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HAPPY NEW YEAR!

Maybe it's because I've been teaching for such a long time, but the years just seem to fly by. Even during these hectic and difficult times we find ourselves in! Already we are nearing the halfway point in the school year when the focus starts to

shift, at least in part, to the next school year as we prepare IEP's and work on intakes and budgets. It can sometimes be difficult to settle long enough to reflect on where we have been and how things are going. I recently sorted through several boxes that I had stored away for years. It brought back a flood of memories, both personal and professional. I rediscovered old yearbooks, student notes and drawings, and even a few performance reviews from the days before APPR. It reminded me how much our work has changed over time and how grateful I am to have been a part of that. Seeing old photos from my early teaching years reminded me not only of the youth that I may have lost, but the insight and wisdom I have gained. I see that reflected back to me in the work of my colleagues and Questar itself. Your good work is an inspiration. I am grateful for the people I have known over the years who have helped shape me into who I am today. I hope that I have been helpful to others in the same way. As we prepare for the New Year I hope that each of you finds some time to reflect on your experiences and what it is that you are grateful

for. I hope that you enjoy some peaceful moments with family and friends.

May your New Year be filled with happiness.

In Solidarity,
Joal Bova
President, RCG BOCES Teachers' Association

We want to make sure that you are getting all that you can out of your membership. Make sure you are receiving communications from us through a personal email. Check out our website at <http://rcgboces.ny.aft.org/>. Follow us on Twitter, @BocesRcg. If you have not already created an online account do so at www.NYSUT.org. Our Local is RCG BOCES Teachers' Association and we are Local 10175. Once you log in you will have access to a variety of membership benefits.



Women's Committee focuses on Alzheimer's Disease

Since its founding, the NYSUT Women's Committee has prioritized women's health as a key issue, and this November's annual meeting turned the spotlight on Alzheimer's Disease.

"Representation matters. We know this because we have seen it," said NYSUT Executive Vice President Jolene DiBrango, who chairs the committee. "We know that women must be their own best advocate when it comes to access to health care and the actual care they receive. That's just one example of why it is so important for women to hold positions of leadership and power in all sectors, so that the challenges that are unique to them are understood by those they go to for guidance and support."

In New York state, more than 410,000 people are living with Alzheimer's, and two-thirds of those New Yorkers are women. Women also bear the brunt of care, when it comes to Alzheimer's patients, and that can take a toll mentally, physically, and financially. During the 2022 meeting, the Northeastern New York Chapter of the Alzheimer's Association presented the latest research on this devastating disease to the committee. The organization, represented by Elizabeth Smith-Boivin, executive director and Erica Salamida, director of community outreach, also discussed the array of resources that are available to women dealing with Alzheimer's.

"People were really captivated by the content, because it does really have a significant impact on women," said Smith-Boivin. She said her organization continues to raise awareness but emphasized that they can't do it alone. "That's why it was so good to see this committee successfully mobilizing a community around the cause," she added.

Barbara Hafner, vice president of NYSUT Retiree Council 18 and chairperson of the Long Island Retiree Delegate Council said the presentation was so

informative that she plans to bring it back to her local members in January. "Honestly, I always found the topic of Alzheimer's to be scary, because it always seemed like a hopeless case, but after listening to these two women, it was scary, but we learned there's also hope," Hafner said. She was impressed by the resources the Alzheimer's Association offers families and is looking forward to supporting this organization going forward.

The NYSUT Women's Committee is co-chaired by Aisha Cook, New Rochelle FUSE, and Leslie Rose, Hewlett Woodmere FA.

To learn more about the committee, visit nysut.org/women.

Author: Molly Belmont

Source: NYSUT Communications

Read the full article here: <https://www.nysut.org/news/2022/december/womens-committee>

“Coming together is a beginning; keeping together is progress; working together is success.” - Henry Ford

STEM HIGH SCHOOL

One of the most exciting aspects of building a school is the opportunity to create “firsts.” At Questar III and HVCC’s STEM High School, we are experiencing these “firsts” each day. This year started with a new faculty of professionals and twice as many students, some of whom were already thriving at STEM High and others who had no idea what they were getting into. Our first challenge? How do we build a community of learners that support each other, encourage risks, and promote innovative thinking?

Project Based Learning was our answer. During the last two weeks of the summer, the STEM High School faculty set out to build a project from the ground up. We defined content specific goals as well as interdisciplinary learning outcomes like collaboration, accountability, communication, and innovation. We wanted students to study the history of innovation in society to better appreciate the roots of our STEM school.



Students would need to research an innovation, consider the positive and negative outcomes of the innovation, and create a virtual museum display, communicating their findings. They would also create an artifact in our Innovation Center that highlighted their innovation and its impact. The culmination of the project would be a museum opening celebration on National STEM Day, November 8th.

The STEM High faculty divided our students into teams that mixed the new freshmen with the upperclassmen. To

kickstart the project, we decided to abandon the schedule during the first week of school. Instead, we planned school-wide learning experiences as well as break-out times for groups to begin working on their projects. Each day during that first week, different teachers planned lessons and activities that supported the project. Science teacher Sarah Conway, a PBL expert, planned a series of Roll-Out activities that spurred student curiosity and helped them consider what they would need to know to complete the project. As an English teacher, I created a lesson to help guide students in close reading and note-taking skills to help gather information. Social Studies teachers Melanie Leonard and Jamie Munro taught students how to weigh the pros and cons of an innovation. Dr. Dan Lewis, our technology teacher, guided students to follow the design process in creating their artifacts.

One of my favorite moments during the first week was when the faculty participated in an improvised skit. Our math teacher, Alisa Sorokurs, gave each of us roles to play while we worked on a collaborative challenge. One of us was the “off-topic” student, another the “negative” student, and another a “non-participant.” In front of our students, we ad-libbed our parts, modeling a collaborative challenge gone wrong. Then we debriefed with students, discussing how teams can become dysfunctional and ways we can work better together. The skit was fun, hilarious at points, and also thought-provoking for us all.

After the first intensive week, we scheduled one block a week for students to meet together to work on the next phase of the project. They did research, brainstormed possible artifacts, provided feedback to each other, built prototypes, and made improvements. Student leaders built a virtual museum in Art Steps, and populated it with each group’s display. The freshmen were also able to go on a field trip to the Museum of Innovation and Science (MiSci) in Schenectady to see an exhibit on innovations through history and participate in some interactive exhibits firsthand.

Everything came together on November 8 on National STEM Day. We invited our school families and HVCC

community to join us to celebrate their Innovations in STEM Museum. Students took turns standing next to their artifact and talking about it to each other and the public. At the conclusion of the day, students reflected, not only on their product, but particularly on the process. How successfully did they navigate the difficulty of collaborating? How well did they understand and use the design process? How did they deal with the challenges and setbacks that they inevitably faced? These are the real-world problems that students need to face sooner rather than later. The goal of the project was not so much the final project presented on November 8th, but actually the process the students and staff took to get there. This project gave each student an opportunity to use their current strengths, develop new skills, and discover a little more about themselves. Some students excelled at creating the content for the virtual museum. Others threw themselves into developing an artifact in our Makerspace. Still other students blossomed when it came time to present their work to the public. Project Based Learning necessitates many different skills, and it fosters creativity because there is no one way to accomplish the goal.

Another unintended but serendipitous result of our first school-wide PBL, was that the teachers and staff came together for a common purpose. Creating this learning experience for our students was actually a PBL of our own! We each took turns stepping into leadership roles, supporting each other, and providing critical feedback on our lesson plans. We built an incredible amount of trust in each other, which has positively impacted our learning community. Our students see us as a unified team that is accountable to each other, communicates effectively, collaborates in good faith, and works in the spirit of innovation. And are we successful every day? No way! Part of the design process is the prototype phase, which involves testing and improving. In order to reinvent education at STEM High School, we must feel comfortable to take risks and possibly fail. Empowering administrators, teachers, and students will allow for a truly innovative educational environment to grow.

-Erin Piotrowski

MEMBER WELLNESS

“Happiness is there for the taking- and the making.” - Oprah Winfrey

Here Come The Holidays!

The season from Thanksgiving to New Year’s Day can be “the most wonderful time of the year.” Coming together with family and friends at festive get-togethers to share delicious food, thoughtful gifts and nostalgic traditions. But, it can also be the most hectic and stressful time of the year! So many additional tasks such as cooking, cleaning, shopping, and hosting (all with the pressure of doing it well, under a deadline, and with an expected big helping of holiday cheer!).

You may have already started to see articles and news items with ideas or tips on how to deal with some of that stress; the following from the Mayo Clinic has some helpful, common sense suggestions:

<https://www.mayoclinic.org/healthy-lifestyle/stress-management/in-depth/stress/art-20047544>.

While it’s unrealistic to eliminate the entire “to-do” list, there are ways to lessen the load, find some extra time, and allow yourself to savor the holidays in a more enjoyable way. For example:

Review your “tradition

How many items on your lists are there because “we’ve always done it that way!”? Just because great-grandma always spent a week preparing holiday feasts, including 12 side dishes and 10 pies with made-from-scratch crusts, doesn’t mean you have to do the same. Your family will probably be grateful that you have finally stopped serving the creamed rutabaga that no one has ever liked. Is it more important to have a perfectly decorated house, or to have a home with a warm atmosphere that makes guests feel welcome?

Prioritize what is most meaningful to you

Do you really need to go to every Christmas fair, every party, every visit with Santa? Running around to every single festivity means you are likely not really enjoying most of them, and even more importantly, not enjoying special times with the people who mean

the most. Why not reschedule some of your annual holiday get-togethers to mid or late January, when everyone is feeling a bit of post-holiday let-down, and would be ready for a fun activity?

Set aside some time for yourself - yes you can!

Although you may feel that you don’t have one minute to spare, take some time to step back from all the chaos for a bit. Set your kitchen timer for even as little as 5 or 15 minutes to really enjoy a hot beverage with a sweet treat, or light a scented candle. Sitting in a favorite spot to listen to some seasonal music or trying a short holiday walk by yourself or with your pet can be invigorating (and get you ready to plunge back into what’s next).

Whatever and however you choose to celebrate, here’s wishing you and yours a joyous, peaceful holiday season and a Happy, Healthy New Year!

-Mari Warfel, Member Wellness Coordinator

Life is complicated. NYSUT Member Benefits can help.

PEER SUPPORT LINE



The Peer Support Line is a new service available through NYSUT Member Benefits that's offered at no cost to all NYSUT members and their families.

**MEMBER
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Working to Benefit You

The Peer Support Line can help with:

- **Finding mental health services or support groups**
- **Answering questions about Medicare and Medicaid**
- **Managing work-related stress**
- **Providing support to new members**
- **Sourcing elder care or caregiving services**
- **Assisting with marital, relationship or child rearing concerns**
- **Reducing feelings of isolation and loneliness**

The Peer Support Line is a partnership between NYSUT Member Benefits and Rutgers University Behavioral Health Care.

For more information or assistance, call toll-free 844-444-0152.

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