



November 2013

The Comet's Tale



*Have you
registered
for your STAR
exemption?*

New legislation requires all resident homeowners who currently receive the Basic STAR exemption to re-register with the New York State Tax Department in order to continue to receive the tax exemption, and the December 31st deadline is fast approaching! The tax department mailed instruction letters to all homeowners who currently receive the STAR exemption with a STAR code provided to register at www.tax.ny.gov but homeowners can also register by phone by calling the Tax Department at (518) 457-2036. If you do not know your STAR code, you may also call the Tax Department and they will assist you by phone. Senior citizens who receive Enhanced STAR exemptions are not impacted by this new legislation as they currently are required to re-apply yearly to receive their benefit.

Sandy Creek High makes the grade and is designated as a Reward School

The New York State Education Department recently announced that Sandy Creek High School has been designated as a Reward School. The only school in Oswego County to receive this recognition, and one of only a handful of schools in the Central New York region, Sandy Creek High School was selected based on their significant progress in several areas and their and the highest achievement in the State with no significant gaps in student achievement.

"We've made significant improvement," said Maureen Shiel, principal at the high school. "What this really means is that we do not have significant gaps in student achievement that are not being closed."

The school met or exceeded certain benchmarks determined by the SED in all areas including graduation rate, four year graduation rate for students who scored at Level one or Level two on ELA and math assessment tests in eighth grade, increase in Performance Index (PI) as determined by calculating the percentage of gain over a two-year period, and a high percentage of students graduating with either a Regents diploma with advanced

designation or a Career and Technical Education (CTE) endorsement.

The high school also exceeded the benchmarks for ELA and Math averages, graduating at-risk students, and overall graduation rate. Sandy Creek High School's four-year graduation rate for the 2011-12 school year was 88 percent, the state's average is 66.1 percent. The reward school designation ranks Sandy Creek High School in the top 10 percent in the state.



Sandy Creek High School Principal Maureen Shiel holds the special plaque the high school received from the New York State Education Department naming them a "Reward School."

Two selected for All-State Music Conference



SandyCreekHighSchoolSeniorsMollyHorth, left, and Hannah Walker have been selected for participation in the New York School Music Association's (NYSSMA) All-State Conference in early December in Rochester. Horth will be participating in the chorus portion while Walker will be representing Sandy Creek in the band division. This is the second consecutive year for Walker's participation. Both students were selected for this elite honor following an audition process through the NYSSMA Solo Festival earlier this year.

The recognition is evident in other areas as well. The High School did very well in Oswego County on Regents exams, scoring number one on five of the Regents exams given in June.

Shiel shares these accolades with everyone in the district. "I give credit to the teachers" She said. "All the teachers in this district; we would not be where we are today without the Elementary and Middle School."

The Sandy Creek achievement goes against the traditional model that declares that high achieving districts are those districts that are the wealthiest, but Sandy Creek has the highest poverty level in the county and of the approximately 700 districts across New York state, Sandy Creek ranks somewhere near the 57th poorest. What are they doing differently?

According to Shiel it is a combination of many things, but she attributes the difference to the caring and dedicated staff in the district. "Our teachers are very nurturing, and will do what they can during the day to nurture our students." The district also boasts a highly successful afterschool program, which allows for intervention and homework help on Mondays and Wednesdays after school. Shiel is grateful for the Board of Education's continued support for the academic intervention program, which has been utilized by a steady number of students.

Another strong suit in the district is staff longevity, with all district administrators exceeding 10 years on the job, and several over the 30 year mark. "We are vested in this district," she said, indicating that five administrators live in the community and their children either currently attend or have attended and graduated from the district. "Those factors have made Sandy Creek what it is."





A Message From the District Superintendent

Mr. Stewart R. Amell



District Sets Priorities for the School Year

In September, the Board of Education set its priorities for the school year. Each year, the Board discusses areas that the district should prioritize to improve all facets of the school district. This year the school district will focus on:

1. Aligning our curriculum and assessments to the NEW COMMON CORE STANDARDS. These new standards were developed in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, and experts to provide a clear and consistent framework to prepare our children for college and the workforce. The standards:
 - Are aligned with college and work expectations.
 - Are clear, understandable and consistent.
 - Include rigorous content and application of knowledge through high-order skills.
 - Build upon strengths and lessons of current state standards.
 - And, are evidenced based.

For more information on the Common Core Standards, visit the state website, EngageNY.org.

2. The District is committed to using DATA to drive decisions as they relate to curriculum, instruction and assessment. Staff members are currently using a database that will create

assessments and link individual test questions to the common core standards. Staff members are presently participating in staff development activities to better utilize the database.

3. Studies have shown that POVERTY affects student achievement. The District has established a team to study and implement strategies that will positively affect students who live in poverty. Sandy Creek ranks 45th in the state out of 700 school districts with the highest poverty. This definitely has an impact on our students and their learning.

4. BULLYING is a problem in all of our schools across this nation. The school district is committed to continue monitoring and evaluating our Anti-Bullying Program.

5. CAPITAL IMPROVEMENT is an on-going process for all school districts. The Board of Education is presently evaluating our building conditions survey that was completed last year mandated by the state department of education. There are several areas of our campus that need upgrades and complete replacements. Security upgrades will be a priority.

In summary, the Common Core Standards, Data Analysis, Anti-Bullying, Poverty, and Capital Improvements will be the focus of the District over the next several months.

Stewart R. Amell
Superintendent of Schools

Sandy Creek holds Book Fair



A steady stream of shoppers attended the recent Sandy Creek Book Fair held in the Middle/High School Library. Students and their families were able to visit the book fair and choose from the large selection of books at all levels of reading ability available for purchase.



CALENDAR OF EVENTS

- Nov. 11 Veteran's Day - No School
- Nov. 13 Financial Aid Night, Pulaski High School 6 p.m.
- Nov. 13 NHS Induction Ceremony, 7 p.m.
- Nov. 14 BOE Meeting, 6 p.m.
- Nov. 15 Parent Conferences PK-5 11:30 Dismissal, No PM PK
- Nov. 20 Parent Conferences PK-5 11:30 Dismissal, No PM PK
- Nov. 21 BOE Work Session, 6 p.m.
- Nov. 26 Gr. 1-2 Thanksgiving Feast, HS Cafe. 2 p.m.
- Nov. 27-29 Thanksgiving Recess - No School
- Dec. 5 5th-12th Grade Holiday Band Concert, 7 p.m.
- Dec. 12 PK Concerts, Commons Area, 10 a.m & 1 p.m.
- Dec. 12 BOE Meeting, 6 p.m.
- Dec. 13 Half Day Staff Development, 11:30 Dismissal, No PM PK
- Dec. 14 Grades 9-12 Semi-Formal 8-11 p.m.
- Dec. 17 5th-12th Grade Holiday Choral Concert, 7 p.m.
- Dec. 19 K-5 Holiday Concert, HS Gym, 2 p.m.
- Dec. 23-Jan. 1 Holiday Recess - No School
- Jan. 9 BOE Meeting, 6 p.m.
- Jan. 20 Martin Luther King, Jr. Day - No School
- Jan. 23 BOE Work Session, 6 p.m.
- Jan. 24 MS/HS End of 2nd Quarter



The SCCS Elementary School Halloween Parade of Books

The Sandy Creek Elementary School Halloween Parade of Books drew a large crowd of spectators as the students in all grades paraded through the school dressed as their favorite literary character. Everything from historical and real characters to sci-fi and comic book heroes were represented in the annual event. Teachers, parents and siblings joined in the fun, arriving at the school dressed up in costume to watch the parade.

Garden gnomes Hailey Miller, left, and Maddie Palmer wait their turn to join the parade, while friendly witch ... stops for a quick photo before proceed on with the parade. Teachers joined in with the fun of dressing up as well.



Michaela Kastler dressed as one of her favorite literary characters Laura Ingalls Wilder from the "Little House on the Prairie" series of books. Kastler joined with her fellow fifth graders in the long line of parade members as the line passed by her classroom near the commons area of the elementary school. Chairs were set up in the area to allow parents, family members and community members an opportunity to view the annual holiday parade.



Cheerleaders have successful fall season



Sandy Creek Varsity Cheerleading has had a very successful season so far. They are pictured here following the 2013 Northern New York Falltastic Cheer Competition at South Jeff in later October.

The SCCS Varsity Cheerleaders have had a very successful fall season. The team placed first at the Northern New York Falltastic Competition beating out Watertown and Chittenango on October 19th. Sammi's Stars stunt group placed second, with members Sammi Pandolfi, Caitlyn Williams, Lexi Goodnough, Lindsey Goodnough, and Val Kampff.

The Varsity Cheerleaders also placed second recently at the Copenhagen Spooktacular Competition behind first place Indian River. Six individual members received awards, and one duo, one trio, and the Sammi's Stars stunt group placed second. They also placed first in the Liberty Stunt Contest.

The Comet cheerleaders were awarded the Sportsmanship Award, which was a great honor.



Sandy Creek staff development day a valuable learning experience



Sandy Creek literacy teacher Jennifer Gestwick (left) discusses the English language arts curriculum with teacher Teresa Crast during a staff development day workshop Tuesday afternoon.

With students out of school for the day, staff members in the Sandy Creek Central School District participated in several workshops on October 15 to discuss everything from the Common Core to classroom technology.

As part of staff development day, teachers met to review current standards and best practices, talk about their goals and develop ideas to improve student achievement.

At the elementary level, pre-K through second-grade teachers joined speech, special education and reading teachers to review the English language arts modules and examine ways to use the English curriculum in other academic areas.

"We've done a pretty good job of keeping the standards in mind," said Sandy Creek literacy teacher Jennifer Gestwick, noting that Core knowledge and expeditionary learning have been a primary focus. "We're now adapting those programs to meet student needs. We're evaluating the curriculum, how to use it cross-curricularly -- especially at (grades) three to five. What can we cover in social studies, what can be done in science?"

Under the guidance of Katie Brousseau, educational coach at Amplify Education (the company that creates digital educational products and services that are used in Sandy Creek classrooms), staff members also examined different components of the curriculum to see how all those components fit. They cited the most critical areas that deserve immediate attention and how the curriculum would be utilized as the students progressed from grade to grade.

"Sitting with grade levels, we can share our experiences, our frustrations ... ask the questions together. We're able to build that camaraderie so that we can see not only at individual grade levels but progression from kindergarten through second grade," Gestwick said. "We can rely on each other. Everybody in the room now has a common language and a common starting point. We can help each other because we are able to learn how the foundation and skills at each grade level (correlates with the next)."

According to Gestwick, it was important to have Brousseau on-site because she is from the publishing company -- the creator of the actual curriculum. "It's critical (to have her here) so that we can see that balance so that we're not cutting out anything critical; that we are being true to the curriculum by keeping those standards in mind while closing the gap for our students."

While elementary teachers concentrated most of their afternoon

on the English language arts curriculum, other Sandy Creek educators participated in workshops ranging from utilizing Link It -- a Web-based assessment platform with reporting and data analysis tools -- to analyzing Regents data.

Regardless of the workshop, one common theme emerged: staff development day was a success. "This has been excellent to come together and see where we can make adjustments but keep those standards in mind," Gestwick said. "And that's really our focus. We're always keeping the data in mind. How are the students mastering the skills? How are they handling those standards?"



During the October 15 staff development day at Sandy Creek Central Schools, seventh-grade science teacher Galen Fellows reviews the Link It assessment platform with ninth-grade biology teacher Kathleen Heck.

Instrument Night for band students



Fifth grade students and their parents recently attended Sandy Creek Elementary School's Instrument Night where they could learn more about the fifth grade band program. Valerie Marshall, band teacher at the school was on hand to answer questions, explain lessons schedules and expectations for students as well as assist students in their instrument selection. Pictured with Marshall is fifth grader Aldyn Landas who is interested in playing the clarinet.



Comet pride shown during Sandy Creek's homecoming week



Pie in the face- Sandy Creek senior Victor Halverson pies Allison Donohoe in the face as part of a football fundraiser before the homecoming game.

Sandy Creek's Middle and High School students showed their comet pride recently during their homecoming pep rallies.

Senior Molly Horth opened the middle school pep rally by singing the national anthem and alma mater. The Varsity Cheerleaders performed a dance routine and cheer for the study body, and pulled students by grade level to compete in a jumping contest. They also lead students in a shouting competition, which the sixth graders won.

The most spirited teacher award was given to sixth grade teacher Denise Elkin. Eighth grader David Hennigan was named the middle school's Spirit King, and eighth grader Emily Kehoe was named the Spirit Queen.



Singing the national anthem and alma mater for the high school pep rally was Liz Sedore. Student athletes

Spirited students - Eighth graders David Hennigan and Emily Kehoe were named Spirit King and Queen during Sandy Creek Middle School's recent pep rally. The school cheered for their student athletes, and showed school spirit by dressing in a sea of blue.

were introduced, and senior athletes Gabby Guarasce and Josh Loccoco were dubbed the spirit week winners.

To end the pep rally, the wall winner was named. Students ninth through twelve grade each decorated a section of the gymnasium, which was then voted on. Winning by one vote was the Class of 2017 with their "Despicable Me" theme.

After school, a pie in the face fundraiser happened outside of the cafeteria. Pie in the face has become a tradition at Sandy Creek High School, and is a football fundraiser.

Student athletes pick their own match ups, and whatever student raised the least amount of money is the recipient of a whipped cream pie to the face. Monies raised help cover the cost of meatballs and sauce for the football team's spaghetti dinner. A portion was also donated to the Susan Bitz Scholarship Fund.

Sandy Creek National Honor Society Induction Ceremony

The Sandy Creek Central School Carpe Diem Chapter of the National Honor Society (NHS) New Member Induction Ceremony will be held on November 13 at 7:00 p.m. in the high school auditorium.

Eligible students were invited to apply up until the week of November 12. In order to be eligible students must have an overall GPA of 87.0 or above. The application process asks students to provide written information to the selection committee regarding their efforts with community service, leadership, and character. Students are also asked to write an essay as to why they are deserving of this honor and why they should be selected.

Once the paperwork is provided, the selection committee meets and reviews all applicants. If any part of the paperwork is incomplete the students are automatically removed from the eligible list. Other areas that the committee looks at are student attendance and student discipline going back to the ninth grade. Using a point system for all of these factors determines who is selected. Once selected, students are required to maintain their GPA, participate in fifteen hours of community service per year, and maintain good character and leadership.

A review committee meets every quarter to review each student's status. If a student is lacking in one of the required areas, they are placed on probation for the next five weeks and are evaluated after that to determine whether they will remain in NHS.

For more information about National Honor Society or upcoming community service activities, contact NHS advisor Casey Vallance at the high school at 387-3445.



Congratulations!
Kylie Hanni
 for being recognized
All Star Varsity Girls Soccer
Section III.



Elementary Students in Sandy Creek Learn About Fire Safety



Thermal images - Sandy Creek Elementary teacher Deb Klotz looks on as her first grade class sees their handprints on a thermal imaging camera. The special camera detects body heat.

During Fire Prevention Week, pre-k through first grade students received visits from the Lacona and Sandy Creek Fire Departments. Students were invited outside to see the department's fire trucks and equipment.

Fire Chief Mike Kastler, Firefighter Kyle McShane and Fire Department President Frank Manchester represented the Lacona Fire Department.

Both departments showed students how a firefighter puts on his or her gear, demonstrating that a uniformed first responder is nothing to be afraid of or hide from.

The presentation also covered what to do and what not to do in the event of a fire. If a child is trapped in their room during a fire, they should get low, crawl on their hands and knees and wait by a window.

Students were encouraged to talk with their parents about

choosing a common meeting place in case of an emergency. They were also reminded to call 911 only in serious situations.

Students from all three grade levels were sent back to their classrooms with plastic fire hats and coloring books.

Future firefighter - Pictured is pre-k student Brady Thomas of Julie McNitt's class with Michelle Forsyth, Captain with the Sandy Creek Fire Department. Thomas comes from a line of firefighters, including his father, grandfather and great-grandfather.



First responder says hello - A first grade student at Sandy Creek Elementary School shakes hands with Lacona firefighter Kyle McShane during Fire Safety Week. McShane helped familiarize students with what a firefighter sounds like, and looks like in full turnout gear.

Emergency School Announcements

In the event that it is necessary to close or delay school due to severe weather conditions, mechanical breakdown, etc. announcements will be made to the following radio and television stations.

Television: WWNY (Channel 7); WSTM (Channel 3); WTVH (Channel 5); WSYR (Channel 9), YNN (Channel 10), WWTI/ABC 50

Radio: 570AM, 620AM, 790AM, 1050AM, 1240AM, 1260AM, 92.1FM, 93.1FM, 94.5FM, 95.7FM, 99.5FM, 100.7FM, 100.9FM, 102.1FM, 103.1FM, 104.7FM, 105.5FM, 105.9FM, 106.5FM, 106.7FM, and 107.9FM



Senior Fall Sports Recognition



Look both ways before exiting the bus, is just one of the many safety rules reinforced during a recent bus safety presentation at the elementary school.

Bus Safety Reinforced at the Elementary School

The transportation department at Sandy Creek recently held several school bus safety presentations at the elementary school to teach and reinforce bus safety. Students watched a special video on school safety then proceeded outside to a waiting school bus to practice loading and unloading, safe crossing, what to do while waiting for the bus to come, bus driver hand signals and safety rules while riding on the bus to and from school.

Safety presentations were held for students by grade level and pictured are second grade students during a recent presentation.

"I see you, you see me" is the signal second grade students are practicing during a recent bus safety presentation at Sandy Creek Elementary School. The presentation, coordinated by the SCCS Transportation Department included a bus safety video followed by a hands-on demonstration outside the school with bus drivers from the district.



Gabriella Guarasce, senior girl's varsity soccer player shows her school spirit as she walks onto the field flanked by her parents Amy and Tom Guarasce.

Seniors participating in Fall sports at Sandy Creek High School were recognized during halftime of the recent Homecoming Football game. Thirty-three students in five sports including girls varsity soccer, boys varsity soccer, varsity cross country, varsity cheerleading and varsity football were announced and then escorted to the center

of the field by their parent(s). The emotional recognition, a long-standing tradition at Sandy Creek, marked a final goodbye for the seniors and an opportunity for the home town fans to show their appreciation one more time.



Molly Horth receives an emotional hug from Varsity Cross Country Coach Patti King, as her parents Jim and Kathy Horth look on.



"I'm gonna really miss you," Head Football Coach and Athletic Coordinator Michael Stevens said as senior Jake Benedict approached. Benedict is escorted by his parents Kristine and Bill Benedict.

 For updated announcements and events visit the Sandy Creek Central School District website at: www.sccs.cnyric.org

**Sandy Creek Central
School District**

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Nurses' Offices
Elementary - Ext. 1503; HS - Ext. 1505
Transportation: Ext. 3330

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School District Board
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Wall of Excellence Induction Ceremony



Four new Wall of Excellence members were inducted during a special ceremony held at the school. Pictured are family representatives and new inductees, left to right: Priscilla Thibault, daughter of inductee Margaret Chase; Kirk Ellis; Andrew and Sarah Orr, children of inductee Barbara Orr; and Michael Stevens.

The Sandy Creek Central School District inducted four new Wall of Excellence members at a special ceremony held at the school.

Two members were inducted posthumously with members of their family on hand to accept the honor.

Barbara Orr's children, Sarah and Andrew were on hand to accept the honor on behalf of their family. Barbara Orr was an elementary teacher in the district, and while small in stature was able to make a large impression on those she taught and worked alongside.

Priscilla Thibault accepted the induction honor in memory of her mother Margaret Chase, a high school English teacher who demanded excellence from everyone who stepped across the threshold into her classroom. Mrs. Chase encouraged students to excel, saying "don't be comfortable with being average."

Another longtime teacher, coach, advisor and SCCS community icon inducted was Kirk Ellis, whose support for the district and its sports teams is incomparable. It is said that if cut, Ellis will bleed Comet blue.

Final inductee, is current SCCS employee Michael Stevens, who it was said not only coaches the football team, but teaches the team members integrity. Stevens was humbled by the honor, and said he was just continuing the work that was begun by other members on the wall and assembled there that evening. "I will continue to pay it forward," he said of the honor, adding "we all bleed that blue," as he gestured to those gathered in the audience.

Show Choir plans trip

Students in the Sandy Creek High School Show Choir will be traveling to Boston in late March to participate in the Boston Heritage Music Festival. The Festival will provide the Show Choir an opportunity to compete with choirs and musical groups from all across the country.

Festival organizers contacted the Sandy Creek choir in hopes they would attend the premier festival in the spring. Show Choir, now in its fourth year, combines singing, dance, and costumed performance opportunities for students in grades 9-12. The group, which has grown to include 22 members, performs a variety of songs including pop, rock and jazz pieces, as well as others and will perform a capella at the festival.

The Show Choir has participated in other festival competitions in the past, such as the large festival held every year at Darien Lake, but "Boston's a whole new ballgame," said Show Choir President Liz Sedore. The Boston festival draws bands and choirs from all over the country for the prestigious competition. The group, extremely grateful for the opportunity to attend, will be hosting several fundraising functions in the coming months to help offset the cost of the trip. They recently held a spaghetti dinner and plan at least one more before the spring date. For more information about Show Choir contact the school or President Liz Sedore. The Show Choir is under the direction of High School Chorus Teacher Sandy Kinney.