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**A LOOK AT
ACTIVITIES AT
THE CENTER FOR
DISCOVERY**

**SECTION C
MAY 16, 2025
CALLICOON, NY**

Celebrating growth, achievement, and new beginnings at The Center for Discovery

BY KERRI L. MUZURUK, M.S. ED.,
CHIEF OF EDUCATION, CURRICULUM DESIGN
AND COORDINATION

At The Center for Discovery, the end of the school year is more than a time of reflection — it is a celebration of possibility. As we prepare for two of our most meaningful events — prom and graduation — we honor the incredible journeys each of our students has taken to reach this pivotal transition in their lives.

At the heart of The Center's educational philosophy is the commitment to whole-person development, guided by the HealthE6® model and its six essential elements: Environment, Emotional Regulation, Energy Regulation, Eating, Education, and Evaluation. This comprehensive approach shapes every aspect of a student's experience, ensuring that growth is not only academic, but deeply personal and holistic.

Each day, students engage in meaningful academic instruction aligned with New York State Learning Standards, while simultaneously building critical life skills through the arts, recreation, outdoor experiences, and our renowned animal-assisted programs. Learning at The Center for Discovery is not confined to



Dressed to impress and ready to celebrate, Hunter takes center stage at prom, showcasing the joy and confidence gained through these inclusive learning and social opportunities!

a classroom — it is embedded in every interaction, every activity, and every moment of discovery.

Our carefully designed envi-

ronments foster safety, curiosity, and motivating platforms for engagement, allowing students to explore their potential in nurturing spaces. Emotional and energy regulation strategies are integrated into all activities, helping students manage stress and sustain participation. Nutrition and healthy eating are reinforced through “seed-to-belly” experiences, where students learn to grow, prepare, and enjoy wholesome foods. Education across disciplines is delivered in creative, meaningful ways, with continuous evaluation to personalize each student's program and maximize growth.

These values come vividly to life during prom and graduation. Prom offers students a joyful, inclusive rite of passage — a night filled with music, laughter, dancing, and pride, as families, friends, and staff come together to celebrate resilience, perseverance, and dreams realized. Graduation is equally powerful. Each student's journey is celebrated, honoring not just academic achievements, but the incredible spirit, courage, and determination that have turned challenges into remarkable triumphs.

Beyond celebrating accomplishments, this time of year also focuses on preparing students and

their families for the next chapter of their lives. The Center's team works closely with each family, school district, and The Office of People with Developmental Disabilities (OPWDD) to develop individualized transition plans that build on every graduate's unique strengths and successes. Whether students are moving into community-based programs, residential opportunities, or supported employment, these plans reflect the strong foundation they have built at The Center.

This collaboration with families is essential; by partnering with them, we ensure that each student steps into adulthood with purpose, dignity, and the support they need to thrive. Families are not just part of the process — they are vital members of the team, contributing to the lasting success of each graduate's journey.

At The Center for Discovery, education is not just about academics — it is about unlocking potential, fostering independence, and empowering dreams. As we prepare for this season of celebration, we are reminded of the extraordinary power of belief, perseverance, and community. This June, we celebrate all that our students have achieved — and all the bright futures that lie ahead.

School Scene

'A look inside The Center for Discovery'

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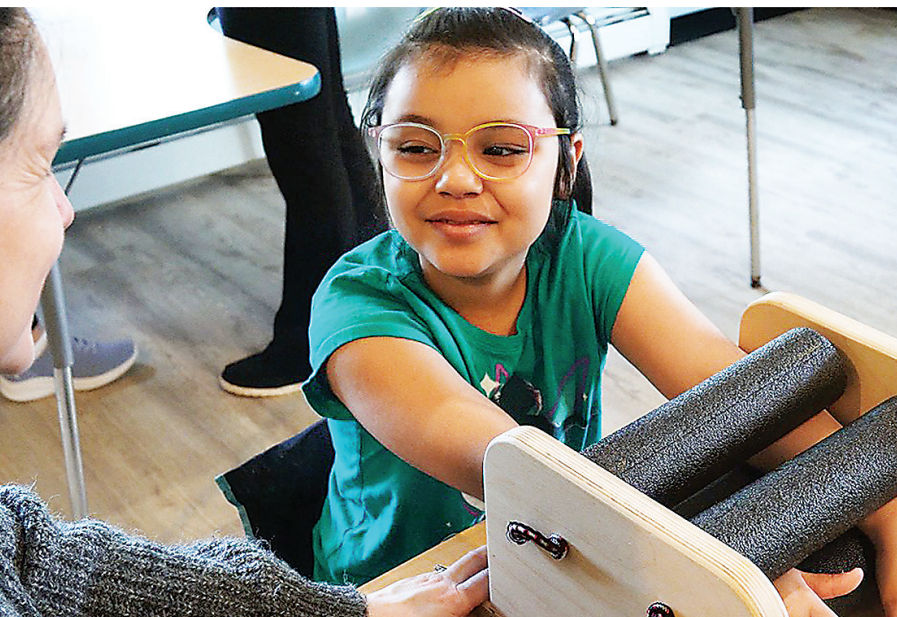


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Innovation Labs at The Center for Discovery: Designing a more inclusive future

BY GIORDANA H. BELL, MS ED., INNOVATION SUPERVISOR



TCFD students, top left, Evan, and top right, Noah during a technology class lesson on adapted wireless remotes and building battery operated devices. Another student, Kaylee, modeling the sensory arm roller, a device for tactile sensory feedback.

The Innovation Labs at The Center for Discovery serve as a dynamic hub where creativity and technology converge to enhance the lives of individuals with complex needs. Guided by the principles of Design, Adapt, and Transform, the Labs focus

on developing assistive technologies that promote independence, accessibility, and dignity.

Working in close collaboration with teachers and clinicians, the Labs identify accessibility goals and tailor solutions to meet the unique needs of each individual here at The Center. Innovations such as the Flex Table®, Sensory Arm Roller, Stability Chair, switch-adapted catapult, Egg Scale, Universal Tool Holder, Braille playground map, and adaptive device holder are just a few examples of the tools created to foster engagement, inclusion, and autonomy.

In addition to fabrication, the Labs explore the use of technology in classroom settings—leveraging devices and built-in accessibility features to enhance learning, participation, and self-reliance. The Innovation Labs are not just building tools—they're building opportunities.

The Labs have also partnered



with TCFD's adult program to adapt toys as gifts for children in the Sullivan County Early Intervention Program. This initiative provided both an educational experience and a meaningful, accessible gift for a child to enjoy.

Educational opportunities are a key part of the Labs' mission. Lessons have included exploring remote control technology and modifying battery-powered toys for inclusive play. Ongoing projects with clinical teams, such as using virtual reality to safely navigate challenging environments, offer immersive, hands-on learning that brings adaptive design to life. These hands-on experiences help students better understand accessibility and adaptive design in a real-world context.

The Labs further extend their impact by open-sourcing their solutions on platforms such as Makers Making Change, Instructables, and the Tikkun Olam Makers (TOM) Global Innovation Challenge. They also collaborate with community-based organizations such as Adaptive Design Hudson Valley and ARISE Adaptive Design—partners who share their commitment to creating custom solutions for individuals in need.

As the Innovation Labs continue to grow, our mission remains clear: to break down barriers, spark creativity, and empower individuals of all abilities. Through innovation, collaboration, and compassion, the Labs are redefining what's possible—one solution at a time.



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Discovery Lab School staff member assisting student with emotional regulation.

From the classroom to the cutting edge: Empowering educators through frontline research

The Research Institute at The Center for Discovery (TCFD) is dedicated to advancing scientific understanding and improving standards of care through a robust interdisciplinary research program. In collaboration with prestigious institutions such as Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Emory University, Georgia Institute of Technology, New York University, University of Missouri, Cornell University, and Baylor University, the Research Institute is shaping the future of therapeutic and educational models.

At the heart of this work is the Discovery Lab School, a specialized classroom embedded

BY DR. JOHANNA LANTZ, PH.D., BCBA, CHIEF OF
PSYCHOLOGY AND RESEARCH

within TCFD's educational program. This innovative space serves as a testing ground for new interventions and technologies. Students in the classroom wear biometric sensor watches that track movement and key physiological markers such as skin temperature, heart rate, and electrodermal activity. These data sources allow researchers to explore the complex relationship between internal physiological states

and external variables like instructional methods, staffing changes, and classroom dynamics. Insights gained here have led to more effective, personalized interventions for students with profound autism spectrum disorder (ASD) and related conditions.

Since its inception, 42 students have participated in longitudinal evaluations through the Discovery Lab School, contributing to several impactful discoveries. Key findings include the benefits of frequent movement breaks, which have been shown to reduce stress and improve on-task behavior. Through our research, we have also learned that stress is contagious—

spreading from student to student and staff alike—prompting the development of more responsive and empathetic classroom environments. Additional insights have revealed that effective communication can reduce both physiological stress and high-risk behaviors, and that small-group or individualized instruction correlates with calmer, more focused classroom settings. In a study published in the journal, *Frontiers in Psychiatry*, we found that a rise in electrodermal activity, indicative of stress, doesn't always precede a high-risk behavior and that for some students, physiological reactivity remains high for the remainder of the day. These findings are informing more personalized and supportive learning environments for students with profound ASD.

This research has gone even further, leveraging artificial intelligence to analyze behavioral, medical, and physiological data to predict high-risk behaviors and medical events. In collaboration with our research partners, we have published several studies that underscore the predictive power of this approach. For example, we found that the presence of

gastrointestinal symptoms, which are common among individuals with autism spectrum disorder (ASD), can serve as predictors of behavioral challenges. We also discovered that patterns of low-risk behaviors may precede and forecast more extreme behaviors, as well as seizures in individuals with seizure disorders. Furthermore, our data show that poor sleep quality can reliably predict behavioral difficulties the following morning.

What makes this research especially unique is the close involvement of educators and other clinical team members—not just as implementers of research-based practices, but as active collaborators in the discovery pro-

cess. Kerri Muzuruk, Executive Chief of Education at TCFD, explains:

“Engaging in research is a transformative experience for educators, offering a rare and powerful opportunity to bridge theory and practice. When teachers are directly involved in research, they gain invaluable insights that inform and elevate their instructional strategies. For many educators, participating in this work is a privilege—an opportunity to shape the future of education in real time.”

At most institutions, teachers seldom have

the chance to be on the frontline of such pioneering work. At TCFD, however, research is woven into the fabric of the classroom, empowering educators to drive change while directly supporting the students they serve.

The Research Institute at The Center for Discovery remains steadfast in its mission to improve outcomes for individuals with profound autism and other complex disabilities. Through groundbreaking, data-driven research and frontline collaboration with educators we continue to deliver proactive solutions that prioritize health, safety, and human potential.



Student wearing E4 biosensor by Empatica that measures electrodermal activity, heart rate, movement and skin temperature.

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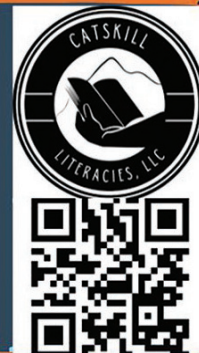
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A beacon of hope for Sullivan County:

The Center for Discovery's Children's Specialty Hospital



The Children's Specialty Hospital entrance in Rock Hill, NY.

Opened in December 2024, The Center for Discovery's Children's Specialty Hospital is a groundbreaking facility that offers short-term, inpatient care for children and adolescents with complex medical and behavioral needs. Designed for individuals ages 5 through 21, the hospital provides comprehensive assessment and treatment for conditions such as autism and related disorders, helping children return home, to school, and to their communities with the tools and support they need to thrive alongside their loved ones.

This first-of-its-kind facility in New York State extends beyond traditional care. The Hospital combines medical, psychiatric, behavioral, nutritional, and educational support, while uncovering the root causes of behavioral and learning challenges. The approach is deeply integrated and individualized, ensuring every child receives the tools they need

for long-term success.

The foundation of the Children's Specialty Hospital's model is the HealthE6® - a six-pillar framework developed over decades at The Center for Discovery. The HealthE6 addresses the interconnectedness of medical, behavioral, nutritional, and sensory systems and has already transformed lives: One teenager, previously homebound for three years due to severe aggression, now attends classes daily. Another has made tremendous strides towards conversational speech after targeted interventions corrected a medical issue that had gone undiagnosed. These early successes underscore the power of an interdisciplinary, whole-child approach that The Center for Discovery is known for.

Early Success Spotlight:

How Supportive Environments Contribute to Overall Success

One child arrived at the hospital facing challenges with tran-

sitions, emotional regulation, and engagement. Through a personalized plan built on movement, sensory integration, and structured support, they made remarkable gains. They learned to independently transition between activities, meet goals tied to flexibility and focus, and participate meaningfully in both small and large group settings. Emotional monitoring and self-advocacy improved as they began requesting breaks, using calming strategies, and returning to class ready to learn. Preferred sensory tools like fidgets helped sustain attention, and a more consistent sleep schedule contributed to their overall success. This journey reflects the potential of a supportive environment tailored to each child's unique needs.

Early Success Spotlight: The Power of Individualized Care

Another child entered the Hospital with difficulties in com-

munication, behavior regulation, and daily living skills. With consistent routines, visual aids, and therapeutic support, they progressed significantly. They used both verbal language and Augmentative and Alternative Communication to communicate effectively, and began clearly expressing needs and preferences. In therapy sessions, they practiced positive coping strategies, identified emotions, and participated more actively. Self-care skills, such as brushing teeth, improved dramatically with only minimal assistance, and structured implementation of emotional regulation strategies helped reduce tantrums and aggression. The child even showed greater food flexibility at mealtimes, and energy regulation activities like gym loops and treadmill sessions supported both physical and emotional development. This progress is an incredible example of how personalized care can make a profound difference.

Inside the Hospital, a certified day school keeps children on track academically, while families, teachers, and providers receive hands-on training to maintain progress after discharge. The ultimate goal is to prepare children for the least restrictive, most fulfilling lives possible.

The Children's Specialty Hospital is located on the Rock Hill campus, surrounded by facilities like a health clinic, training café, and professional development center. These resources work together to support care, education, and innovation.

Recently, New York Senator Charles Schumer highlighted the Hospital as a “beacon of hope” that will shape care for generations. With support from USDA and New York State, and decades of expertise from TCFD, the Children’s Specialty Hospital is not just a new facility – it’s a new future for children and families navigating complex disabilities.

The Center for Discovery President & CEO Dr. Terry Hamlin said of the Children’s Specialty Hospital, “The Center for Discovery is deeply committed to supporting children and adolescents in innovative and expanded ways. Through our Children’s Specialty Hospital, we are providing a lifeline to families in search of answers. The children admitted to our hospital face extraordinary challenges. They live with co-occurring medical conditions that make their developmental disabilities profoundly complex to treat. Many of these medical issues are accompanied by pain, which often leads to maladaptive



A clinical session with a Center for Discovery resident, located in the gymnasium of the new Specialty Hospital.

behaviors that further impact their quality of life. Families have long needed a place where their children’s complex needs are understood, and where there is integrated and coordinated care in one place. At The Center for Discovery, we are dedicated to addressing these medical com-

plexities head-on, treating the root causes, and improving outcomes in ways that transform lives.”

To learn more about admissions or services at The Children’s Specialty Hospital, visit thecenterfordiscovery.org or call (845) 707-8889.

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Building Futures: The Center's partnership with SUNY Potsdam to grow Special Education excellence

BY KERRI L. MUZURUK, M.S. ED., CHIEF OF EDUCATION, CURRICULUM DESIGN AND COORDINATION

The Center for Discovery has proudly established a partnership with SUNY Potsdam to strengthen the pipeline of highly skilled special education teachers. Through this collaboration, existing Center employees have the opportunity to pursue a Master's degree in Special Education — fully funded through the generosity of donors who have established the scholarship program.

This partnership is a reflection of The Center's deep commitment to professional development and the belief that investing in staff education leads directly to stronger outcomes for the students and residents we serve. Through this initiative, cohorts of passionate employees — many of whom already demonstrate outstanding skills in the classroom, working with individuals with complex needs — are now engaged in an advanced, rigorous academic program while continuing their life changing work at The Center.

Jeffrey Bordeman, The Center's Chief of Education, Compliance, and Educational Partnerships, has led the development of a growing partnership between The Center for Discovery and SUNY Potsdam to expand staff access to teaching careers through the ACE (Advancing Careers in Education) Initiative and increase recruitment of future teachers. Eight TCFD staff are currently enrolled in SUNY Potsdam's fully online MEd in Special Education program, which leads to NYS Teacher Certification and is fully funded through TCFD's tuition assistance program. "This collaboration not only opens new

doors for our staff but helps build a stronger, more sustainable future for the special education workforce," said Bordeman. To further strengthen the partnership, a two-day site visit has been arranged for faculty and 40 music education students from SUNY Potsdam's Crane School of Music to complete classroom observation hours in TCFD classrooms.

Beyond tuition support, our teachers are enveloped in a rich,

education through a fully funded MEd program and hands-on professional learning experiences at The Center for Discovery.

The response from employees has been overwhelmingly positive. Participants have shared that the ability to earn their Master's degree without the financial burden of tuition has been life-changing. In addition to building their expertise, many have described how the



Students benefit from our SUNY Potsdam partnership, where hands-on teacher preparation meets real classroom impact.

integrated mentoring system. The Center's experienced instructional coaches, clinicians, teachers, and psychologists form a powerful network of guidance for emerging educators. Through one-on-one coaching, targeted feedback, and cross-disciplinary collaboration, participants receive hands-on mentorship designed to bridge theory and practice in the most meaningful ways.

This partnership with SUNY Potsdam offers current and prospective staff a unique opportunity to advance their careers in

education through a fully funded MEd program and hands-on professional learning experiences at The Center for Discovery. The coursework is immediately relevant to their work, allowing for real-time implementation of evidence-based practices that directly benefit the individuals we support.

The Center's leadership team sees this initiative as a critical investment not only in people but in the future of special education itself. By removing traditional barriers to higher education —



"Grateful to The Center for Discovery for supporting my journey toward a master's in special education at SUNY Potsdam — excited to bring new skills back to the classroom and community!" - Kathleen Kehlenbech, TCFD Teacher

such as cost and access — The Center is actively cultivating a new generation of highly qualified special education professionals who are equipped with both theoretical knowledge and real-world experience.

This partnership with SUNY Potsdam also reflects The Center's broader strategic goals: to become a leader in education, clinical innovation, and workforce development. It demonstrates a model that other organizations may look to replicate, highlighting how collaboration between institutions of higher learning and service organizations can address critical shortages in specialized fields.

As the first cohorts move through the program, excitement continues to grow. These future leaders are not only gaining advanced credentials — they are forming a vibrant community that will strengthen The Center for years to come. Their growth represents a direct investment in the lives of individuals with complex conditions and is another powerful example of how The Center for Discovery continues to innovate in service to its mission.

Spotlight on possibility: The Center for Discovery to launch Performing Arts Academy

Every spring, the theater at the Michael Ritchie Big Barn buzzes with anticipation as the audience settles into their seats for the annual theatrical production at The Center for Discovery. Excitement builds as the lights slowly dim, the music swells and the curtain rises. One by one, performers take to the stage—each shining in a performance shaped around their unique strengths. Some sing. Some dance. Some speak a single word; some just bravely walk across the stage; others deliver lines with gusto. They act with steadfast purpose and confidence, bringing their voices and movements together to tell a story that is entirely their own. This isn't just a performance; it's a transformative experience for every performer on stage.

Moments like these—where creativity, collaboration and individuality flourish—have inspired the creation of a new performing arts academy at The Center for Discovery. Launching this fall, the academy will provide an innovative educational experience for teenagers and young adults with complex developmental and medical needs. Here, the arts won't just be subjects—they'll be essential tools for learning, self-expression and connection. Through music, dance, drama and the visual arts, students will explore their creativity while building confidence, independence and the skills necessary to lead rich, fulfilling lives.

The Center has long recognized the power of the creative and performing arts. Music therapists engage students in music making that nurtures interaction, relationship building, and self-expression. Dance instructors use creative movement to help regulate energy and build physical stamina. Specialists in the visual arts provide rich sensory experiences that equip students with skills to navigate their environments. Drama classes help students develop



A student at The Center and Conio Loretto, Senior Director of Music therapy, practicing for this year's Discovery Dramatic Arts production of CATS.

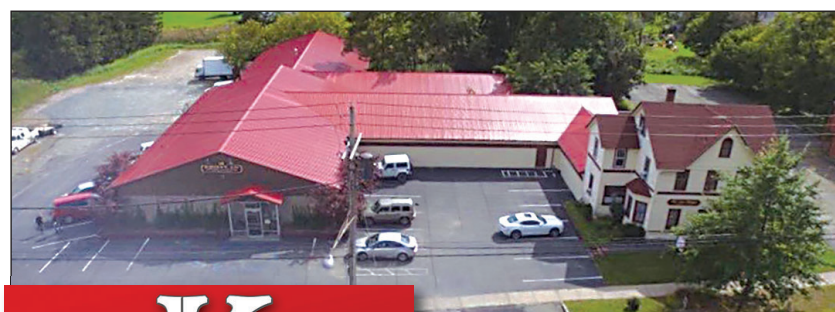
emotional awareness, fostering a deeper understanding of their own feelings and those of others. Just as importantly, arts-based experiences play a vital role in reducing anxiety and stress—helping students feel emotionally grounded, focused and ready to learn.

The curriculum at the academy will integrate best practices in education, therapy and the arts with The Center's HealthE6® model of care. Students will rotate through a variety of arts-based classes, each supported by a team of skilled educators, therapists and artists all working together. Offerings will range from painting to songwriting, costume design to tap dancing—each meeting students where they are developmentally while encouraging growth. Educational and vocational skill-building will be seamlessly woven into every artistic pursuit. Rehearsing in ensembles will also play a central role in the school day, with plans underway for an all-school chorus, a drumline and several dance troupes. The acad-

emy will focus on the outcomes that emerge from the creative process itself, rather than any final polished product.

Future goals for the academy include building strong partnerships with local arts organizations and engaging community teaching artists for classes and workshops. The academy aims to become a vibrant part of the region, celebrating the limitless potential of the arts to inspire, connect and teach us all.

On stage today, students are hard at work rehearsing for their next production, an adapted version of the musical *Cats*. As one student offers a beaming smile and joyful high-five to a fellow performer who's just nailed a tricky piece of choreography, the promise of the academy's future comes clearly into view.



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