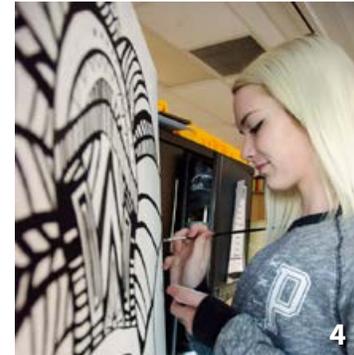


# Exceptional Education

*Programs and Services*



1. Samantha Wurstner and student Chase Smith celebrate academic success, see pg. 4.
2. Arlene Adams is the new Assistant Principal at Northtowns Academy, see pg. 4.
3. Dr. Kirsten Norman sets the pace at the Erie 1 BOCES Pacers program, see pg. 3.
4. Northtowns Academy art club member Alyssa Kelleher tackles a Zentangle, see pg. 2.
5. Student Chloe Yagastis works in her new classroom at West Elementary, see pg. 4.

## Northtowns Academy Clubs Prove Popular

“Join the club” is a popular idiom these days, and many Northtowns Academy students have been doing just that.

“Students are welcome to join after-school activities at their home school,” said Justin DeMartin, director of Exceptional Education for Erie 1 BOCES, “however many teens feel connected with Northtowns. We wanted to give students the opportunity to celebrate that identity through a club period.”

Northtowns instituted the club period concept following a visit to Evertech, a Broome-Tioga BOCES alternative education program, by DeMartin and two staff members.

“This is our first year implementing the program,” said Northtowns Principal Lorenda Chisolm. “The clubs meet for 30 minutes and run opposite of student lunch periods. Students select their activity club and have the option to switch every five weeks.”

Current club offerings are in art, film, gaming, music, science and sports. Early results show they’re becoming a popular option with students and teachers alike.

“I don’t have one kid that isn’t working,” noted art teacher Nancy Amico. “When they don’t have work to catch up on, it’s a good alternative to study hall.”

Alyssa Kelleher, an art club member who came to Northtowns from Ben Franklin Middle School in the Ken-Ton School District, agrees wholeheartedly.

“I love art. I love the fact that I can express myself, and it’s very calming to me. I do portraits and zentangles.”

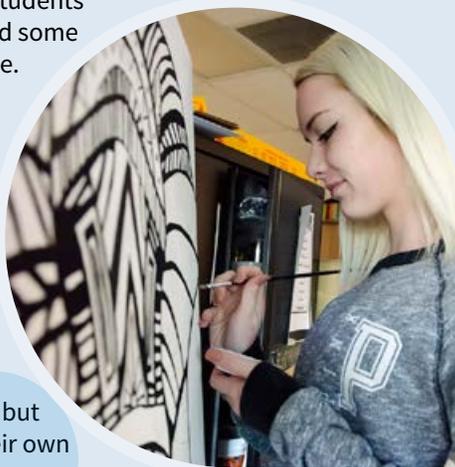
Zentangles, the art of crafting images by drawing structured patterns, is one of many techniques covered in Amico’s class.

Science Teacher Joseph Meyer began a science club this year, and says his students have already gained some practical experience.

He has hopes that the science club will continue to grow as the word gets out. Amico agrees, stressing how student-choice has fueled the enthusiasm.

“I’m guiding them, but they determine their own project,” said Amico.

“Kids are inspiring other kids.”



Art Club member Alyssa Kelleher works on a Zentangle.

## New Northtowns Administrator Driven to Make Positive Impact

The newest face in the administration at Northtowns Academy has taken a long road to get there.

*Northtowns Academy  
new Assistant Principal  
Arlene Adams.*

“I’m originally from New York City and my family is from Belize in Central America,” said new Assistant Principal Arlene Adams, “and when they came here, they originally wanted me to be a doctor.”

However, some experiences during her teens pointed her in a different direction. “I thought...if I become a teacher, then maybe I can catch (kids) early and make an impact in their lives beforehand.”

That belief drove her to pursue a career as an educator. After earning undergraduate and graduate degrees at Buffalo State College, as well as a second master’s degree from Canisius College, her career eventually took her to Buffalo’s Burgard High School in the unique role of instructional coach.

“Then I worked with all of the teachers there,” she said, “providing coaching, mentoring, turn-keying, whatever things were coming down from the state, whatever district initiatives were coming across. Then I realized I could impact even more students, so the logical step for me was administration. This way I touch more students, family and staff. It’s a larger reach.”

Adams said her time at Burgard, as well as a stint teaching history at McKinley High School, left her well-prepared for her new role at Northtowns – which is a good thing, since, she’s had to hit the ground running.

“I’m just learning the staff, learning the students...because each program has its own set of rules. So I’m learning each one of them and supporting them where I can.”

One priority, which she said has already emerged, is developing a strategy to unite the diverse programs under Northtowns’ roof.

“All of the programs are in the building. Middle school, ALP, the CCRA program, the center-based program. But they each have their own program ideas, how they handle discipline, their reward systems for students are all different. The needs are different for each one. So it’s really taking into account every part of the building.”

“Right now,” she continued, “before implementing anything here, I’m really still in the observation stage. I really want to learn what the school culture is, although I’m learning rather quickly. I really want to bring the different parts together. I see things I would like to do, but not too much, too fast.”



# Pacers Program Pumps Up Muscles and Spirits

Swimming pool noodles and plastic bottles filled with colored water are the humble tools building strength and flexibility for students in Erie 1 BOCES Pacers Program.

Physical therapist Dr. Kirsten Norman and her assistants utilize a special education exercise program that was created in Texas in 1992, when a special education preschool teacher asked her school's physical therapist, Tim Erson, to design a way to introduce fitness as a life skill to her students. The local program, formally known as Courageous Pacers, became the subject of a book and was embraced nationwide.

Pacers kids meet on Monday and Wednesday afternoons at the Erie 1 BOCES Learning Center. The program was run for some time by Erie 1 BOCES physical therapist Deborah Robida, with Kirsten Norman taking the reins this year. Norman said besides affordability, there's sound science behind the colorful bottles and noodles.

"The focus is on strengthening and flexibility, and there's also a walking component," she said. "It's cool for them to use something that has more of a sensory input to it. It's better that using something boring that adults may like. For the kids, it helps them to use something that has other benefits from using colors and textures."

The number of students participating varies, as teachers treat participation as a reward to be earned through good behavior. That fact shines through in the enthusiasm shown by the kids.

"You can see that the kids look forward to it," Norman said. "They're excited to hear music and some of them know it's a reward that they earn if they have good behavior. It's nice to see when they get excited. They're looking at you and you just say one cue and they start doing it and it's nice to see how responsive they can be to the program. Some of them love it so much that you'll see actions that show they know what exercise is coming next."

Norman noted that a team of classroom aides and personal aides help out during the 15-minute Pacer session, encouraging the kids and knowing them well enough to give the kind of cues they need to more fully participate.

Beyond the bottles and noodles, Robida also established a weight room in the boys' locker room using donated equipment, which Norman said has been a boon to older kids who want to do more than the basic props allow.

"They need more endurance and strengthening, so we have a weight machine, a treadmill and an elliptical. That's great that we can use that for therapy or if a kid has a lot of sensory needs, sometimes doing something like treadmill or weights gives them that deep pressure (exercise) and helps them to relax. It gets their blood flowing and exercise makes you feel good."

*Aide JoAnn Jones assists student Steven Borowski with a flexibility exercise in the Pacers Program at the Erie 1 BOCES Learning Center.*



*Physical Therapist Dr. Kirsten Norman runs the Pacers Program at the Erie 1 BOCES Learning Center.*

## Meet Matthew Raines, Assistant Principal

Continued progress and individual student success drives

Matthew Raines, assistant principal for Erie 1 BOCES Exceptional Education division. Raines joined Erie 1 BOCES in the summer of 2016 as the extended school year principal; now he wears a number of different hats for the organization's instructional divisions.



"During the regular school day, I am the assistant principal to the Erie County Youth Detention Center and to various classrooms within Special Education's 11 satellites," said Raines. "In the evening, I am the principal for the Potter Twilight program."

Prior to joining Erie 1 BOCES, Raines was an elementary school assistant principal in Cheektowaga Central. Before that, he was a special education teacher for Cheektowaga Central.

"Special Education is my passion," continued Raines. "My biggest job is to support our teachers and advocate for the needs of our students."

While he is excited to be in this role at BOCES, he admits he was initially naïve to BOCES' cooperative structure.

"The extended school year program was unique, I didn't realize the size and scale of servicing 225 special need students over the summer but it was awesome," said Raines. "The amount of activities we were able to do with the kids really helped them work on their skills and not regress."

A typical day for Raines begins at 7 a.m. and ends at 6:30 p.m. Since his schedule frequently shifts to meet the needs of teacher and students, e-mail is a great way to get in touch with him. However, he also has an office at the E1B Learning Center in West Seneca. The number he can be reached at is (716) 821-7117.

"The kids are great, I absolutely love it," said Raines.

## A New Beginning

For teachers at the Erie County Youth Detention Center, every day is like the first day of school. Erie 1 BOCES, which holds a contract with the county to provide instruction, works with children in grades five through 12.

“Children can arrive at any time and the average stay is two weeks,” said Matthew Raines, assistant principal for Erie 1 BOCES Exceptional Education.

Donna Walters, a math teacher, has devised her own structure to manage the classroom and keep students engaged in learning. Leeann Haj, life skills and health teacher agrees, “You have to be flexible.”

“These students have made mistakes ... but these are loving kids, they are not hardened criminals...,” said Raines. “We play an important role in helping them succeed.”



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## A New Home at West Elementary

West Seneca West Elementary School is the new home to seven Erie 1 BOCES Special Education classes, many of which are focused on serving students with autism.

“Our goal is to expand autism program offerings to service the increasing needs from our districts,” noted Justin DeMartin, Erie 1 BOCES Director of Exceptional Education Programs and Services.

One such class, comprised of six students ranging in age from 7 to 10, were previously together at Maryvale. This year, they’re settling into West Elementary with teacher Caitlin Palmer. While the surroundings may be unfamiliar, teacher and students got a head start on getting to know each other during a six-week summer program.

“That was a nice introduction for them and it wasn’t completely brand new,” Palmer said. “Some of the aides are the same...so they have some familiar faces. It’s nice to have more BOCES staff on site.” Supervisor John Pope provides that BOCES presence at West Elementary. He said there’s a good working relationship. “What we’ve put together here is a collaborative effort for kids with unique and special needs. We’re really working for the growth & opportunities for all students in the building.”

Instructional Resource Teacher Melissa Metz said the E1B team is making the most of the many resources available to them, including programs such as Symbol Stix and Unique. She said those programs help students with autism gain independence, increase communication, and benefits social interaction with peers and adults.

That social interaction is a definite priority, according to Special Education Teacher Samantha Wurstner.

“It’s emphasized a lot in the classroom,” she said of her young class. “We’re working a lot with the different social skills – waiting, taking turns, raising your hand before you speak, and basic goals and routines. We’re just trying to get them to be able to function as a student. They have to learn to be a student before they can actually learn. That’s my motto.” DeMartin said the program is off to a good start at West Elementary, and will only get better. “We are sending teachers and administrators to receive further training in this area to ensure we remain the foremost provider for our community.”

*Chloe Yagastis works on coloring during Caitlin Palmer’s class at West Elementary School.*



*Erie 1 BOCES provides equal opportunity for students and does not discriminate against any student enrolled in (or any candidate for admission to) its programs and activities on the basis of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, or age. A notice of nondiscrimination is posted on: [www.e1b.org](http://www.e1b.org).*

