatomy, physiology, and healthcare fundamentals. Those who choose to continue into the CNA program as seniors learn 21 essential skills and complete 108 hours each of theory and clinical practice. Clinical hours are spent at Achieve Nursing and Rehab in Liberty, where students work directly with residents, applying what they learn in class.

"Clinical is the icing on the cake," said Wolcott. "These students are making human connections. They're taking care of someone's grandparent. They're making a difference."

Students echoed that sentiment. Nehemiah Damon, a senior from Fallsburg, shared that a family



Amy Wolcott, RN, BSN, far right, supervises her CNA students as they practice assisting a patient with getting out of bed.

member's illness sparked his desire to help others. He plans to attend SUNY Sullivan, then transfer to a four-year college to become an endocrinologist. Maddie Vannostrand of Sullivan West said nursing helped her mental health. "It's being able to take the focus off myself and help others. It really did something to my heart," she said.

For Francely Marabiaga, a Fallsburg senior and first-generation immigrant, the program is a stepping stone toward becoming a military nurse. Liberty senior Connor Williams said the program helps him honor a family member's dream. "I like that I get to help peo-

ple in the nursing home and learn new things."

Beyond the personal stories, the program has a practical impact.

Students help fill staffing gaps at local long-term care facilities. Achieve Nursing and Rehab has welcomed the students and expressed gratitude for their contributions, Wolcott said. "An aide told me the other day she finally had time to eat lunch because of our students. That says it all."

The program also fosters diversity. Some students are bilingual, which is a major asset in a facility where many residents primarily speak Spanish. Wolcott said employers are eager to hire these students not only for their training but also for their cultural competence.

The program costs nothing for students except for personal items like uniforms, thanks to district funding. If pursued outside of BOCES, CNA training would cost around \$2,000, making this a major value for families.

As the need for healthcare workers continues, BOCES may expand the program if student interest remains strong. For now, these future healthcare professionals are already making a difference—one patient, one smile, one bed made at a time.



Amy Wolcott, front left, with her staff and current students enrolled in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program.

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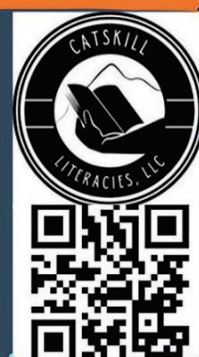
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BOCES expands CTE to meet growing demand

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

With the demand for skilled trades rising across the region and the nation, Sullivan BOCES is stepping up in a big way. The Career and Technical Education (CTE) Center in Liberty is expanding its programming to meet the needs of students and the local workforce, creating new opportunities for hands-on learning and career readiness.

This fall, the Career & Tech Center will roll out two new programs—plumbing/HVAC (heating, ventilation, and air conditioning), and esthetics—responding to both increased student enrollment and industry demand.

“Our enrollment is at an all-time high, reflecting the growing demand for our programs,” said Jeffrey Molusky, Executive Principal of CTE. “To continue meeting the needs of our students and the county, we’re excited to expand our programming and provide even more opportunities for success.”

The new programs come in addition to the expansion of exist-



Students in the CTE Music Production program hard at work creating original beats and music to express their creativity and talent.

ing courses like electrical, welding, health occupations, and public safety. These additions are part of a larger strategy to provide students with career paths that align with both their interests and job market projections.

“Electrical, plumbing, and HVAC are probably one of the biggest needs within the county,” Molusky added. “There’s major shortages and our overall goal is to train students in areas where they’re going

to be able to get jobs and be employable.”

According to Assistant Principal Katie Wilcox, collaboration with trade unions and industry experts is central to the development of these programs. Sullivan BOCES partners with organizations like the Steamfitters, the Carpenter’s Union, and the Iron Workers to create pipelines from the classroom to the job site.

“We have been successful with

this model, our construction program, has anywhere from three to five students per year entering their union’s training program,” said Wilcox.

CTE students are exposed early to real-world expectations. The center hosts job fairs, invites industry partners to speak directly with students, and offers work-based learning experiences, many of which lead to employment even before graduation.

“We’ve had students actually get a job at our career fair—interviewed and signed on the line,” said Wilcox.

While expansion is crucial, space has become a premium. BOCES has been working closely with SUNY Sullivan to secure additional classrooms each year to accommodate the growth.

“Our current enrollment’s around 680. We started at about 710 this year,” said Molusky. “Next year we’ll probably be over 700 again.”

Beyond immediate employment, CTE students are also getting a head start on higher education. The center has articulation agreements with colleges across

School Scene

‘A look inside the BOCES School District’

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New York and even in Ohio and Connecticut, allowing students to earn college credits while still in high school.

"All of our programs have articulation agreements," said Wilcox. "We work with SUNY Sullivan and others to review our curriculum and award credit if the student chooses to continue their education there."

In many cases, CTE students graduate not only with practical experience and credentials like industry certifications but also with valuable connections to local employers and unions.

"Students come here and do something they enjoy rather than just math, science, and English," Molusky said. "They still get the credits they need to graduate, but they also leave with real skills."

Importantly, students maintain ties with their home schools, attending CTE for half the day and returning for sports and extracurriculars. This structure helps foster both personal and professional

growth.

The programs are taught by industry professionals who transitioned into teaching after careers in the field. These instructors bring not only expertise but also connections that open doors for their students.

"All of our teachers bring valuable industry experience," Molusky noted. "They are experts

in their trade and then develop their teaching skills to inspire the next generation.

Wilcox added that the faculty also participates in teacher training focused on CTE pedagogy, which includes everything from project-based learning to student assessment using industry stan-

dards.

Every CTE program includes a technical endorsement opportunity, which is equivalent to an Advanced Regents diploma and is based on a written exam, a

hands-on assessment, and a portfolio that includes resumes, cover letters, and work samples.

"We're building their work ethic," said Wilcox. "Not only technical skills, but also their work readiness—being on time, being respectful, working as a team player."

In addition to classroom and lab instruction, students contribute to real projects across the county. Construction, electrical, and design natural resources students have worked on projects at local firehouses, our hospital, and schools. Culinary students run pop-up restaurants, and cosmetology students run a salon that is open to the public and provide services at local nursing homes in collaboration with health occupations classes.

"We go above and beyond to ensure our students get the hands-on experience they need to succeed," said Molusky.

As CTE continues to grow, so too does the sense of purpose and pride among the students. It's a place where they can explore, try on different futures, and leave high school with more than just a diploma.

"They're building their name in our community right now," said Wilcox. "They make connections they'll have for the rest of their lives."



There is a focus on the physical in addition to the culinary and computer studies, as students in the CTE cosmetology program practice to eventually master their craft.



Students in the CTE Culinary Arts program carefully evaluating their latest tastings to ensure they meet high standards.

Expanding Elementary Special Education Programs

STORY AND PHOTOS
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

To meet the growing needs of local districts, Sullivan BOCES has expanded its specialized education program in response to the rising mental health and developmental needs of elementary-aged students. Additionally, they have expanded their alternative education program to include a middle school option for students.

This year, the Elementary Program introduced three new classrooms as part of its expansion of services for kindergarten through second-grade students.

"We had about 22 kindergartners come into the program this year," said Megan Becker, Executive Principal of the Elementary Program. "That demand prompted the opening of new classrooms to better serve students across the county."

BOCES special education programs operate under specific classroom models based on student needs. The "8:1:3" model refers to eight students, one teacher, one teaching assistant, and two teacher aides. Other models in-



Above: These students are part of a growing program that now includes iTAP (Intensive Therapeutic Academic Program) classrooms at the elementary level.

At right: Some students use iPads with communication apps or speech-to-text tools.

Below: Hardworking students in the Special Education program benefit from unique classroom models — such as the 8:1:3 setting.



with speech impairments and autism—has also seen growth.

For these young students, technology plays a vital role in enhancing their educational experience. Becker highlighted the adoption of various curricula for students with autism, including digital learning and communication aids. Non-verbal students use augmentative and alternative communication (AAC) devices like iPads, which feature apps to help them communicate.

"They press a button, and the device says the word for them. As they grow, they can form full sentences," Becker explained. Assistive technology, such as speech-to-text software, also helps students with writing difficulties. "Spelling, writing, and many talk-to-text apps have been incredibly beneficial," said Becker. "These tools allow students to express their ideas and refine their communication skills."

A new iTAP classroom was also added to serve younger students in response to a rising need among school districts. Previously available for grades three and up, the iTAP program provides therapeutic academic support in collaboration with medical profes-

clude "8:1:1" and "12:1:1," depending on the level of support required. For students with the most intensive needs, BOCES offers an Intensive Therapeutic Academic Program (iTAP), which adds a therapeutic component and includes behavioral therapists, counselors, and psychologists.

Parents play an integral role in the referral and placement process at BOCES. "Districts refer students to BOCES, and parents meet with us to discuss placement," Becker said. In programs like iTAP, parental involvement continues through ongoing telehealth communication and counseling.

Becker said that the 8:1:3 program—which serves students





Students in the Special Education program stay focused during classroom activities. This year, Sullivan BOCES expanded its elementary services by opening three new classrooms for kindergarten through second-graders across the county.

sionals. The new program started with just a few students and has since grown rapidly.

"By expanding our iTAP program to younger grades, we can better tailor the program to students' needs," said Megan Becker, Executive Principal of Elementary Programs. "It now offers a more detailed and therapeutic approach, ensuring students have the resources they need to succeed."

Despite the growth, capacity remains a concern. "We have been full since the start of the year," said Becker. "I have 16 elementary classrooms, and right now, only one seat is available." In cases where no seats are open, BOCES works with school districts to find alternative options until the student can be enrolled.

Staffing remains one of the biggest challenges in maintaining and growing these programs. "Our biggest challenge right now is finding qualified educators with the correct credentials," Becker said. She added that the increasing complexity of student behaviors requires additional training for staff and behavioral therapists.

Looking ahead, Sullivan BOCES continues to evaluate and address evolving needs through professional development (PD). "We have a number of PD days throughout the year," said Becker. "We're always looking for curricula that best support both our

teachers and students."

Ultimately, the goal remains the same: to provide high-quality, individualized education for students across the county. "We're expanding our programs to meet the needs of the districts," Becker said. "And we remain committed to providing the best possible education for our students."



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