I-Camp Promotes Technology Exploration

Students in the STARRS program are excited about a hands-on initiative that introduces them to new technology that helps build classroom skills.

Special Education Coordinator Amanda Hopkins launched the program last year, utilizing resources and expertise from the Mohawk Regional Information Center’s Model Schools team. During these monthly half-hour sessions, students learn about a specific piece of technology and then try it out with teachers’ assistance.

Hopkins said the I-Camp sessions are a way to help students develop academic, social, motor and problem-solving skills, and it introduces them to tools and concepts they may encounter later on in their schooling.

“My favorite part is that they’re faced with different challenges, they have to work through it, solve problems through it, go back to the drawing board, and work with their friends to solve these problems to make something work,” she said.

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Conservation Demonstrates Work With Bees

Conservation students spearheaded an interdisciplinary celebration of bees this fall to expose CTE and special education classes to key pieces of their new beekeeping curriculum.

Classes that visited the Bee Fun event in the Rossetti Courtyard had the opportunity to see honey combs, watch the honey-spinning process, try on beekeeper suits and ask questions about the process of keeping bees and harvesting honey. They could also sample some of the final product.

In the spirit of Operation Collaboration, a CTE initiative to increase cross-disciplinary projects and learning experiences, other classes contributed to the bee-themed event.

Early Childhood Education students set up several activity stations for the elementary students who attended, including a sensory box, a floor maze, a photo booth and hand painting.

Cosmetology students created their own lip balm using beeswax, shea butter and coconut butter as part of a science integration project.

Conservation students worked with Graphic Design students over the past several weeks to brand their new honey with a name, logo and label design for their bottles. Conservation began working with bees in the spring and just began bottling their honey this fall.
Summit Focuses on Transitions

The MOBOCES Early Childhood division helped sponsor the first regional Kindergarten Transition Summit on October 25 at SUNY Polytechnic Institute to help Mohawk Valley educators and community representatives discuss best practices to prepare children for kindergarten.

Key topics at the conference included identifying examples of successful transition practices, anticipating barriers to successful transitions, and ways to secure stakeholder buy-in on transition practices. Dr. Joshua Sparrow, a faculty member at Harvard Medical School, delivered the keynote speech on parent, family and community engagement.

Early Childhood Director Colleen Wuest delivered a presentation on the importance of supporting students and families during major transitions. She also sat on a panel of regional educators discussing best practices related to school transitions.

“Giving parents information before they get to that transition meeting is very helpful, at least so they’re not walking in and feeling like they have no idea what's going to happen,” Wuest said. “And the compassion and empathy piece is huge.”

Other panelists included SUNY Poly Professor Dr. Joanne Josephs, Madison Principal Brian Latella, Rome Early Childhood Director Dana Benzo and teachers from Rome and Vernon-Verona-Sherrill.

The conference was presented through the United Way’s Ready for Kindergarten (R4K) initiative, a regional partnership with schools, parents and community organizations to ensure children start school ready to learn and provide resources for continued success. More than 200 educators, classroom support personnel and community agency representatives participated in the event.

Conference Day Builds Expertise

The Kindergarten Transition Summit was just one of large regional professional development opportunities that MOBOCES offered to teachers, administrators and paraprofessionals on October 25, as part of our fall Superintendents Conference Day. Among them:

More than 200 teacher aides and teaching assistants from 11 districts heard from Deborah Patrick, of The Kelberman Center, on strategies to understand and support students with Autism Spectrum Disorder.

More than 200 music educators from 49 districts attended the Music Educators Conference, hearing from internationally-known composer Brian Balmages and participating hands-on music sessions.

More than 50 educators and administrators from four districts participated in a two-day training with Capturing Kids’ Hearts, which provides school-wide strategies to improve student behavior, attendance and achievement.

Speakers Address Diversity in Literature

This year’s Leatherstocking Conference helped highlight the role of libraries and librarians in exposing students to different cultures, introducing them to different viewpoints and creating inclusive spaces for all learners.

Keynote speaker Ellen Oh is an author of middle grade novels and the co-founder of We Need Diverse Books, a nonprofit dedicated to increasing diversity in children’s literature. She shared her story of growing up in an immigrant family and always looking for characters and stories that reflected her own experiences. Syracuse illustrator London Ladd served as the featured speaker, leading breakout sessions on historical accuracy and research in illustration as well as his personal journey to becoming a picture book illustrator.

In addition, a teacher and librarian from Camden led a session on supporting English Language Learners through the school library, and a Rome teacher spoke about social emotional learning through literature. MORIC Model Schools and the MOBOCES School Library System both led sessions on mobile apps to increase student engagement and productivity in the classroom.

The 140 participants also heard about academic library research, technology, state learning standards, and discovering identity through literature.
Students Compete In Special Olympics

More than 300 student-athletes from across the region ran, jumped and threw their way through this year’s Special Olympics Autumn Games, in Canastota.

The games, in their 9th year, featured a variety of track and field events, including shot put, softball toss, long jump, and running races as well as Adaptive Games for students with additional needs.

The event began with the traditional Parade of Athletes, led by the Canastota High School Marching Band and Color Guard. Students walked in by school delegation, and recited the Special Olympics Oath.

MOBOCES Education Coordinator Laurie Ann Ross, an event organizer, joined Canastota Superintendent Shawn Bissetta in sharing welcome remarks.

MOBOCES students from Alternative and Special Education programs competed in the event, and students and staff from both Alternative and Special Education and CTE served as volunteers, supporting athletes throughout the day. CTE Early Childhood Education students staffed the Olympic Village, which featured crafts and games for both athletes and volunteers to participate in between events.

New Public Administration Class Connects Students With Local Governments

Within just a few weeks of starting the new Law, Government and Public Administration program at MOBOCES, the seven seniors in the inaugural class already had some unique experiences.

The one-year New Visions class is housed at the Madison County Office Building in Wampsville, providing students with easy access to the courthouse and other county departments.

On October 17, students had the opportunity to attend oral arguments at the New York Supreme Court, Appellate Division, Third Department, which hears both civil and criminal appeals from all trial level courts in 28 counties. This was only the second time the Appellate Division, Third Department has conducted a regular session of court in Madison County; the first was in 2004. Following the appeals, students asked questions of the judges and toured the courthouse.

Throughout the program, students hold internships and rotate through county and local government departments to gain hands-on experiences about working in public service.

Participating students this year are from Canastota and Oneida.

Workshop Supports ENL Teachers

Staff Development Specialist Jody Popple held a math workshop on October 8 specifically geared toward English as a New Language (ENL) teachers in the region. The workshop focused on helping students understand the language of math so they are better prepared to follow instruction and learn the concepts. In particular, she discussed how mathematical language routines can support math instruction for all students, especially English Language Learners.

The workshop was initially designed for Rome’s ENL teachers, but teachers from Camden, Oneida, NYSDD and MOBOCES also joined the professional development session. The Rome contingent planned to share this information at a faculty meeting so it can be used throughout the building.

Going forward, Popple hopes to continue introducing teachers across the region to these mathematical routines as a strategy to improve students’ understanding of math concepts. She said she hopes general education teachers will also participate in the future so these strategies can be used to support all students.
CBM Nets High Marks From DOT

The Central Bus Maintenance (CBM) service earned a 97.6% passage rate on its NYSDOT vehicle inspections in the 2018-19 school year, far exceeding the state’s required 90% pass rate.

The DOT inspects each school-operated bus and van every six months. During each inspection, vehicles must have no deficiencies in category A, which typically relate to safety, such as issues with brakes, steering systems, doors, mirrors, windows and locks. Buses with A-level defects are immediately placed out of service until the issues are repaired and a new inspection is completed successfully.

Between its Oneida and Camden sites, CBM oversees repairs and inspections on nearly 300 school vehicles from 10 school districts. The DOT reviews each district’s fleet individually, and CBM Coordinator Frank Slawiak compiles the inspection data into an overall MOBOCES service pass rate. The 97.6% pass rate for the last year included four districts with a 100% pass rate, and the lowest pass rate was 95.8%.

In 2017-18, the MOBOCES service had an overall 98.8% pass rate. It has been five years since any single district fleet in the CBM service fell below the 90% threshold.

MOBOCES Discusses Current Data Security Landscape

The MORIC hosted its 1st Security Summit & IT Expo on October 9 to help inform education and technology leaders about key cybersecurity issues. The event included panel discussions, breakout sessions, vendor representatives, and time for regional colleagues to network about challenges and successes related to data security.

A cybersecurity panel included 10 speakers from MORIC, Watertown CSD, NYS Education Department and the NYS Division of Homeland Security to share information on the current cybersecurity landscape. Breakout session topics included Data Inventory, Cybersecurity Framework, Comptroller IT Audits, Ransomware, Information Governance and Data Security User Training.

The 126 participants represented all four BOCES regions in the MORIC service area, including all nine MOBOCES districts.

Prior to the summit, MORIC hosted two professional development opportunities for district leaders to learn specifics about the updated Part 121 Regulations related to Education Law 2-d. They discussed a wide range of issues related to the law, including identifying a Data Protection Officer, planning annual employee training plans, reviewing contracts and developing a complaint and incident timeline. Participants also received reference materials to assist their in-district planning work.

MOBOCES Earns Three Genesis Awards

The Genesis Group of the Mohawk Valley recognized MOBOCES with three awards during its 14th annual Celebration of Education. This year’s event recognized 13 outstanding programs and 30 individuals who have championed educational excellence in the region, including:

Outstanding Educator

Stacye Kapala has been a counselor in the middle/high school special education program housed at Vernon-Verona-Sherrill Middle School for the past 13 years. Coordinator Carla Fountain nominated her for her commitment and positive contributions to her students, families, colleagues, and community.

Outstanding Program

The High School Intense Management Needs program serves special education students in grades 9-12 with attendance and disciplinary issues. Principal Owen Maranville and Coordinator Gina Calabro nominated the program for its commitment to improving student success through by incorporating social emotional learning practices and fostering healthy relationships across all segments of the school community.

Education Hall of Distinction

District Superintendent Jackie Starks was recognized for her longtime commitment to and advocacy for educational excellence in the Mohawk Valley and her dedication to supporting the students and educators she serves. At the ceremony, her longtime colleague Howard Mettelman, former District Superintendent at Oneida BOCES, shared with the audience a summary of Jackie’s career.
AmeriCU Kicks Off Online Finance Course

Students in 11 CTE classes are participating in the Everfi online personal finance course this year through a continued partnership with AmeriCU credit union. AmeriCU representatives visited campus this fall to meet with some of the classes and officially kick off the program.

The self-paced web-based course introduces students to basic concepts of financial responsibility. The curriculum covers banking, investing, credit, budgeting, financial aid, consumer skills, managing debt, credit scores, taxes, insurance, identity theft and fraud. The course format allows students to manage their time, direct their own learning, use modern teaching tools like video and gaming, and complete scenario-based assessments for hands-on practice of the content, and it provides teachers with tools to monitor student progress.

CTE first partnered with AmeriCU last year on this program to enhance the personal finance instruction already incorporated into CTE classes.

Pre-K Celebrates Fall!

October was a big month for students in MOBOCES pre-k classes! Students practiced what they should do in a fire for Fire Safety Month. They also celebrated Halloween with various pumpkin-themed academic lessons, parent activities, safety messages and crafts.

ESL Student Receives Award

Ehla Moo, an English as a Second Language student at the Rome ACCESS Site, is one of this year’s Outstanding Adult Students, an honor given annually by the New York Association for Continuing and Community Education (NYACCE).

Ehla is a refugee from Burma who joined the ESL program in May 2016. Earlier this year, he moved into the adult literacy program at Rome ACCESS and is now preparing to earn his high school equivalency through the National External Diploma Program. He hopes to study graphic design at a community college and pursue a career in that field.

NYACCE recognized Ehla and other Student of the Year winners at a ceremony in October in Albany and provided them with tours of the state Capitol building.

In addition, Rome ACCESS student Kayann Wilson earned an honorable mention. In 2017, Kayann joined Pride in Work, a pre-employment program for those on public assistance. She is now in the adult literacy program and plans to pursue her high school equivalency and eventually post-secondary training.
Students Explore Technology During I-Camp

Model Schools Coordinator Derek Lalonde has been leading the monthly sessions. Before meeting with students, he works with STARRS staff and administrators to ensure the lessons enhance classroom work and appropriately build on students’ skills. During the October session, he brought in Sphero SPRK+ and helped students navigate the balls around a table maze to help reinforce motor skills, such as hand-eye coordination, and problem-solving skills.

“We try to make the learning relevant,” he said.

Other I-Camp sessions have featured virtual reality, augmented reality, coding and robotics. Teachers have begun integrating the I-Camp technology into classroom lessons to help students engage more with the curriculum. Last year, STARRS teacher Laura Kent began integrating Osmo into her math lessons as one way to help students learn shapes, patterns, and problem solving skills.

“It’s a great way to engage the kids,” she said. “They’ve grown up with technology so it’s just another way to be able to incorporate that into the classroom and use it as a learning tool.”

MOBOCES Receives Five NYSPRA Awards

The New York School Public Relations Association (NYSPRA) recognized MOBOCES with five awards in its 40th Annual Communications Awards, a statewide contest to honor schools and BOCES for outstanding print, visual and digital communication.

This year’s awards are:

- Award of Merit in the Excellence in Writing category for an article about a regional digital communications grant program
- Two Awards of Merit in the Photograph category, for photos from the Oneida Nation Early Learning Center and from CTE Open House
- Award of Merit in the Video category for a video series about Oneida school district retirees
- Award of Merit in the Social Media category for Twitter coverage of the MOBOCES Annual Meeting

Event Showcases Construction Careers

The Mohawk Valley Builders Exchange hosted its annual Mohawk Valley Construction Careers Day on October 17 in Oriskany. The event is a collaborative effort with MOBOCES, Oneida BOCES and Herkimer BOCES, which each send CTE students to explore careers with construction trades professionals. More than 500 students from 28 school districts attended.

This year’s event included interactive exhibits, trade industry displays, and hands-on demonstrations for students, such as bulldozer operation, electrical installation, bricklaying and materials testing.

MOBOCES students from Carpentry, Electrical/HVAC and Heavy Equipment Operation participated.
Students Promote Suicide Awareness

MOBOCES students went the extra mile for Suicide Awareness and Prevention Month in September, hosting on-campus events to increase kindness and unity among their classmates.

Seniors in the CTE Health Related Careers (HRC) classes hosted a Suicide Awareness event to help inform their peers about the risks for suicide and ways to offer help someone in crisis. This is the second year HRC has held this event.

They set up interactive stations with games, quizzes and prizes to help educate others. They also created a “Promise Wall” where students and staff could pledge not to engage in bullying behavior and to help those in need of support. Participants could apply temporary tattoos and face paint of semicolons and other symbols used by the national suicide prevention movement.

Captain Nice made an appearance, this year played by two HRC seniors: Elizabeth Hodge from Camden and Elizabeth Love from Canastota. Captain Nice has been a fixture of CTE for several years, spreading the message of acting kindly toward others and supporting each other.

The HRC classes distributed information and question sheets to other CTE classes in advance, and several of the classes used the information to begin their own conversation about mental health and where to turn for help.

In the Alternative and Special Education programs, staff shared information and statistics about teen suicide and handed out notes encouraging students to support each other and create a positive school climate.

Just a few weeks later, in October, they spearheaded a celebration of Unity Day by decorating the school in orange and encouraging everyone to wear that color to take a stand against bullying. Both events are part of the program’s ongoing work on fostering a positive school climate for everyone.

Grants Writer Secures F2S, Afterschool Funding

Planning and Grant Writing Specialist Lisa Seitz helped secure two regional grants this fall that will provide additional programming and support to area students.

She worked with the YMCA of the Greater Tri-Valley secure a five-year, $160,000 state grant to support afterschool programming for up to 80 students at Denti, Gansevoort and Joy elementary schools in Rome.

The NYS Office of Children and Family Services grant will allow the YMCA’s Advantage After School Program to run for the full school year, 5 days per week until 6 p.m. The program includes educational, cultural and recreational activities; offer academic, behavioral and social emotional support; and family events.

Seitz also worked with a regional consortium to secure a $100,000 award from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to expand a regional Farm to School (F2S) initiative. MOBOCES will serve as a project lead, and Oneida BOCES, Herkimer BOCES, 31 area school districts and Cornell Cooperative Extension of Oneida County will partner on the project.

The grant will help scale up the Farm to School initiative that has been operating for several years. It will support the development of new mechanisms and tools to make it easier for schools to procure local crops and products and to create educational connections to the Farm to School movement, such as meeting local farmers, starting school gardens, and exploring crop planning and production systems.

Specifically, the grant will allow 20 teachers across the three BOCES regions to attend Farm to School training; engage with FFA and agriculture programs; and explore improvements to existing storage facilities, food processing equipment, food distributors, food order forms and student activities related to the program.
Thanks for Joining Us at Open House!

Hundreds of students, parents and community members attended our Fall Open House and College Fair on October 24 to learn more about our CTE and Continuing Education programs. Current students led hands-on demonstrations of their curriculum, teachers talked with parents about program options, and continuing education leaders joined nearly two dozen college, trade school, and military representatives to highlight post-secondary and career options that align with different programs.