

DUTCHESS BOCES Spotlight

October 2026

CTI Teacher Helps Draft Potential National Esthetics Exam

When Esthetics Teacher Melissa Lennon was first developing the Career & Technical Institute's (CTI) program for it, she learned that the only testing option available for students was the New York State licensing exams. Wanting her second-year students to be able to demonstrate their knowledge and practical skills before they left CTI prompted Lennon to look at creating a test to meet those needs.

"Over my years of teaching cosmetology, I know that a lot of students who've just finished the program maybe don't get their license or wait a while to get it," Lennon said. "Rather than wait until they get to that point, I asked NOCTI (the National Occupational Testing Institute) if they'd consider doing it ... there was no company creating an esthetics exam for a school program." NOCTI is a nonprofit provider of industry credentials and resources, and has been serving career and technical education since 1966.

After Lennon's conversation with NOCTI and learning that other teachers shared her sentiment, the organization surveyed other BOCES locations and schools across the state to find there was sufficient interest in creating an esthetics exam. Lennon and three other teachers volunteered their time, including some late nights, to create a practical assessment where students demonstrate how to perform facials, tweezing, waxing

and applying makeup, followed by cleaning and decontaminating their work areas. They did so with ease, as one of the teachers was an examiner for the state boards who knew what a practical esthetics exam looks like.

"NOCTI created the written questions based on the national curriculum; because requirements vary from state to state, our small group reviewed the questions to check for their relevance to New York state," Lennon recalled. "Sometimes we were on almost two hours going through the different details of the practical examinations, line by line."

The written and practical exams were piloted last spring, including in Lennon's classroom. She and her fellow teachers are reviewing questions on the written test that were flagged to see how they could be adjusted, as there are sometimes questions that are impossible for students to answer. Lennon hopes to see the testing begin as the industry assessment for her students by the end of the 2026-27 school year, with a goal of helping many of them become licensed before the CTI Recognition Ceremony in June.



CTI Teacher Melissa Lennon in the Esthetics classroom.

"We prepped the students as we would with any other program where they're going to take a licensing exam at the end, and they were all pretty successful with that," Lennon explained. "The testing replicates the state boards, so if students prepare for this and do well, they're going to feel a lot more confident to go out and take the licensing exam and get their license."

Lennon is proud to have assisted with getting the process started and establishing historic assessment standards for esthetics in New York.

"I did it for the love of it," Lennon said. "What started as a need in our esthetics program has grown into something with national potential."



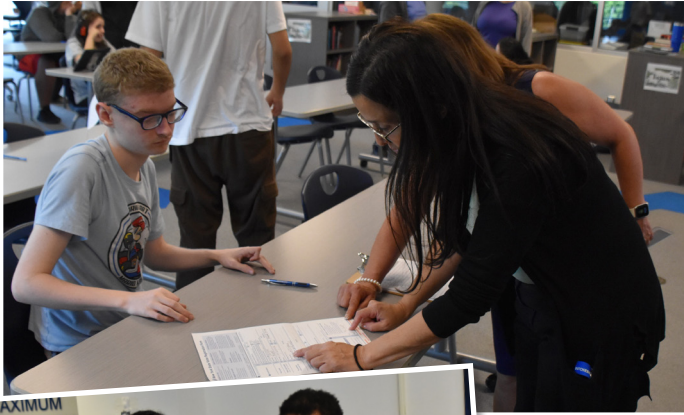
Culinary Arts and Restaurant Management students squeeze lemon and measure cinnamon to make cookies.

Students, Agency Thank Trustees

Students in the Career & Technical Institute's (CTI) Culinary Arts and Restaurant Management program were busy Oct. 13 and 14 baking a variety of treats for Dutchess BOCES' Board of Trustees in honor of School Board Recognition Week Oct. 12 to 16.

First and second-year students in Chef Teachers Amanda Scoca's and Gabriel Ross' classes prepared, baked and presented an assortment of treats including pecan bars, apple turnovers, pumpkin muffins and French Sablé cookies with chocolate centers, to District Superintendent Dr. Jodi DeLucia, Deputy Superintendent Dr. Sal Contés Jr. and Board Clerk Nancy Melilli ahead of the board's monthly meeting on Oct. 14.

Resilience Academy Students Register To Vote



Lammers, who enhanced the sessions by playing voting themed songs on guitar, explained how students can preregister to vote at 16 and shared how anyone can vote early at seven polling sites across the county, nine days before Election Day, or use an absentee ballot if they are away from home during an election.

"Once you're a registered voter, you are eligible to vote," Lammers said. "If it's a primary, you must be registered in the party that is having a primary, but in a general election all you need to do is be registered."

Lammers explained that once students registered to vote they would be placed in an election district situated near where they live. There they will vote on propositions specific to their area printed on a ballot.

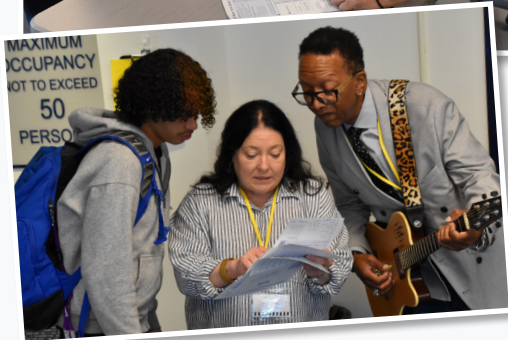
"Propositions are local things. They may want to raise money for the library in Hyde Park, but in Poughkeepsie they may want to hire Jay-Z to do the senior prom – two different things that affect two different areas," Lammers explained. "If you live in Arlington and your friend lives in Fishkill, well the things that affect Fishkill may not necessarily affect Arlington."

Elections occur every year with Lammers stressing the importance of voting in off-year elections which may have more of a direct impact on citizens.

"The presidential election is a big deal, but the person that shovels the streets and picks up the garbage off the sidewalk is what affects you right now – those are (determined by) elected positions," Lammers said. "Find out what's going on, the school board is an election."

Senior Mia Fountain appreciated Lammers' and Coppola's engaging presentation where she learned there was more to voting than just simply casting a ballot. She decided to register because she feels every vote matters in an election.

"Even if you think it doesn't matter, it really does matter ... you can really change what's going on if you just vote," Fountain said. "It's so important to put your two cents in."

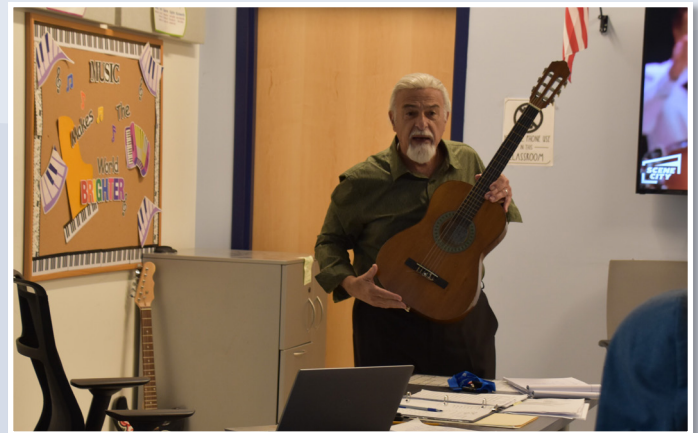


Top: Looking over a form.
Left: Lammers and Coppola talk with a student.

Around 40 students from Dutchess BOCES' Resilience Academy (RA) are either now registered or preregistered to vote following a Sept. 17 visit from representatives from the Dutchess County Board of Elections in honor of Constitution Day.

Throughout the morning, students gathered in the RA's Learning Commons where they sat at tables adorned with voter registration forms to fill out if they wished. The board's Elections Specialist team of Lisa Coppola and Wilford Bryan Lammers and RA School Counselor Heather Murphy assisted students if they had questions about registering and voting in general.

Music Lesson Reflects on Hispanic Heritage



In RA, Music Teacher Dean Karahalos taught the students about the late Ritchie Valens, a Mexican-American singer, songwriter and guitarist best known for the classic song "La Bamba," sung entirely in Spanish. Despite the song being released almost 70 years ago, most of Karahalos' students recognized it. He noted that it was a game changer for popular culture. He later showed students an acoustic guitar, a common instrument in mariachi music, and allowed them to strum a few strings to compare the sound to an electric guitar – the type Valens used in his version.

Families Visit Salt Point Center, Meet Teachers

Salt Point Center hallways and classrooms were filled with students and their families Tuesday night for this year's Open House.

Teachers, administrators, teaching assistants and aides were present to answer questions and share with parents and guardians how their children were doing.

In Jennifer Whalen's class, students created pages filled with pictures and words that represented them, asking visitors the question: "Who am I?" Whalen is in her ninth year at SPC and teaches in the Providing an Education for Autistic and Communication Impaired Children Effectively (PEACCE) program. She explained how she creates a structured learning environment, uses visual cards and cues to help students with their activities and schedules and how each student has a Star Card for rewards.

"Each day I ask students what they want to work for today," she said. Students indicate it on their sheet and must earn five stars to get their reward. "It's not just about work. They can get stars for being kind, helpful," she said.

Luz Collazo, great-grandmother to student Cameron, said she came because she wanted to get to know Cameron's teacher and find out how he was doing. "They're wonderful. He likes it here and is doing well. I like how she has it structured and the way she is teaching," she said.

Stevie Beatty, whose son, also named Stevie, is in the class, said he came "to support the kids and the teachers and see how he is doing." Beatty left with a sense of the routines the class follows. He and his wife are going to begin using some of the tools Whalen uses in the classroom at home.

Down the hall, Samantha Coachman met with her daughter's teacher, Valerie Cantone. "I wanted to get to know Abigail's teachers and TAs and see the school," she said, adding that

this is Abigail's second year in the program. "This is an excellent program. My daughter has flourished and really has come a long way."

Principal Melissa Murphy looks forward to the event each year.

"It was wonderful to see so many proud families and excited students showing their parents, siblings, and extended family where they learn and spend their school days," Murphy said. "The welcoming classrooms and happy staff made the evening feel warm and inviting. We truly appreciate all the time and effort everyone put into creating such a memorable night."



Top: SPC Teacher Jennifer Whalen speaks to a group of students' families. Second: Teacher Valerie Cantone shares classroom information with parents.

Dance, Art Inspire Hispanic Heritage Month Activities



Dance Teacher Kathy Muenz taught her students how to do the mambo, a dance originating from Cuba in the 1930's. It is based mostly on forward and backward movements incorporating rock and side steps, as well as occasional points, kicks and flicks of the feet.



Inspired by the Mexican artist Frida Kahlo, students in Amy McCann's SPC Spanish class colored in pictures of individual wings which were then assembled to create a large mural with space for people to stand between to make it appear as if they have wings.

Business Office Employee Spreads Positive Energy

Selena Virtuoso, Secretary to Assistant Superintendent for Business Services & Operations Mike Skerritt, goes above and beyond in her work and is a real beacon of positivity and productivity. When it came time to choose an employee to recognize at the Oct. 14 Board of Trustees meeting, it was clear that she was a perfect fit.

"When I asked, 'What do we think of this nomination?' everybody was like, 'Yes, absolutely this is a person who needs to be recognized,'" District Superintendent Dr. Jodi DeLucia recalled. "Selena is relatively new to our organization and we really are very fortunate that she found us."

Some of Virtuoso's tasks include assembling every financial document that comes into the agency and working with every division's support staff to ensure they have what they need, all with a positive energy that is felt across the campus.

"Regardless of the deadline or the work, she continuously rises to the challenge," DeLucia said.

Skerritt wrote in his nomination letter for Virtuoso that he could not navigate his

role without her, adding that she is approachable, highly astute and solutions driven.

"She keeps me organized, focused and consistently anticipates needs before they even arise," Skerritt wrote.

Virtuoso works with more than just the BOCES business team. "Whether it's helping coordinate the financial and clerical efforts for our BOCES, Dutchess Educational Health Insurance Consortium (DEHIC), the Dutchess County Workers' Comp Consortium, or our Business Officials Association, she handles complex, high-stakes tasks with skill, grace and quiet humility."

Virtuoso was honored to be recognized by DeLucia and the cabinet for the daily foundational work she does, which, while important, is often unseen, making this

acknowledgment even more meaningful for her. Seeing her efforts have a positive impact on BOCES students is Virtuoso's favorite part of the job.

"I am grateful for the confidence our administrators have placed in me to contribute to high-priority initiatives early in my career," Virtuoso said. "I look forward to continuing to grow and serve our community in the years to come."



L-R: District Superintendent Dr. Jodi DeLucia, Selena Virtuoso, and Assistant Superintendent for Business Services & Operations Mike Skerritt.

Sheriff's Vehicle Donation Helps Several CTI Programs



Security and Law students and Teacher Stephen Price explore the SUV.

Students in multiple Career and Technical Institute programs will benefit from Tuesday's donation of a retired Dutchess County Sheriff's Office patrol vehicle. The Ford SUV has about 163,000 miles on it and is fully functional.

Security and Law Teacher Stephen Price approached Dutchess County Sheriff Kirk Imperati with the request during an end-of-year ceremony last school year.

"I said absolutely," Imperati recalled Tuesday as Price's students excitedly explored the vehicle parked outside. Typically, vehicles are just auctioned, so the county ensured it was operational and transferred ownership. "We work hand-in-hand with BOCES," Imperati said, so it made sense.

Price said the vehicle will be "a huge tool in live scenarios" including felony stops, traffic stops and mental health calls. "The EMT program can use it to see how to render aid while a person is in a police vehicle."

Imperati added that students can learn how to exit the vehicle, position it for traffic stops and secure equipment inside.

Students lined up to shake Imperati's hand and thank him for the donation.

"I'm so excited we'll have new opportunities to explore. We can learn different functions of the car so that we are prepared when we go into a field involving law enforcement," Second-year student and senior Natalia Quinteros Tejada said. "I want to thank the Sheriff and all the other people involved in the donation."

CTI Principal Jason Lloyd said the donation impacts more than just Price's students.

"The donation is a great example of how this partnership with the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office can create meaningful learning opportunities across multiple programs. EMT gets to practice patient care skills, Graphic Arts and Design gets to design logos and other insignias for the vehicle, Automotive gets to inspect, service, and ensure it runs," Lloyd said. "It is an investment in our students, their skill development, and their future career readiness. Thanks again to the Dutchess County Sheriff's Office."