Southern Westchester BOCES

Board Links

BOARD TO BOARD NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2026

Center for Special Services



My Brother's Keeper symposium provides a forum for engagement, connection and dialogue

SWBOCES delegation joins daylong leadership event at County Center

More than a dozen students from Southern Westchester BOCES' Rye Lake Campus joined hundreds of their peers for a day of inspiration, learning and connection at the My Brother's Keeper Youth Leadership Symposium at the Westchester County Center in White Plains.

The April 21, 2026, event drew chapters from numerous Hudson Valley schools for a daylong series of conversations, workshops and shared experiences, under the theme of "Legacy in Action: Empowering Youth, Building Futures."

"This was an eye-opening experience for our students," said advisor and Rye Lake Campus Team Leader Curtis Anderson. "They saw firsthand that there is a system of support and brotherhood they can rely upon and be a part of themselves."

Dr. Alexandria Connally, Assistant Director of Special Services at SWBOCES and Chair of the Westchester County Youth Board, said that having an MBK chapter at Southern Westchester BOCES is a natural extension of the organization's shared mission.

"This was a powerful day, one that I am sure made an impact and will benefit our students well into their future," Dr. Connally said.

"It is a point of pride that our BOCES students have this opportunity to participate and benefit from all that My Brother's Keeper has to offer young men," added District Superintendent Harold Coles. "I am thankful to our team for ensuring their representation at this important symposium."

Participating districts from the SWBOCES region included New Rochelle, Mount Vernon, Port Chester, Greenburgh, Greenburgh-Graham and Mount Pleasant while delegations from Yonkers and Newburgh, among others, participated as well.

Legacy In Action

The symposium kicked off with keynote speaker Brad Butler II, who brought energy and inspiration to the stage. His message: Be a living legacy.

Live life in a way that you'll be remembered, Mr. Butler said. Integrity and values matter,

A Message from the Board President



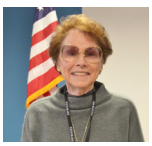
Greetings fellow Board of Education members,

As another successful school year comes to a close, I would like to extend my sincere gratitude to each of our component school districts, their Boards of Education, superintendents, administrators, faculty, staff, and community members for their continued partnership and support of Southern Westchester BOCES.

On behalf of the Board of Education, thank you for your unanimous approval of the 2026–2027 Southern Westchester BOCES budget. Your support reflects the shared commitment we all have to providing exceptional educational opportunities and services for students and families throughout our region. We are equally grateful for your confidence in the leadership of our Board through the re-election of trustees Sheryl Brady and Nilesh Jain, as well as the election of Nan Mead to her first term. We congratulate all three and thank them for their dedication and willingness to serve our students and school communities.

Southern Westchester BOCES continues to evolve to meet the rapidly changing needs of education and the workforce. One area where this growth has been especially exciting is within our Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs. Over the past

Greetings continues on Page 2



Dr. Joan Weber, VP
Hawthorne Cedar Knolls



Sheryl Brady
White Plains



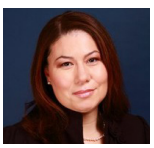
Lynn Frazer-McBride
Mt. Vernon



Nilesh Jain
Edgemont



Robert Johnson
Greenburgh-North Castle



Nan Eileen Mead
Scarsdale

Greetings fellow Board of Education members

Greetings continued from Page 1

several years, we have witnessed tremendous growth in student interest and enrollment across many of our CTE offerings. More students than ever recognize the value of hands-on learning experiences that prepare them for high-demand careers, industry certifications, post-secondary education, and meaningful employment opportunities.

As technology, business, healthcare, and skilled trades continue to transform at an unprecedented pace, we recognize that preparing students for tomorrow's workforce requires ongoing collaboration and forward-thinking planning. We want to ensure our programs not only meet current workforce demands but also anticipate the industries and careers that will emerge five, 10, and even 15 years from now.

To that end, we ask our component districts to continue engaging with us in conversations about the future of Career and Technical Education. We welcome your ideas, feedback, and recommendations regarding programs you believe would benefit your students and communities. Whether there are emerging industries, specialized technical skills, healthcare pathways, engineering technologies, artificial intelligence applications, cybersecurity programs, or skilled trades that deserve greater focus, we want to hear from you.

Our strength has always been rooted in collaboration. By working together, we can continue creating innovative opportunities that prepare students not only for graduation, but for lifelong success in an ever-changing world.

As we celebrate the accomplishments of this school year and begin planning for the future, we remain committed to supporting our component districts with responsive, innovative, and student-centered programming. Thank you once again for your continued trust, partnership, and shared dedication to educational excellence.

Wishing everyone a safe, restful, and enjoyable summer.

John Filiberti

Board of Education President
(Eastchester)
Southern Westchester BOCES

Center for Special Services

MBK continued from Page 1

not money, he added. Income only matters only as far as it supports the influence we have and the impact we make. "What I want to know is, are you a good person?" he said.

Mr. Butler is a nationally recognized speaker and educational consultant who uses storytelling and personal insights to equip students and educators with practical strategies for purpose-driven leadership, accountability, and resilience.

He shared his own story of struggling with self-worth and internalizing beliefs about himself that others imposed upon him.

When he was placed in special education programs, he stopped believing in his intelligence. When an advisor told him he'd surely succeed but asked him to remember those who came after, a light came on—he was responsible not only for his own success but that of others.

He urged the young men on hand to believe in themselves and reject any negative self-perception.

Several community leaders spoke, offering encouragement.

Ernest L. McFadden, Executive Director of the Westchester County Youth Bureau, advised participants to take the opportunity to make connections and also to appreciate the adults who put this symposium together. Take what is offered, he said, "and run with it as far as you can."

Following the keynote, the students attended workshops on topics ranging from Hip Hop Therapy and Emotional Resilience to The Value of Fraternities and My Brother's Keeper and the Monetization of Your Brand. Mr. Butler led a workshop on Success, Accountability and Education.

Westchester County Legislator Jewel Williams Johnson told attendees too many young men have been overlooked, underestimated and left to navigate challenges on their own.

"This day is for you," she said. "Your voice matters. Your presence matters. Your future matters."

My Brother's Keeper was launched by former President Barack Obama in 2014 to close opportunity gaps facing boys and young men of color and help them to reach their dreams by sparking dialogue and action. The Hudson Valley MBK Alliance includes seven local school chapters that are nationally recognized and certified.

SWBOCES News

SWBOCES Board of Education welcomes new member Nan Eileen Mead



Nan Eileen Mead of Scarsdale joins the Southern Westchester BOCES Board of Education following her election in April. She replaces Eileen Miller of Pelham, who did not seek reelection. Ms. Mead, who was recommended by the Scarsdale Board of Education, brings a background in education policy, research, and advocacy that will greatly benefit the 32 component school districts we serve, Board President John Filiberti said.

"With her deep experience in curriculum development, civic readiness, and stakeholder engagement, Nan is well-equipped to support our mission of providing high-quality educational opportunities. We look forward to her contributions as we continue to collaborate across our diverse Westchester communities," Mr. Filiberti added.

Ms. Mead is Co-Executive Director for Operations and Partnerships for Democracy Ready NY and also serves as Lead Facilitator, College Access with Oyate Group. From 2022 to 2025 she was Director of Outreach and Communications for the Center for Educational Equity at Teacher College of Columbia University. She holds a Master of Education degree in Curriculum and Instruction and a Master of Arts degree in Social and Public Policy. She has served as a member of the University of the State of New York Board of Regents and held leadership roles in citywide parent advisory councils.





Career Services graduates called on to 'be the workforce and citizens we need'

Annual CTE Recognition at County Center a time for reflection, celebration

Students enrolled in Career and Technical Education programs through Southern Westchester BOCES' Center for Career Services were honored for their achievements at the annual Recognition Ceremony, held on June 11, 2026, at the Westchester County Center in White Plains.

U.S. Marine Corps recruit Andy Ordonez, from Port Chester, carrying an American flag, led the opening procession of students and staff, then led the Pledge of Allegiance. Cosmetology student Miranda Beato, from Hastings, followed with a powerful rendition of the National Anthem.

Director of Career Services Dahlia Jackson and District Superintendent Dr. Harold A. Coles delivered welcoming remarks.

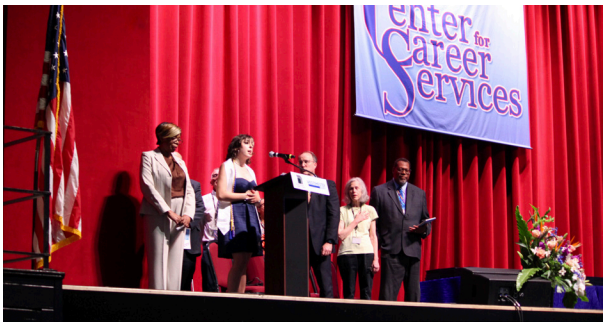
"As you leave here, be the workforce and the citizens that we need to build a just society," Dr. Coles said. "Congratulations to you, Southern Westchester BOCES CTE Class of 2026."

Salutatorian and Security, Law & Policing student Alexandria Mendoza, from Edgemont, invited families and teachers to stand and be recognized, acknowledging their role in supporting student success.

"You've all played an important role in our achievements," Alexandria said. "It is now our time to take this encouragement, along with the tools we have gained over the last two years at Career Services, and start building our future."







A video segment produced by Video Production students Tyler Luisi and Jake Olivier, both from Eastchester, featured reflections on the Career Services experience. The segment was introduced by Valedictorian Rebecca Durinda, from Rye Neck, also a Security, Law & Policing student. She spoke about growth through change and the importance of embracing new challenges.

"Everyone goes through it," she said. "While it may be scary to step into the unknown, it is admirable to take that next step anyway."

Principal Jaclyn De Lao and Assistant Principal Phil Donohue recognized school Social Worker Eileen Yip, who is retiring after 18 years, for her lasting impact on students and the school community. Ms. Yip was presented with flowers by Ms. Jackson. Dr. Brendan Lyons, Deputy District Superintendent and Chief Operating Officer, also honored retiring Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services James Gratto for his decade of service.

During the presentation of certificates, each student was called to the stage by their instructors and celebrated alongside their peers before gathering for group photos at the foot of the stage.

"Congratulations to all of you," Ms. Jackson said, concluding the evening. "It is with great pride that I present to you the Class of 2026."







Music program makes an impact on SWBOCES students—and their teacher

Upcoming performances will put a spotlight on Irvington students and their music program

As a musician and a music teacher, Andrew Ruoti enjoys the best of both worlds.

That's not just in reference to the two songs his students were rehearsing for upcoming performances: "On Top of the World" by Imagine Dragons and "Everybody Wants to Rule the World" by Tears for Fears.

Music has had a big impact on his own life, and he gets to share that with his students, who in turn reap its benefits.

"A big focus I put on the program is how music can be a vehicle for self-expression," Mr. Ruoti said, adding that it can also be a supplemental support piece for students.

Mr. Ruoti teaches students in the Therapeutic Support Program at SWBOCES' Irvington Middle-High School and three other Center for Special Services locations. His classes on a recent morning were effectively band practices—and the band sounds great.

"Let's get a soundcheck real quick, guys," Mr. Ruoti says as students settle in. One asked if they can run through "On Top of the World."

"Yeah, let's go for it!" he replied.

As the song progressed, one student picked a tasteful melody on a classical guitar while another sings. Rhythm guitars strummed while the bass line fit like a glove with the beat of the program's new electronic drum kit.

"Playing in front of an audience, that's a skill too, Mr. Ruoti sayid when the song ended.

The Irvington students were working on recording their parts utilizing digital audio workstation (DAW) software to be played as a backing track at St. Matthew's School's end-of-year recognition.

Next, several students traded guitars for drums or bass for keyboards. The transition is seamless. Mr. Ruoti likes to expose his students to multiple instruments.

"Everybody Wants to Rule the World" is an 80s pop staple that's recently seen a resurgence. It's a more challenging arrangement, but clearly this wasn't their first rehearsal.

Unlike sports, music isn't a competition. Mr. Ruoti complimented Matthew's singing after he followed another vocalist. "She sounded good too," Matthew, who is from Ardsley, was quick to add.

In another class, a quartet of sixth-graders got set up. One of them, Eli, from Blind Brook, shared his thoughts on music.

"I always wanted to play electric guitar because it's always been the coolest instrument to me," he said, then putting it in words that must be music to his teacher's ears: "It's cool to be able to come to school and do this."

Earlier, 9th grader Megumi from Irvington played a cream-colored stratocaster he picked up two years ago, inspired by his multi-talented sister and his jazz-loving grandfather, though his tastes lean toward heavy metal.

"I usually prefer playing alone," he said. "I find music helps you. You don't have to say a word, and you can describe how you're feeling."

In the back of the room, two girls traded guitar licks and pop lyrics.

Dani, from Eastchester, says she gave up the guitar for a while but picked it back up again.

"I think what got me back into it was how it helped get me out of a bad place in my life," she said.

Giselle, from Yonkers, is inspired by Lady Gaga to become a working musician one day.

"I love learning new things in this class," she said. "I've become more comfortable singing. This class, I think, gives me hope for the future."

At Tech Expo, 300+ educators and partners 'lead with joy, learn with purpose'

Tech Expo 2026, the two-day capstone event of the Technology Leadership Institute (TLI) series, turned the bucolic Windrose on Hudson into a campus for leading, learning and making connections.

"This is a chance to learn from one another and sharpen your practice," said Dr. Ellen J. McDonnell, Executive Director of the Lower Hudson Regional Information Center.

The event, held May 7 and 8, 2026, brought together more than 300 educators—dozens of whom led sessions on their area of expertise—and 40 educational technology vendors, nearly half of whom also led workshops.

"I hope your time here sparks new thinking, strengthens relationships and reminds you that you are part of a vibrant community committed to leading with intention and learning with purpose," said Instructional Technology Manager Mary Lynn Collins-Callanan.

For attendees, Tech Expo is an experience not to be missed.

"This is like my Super Bowl," said Lakeland Schools' Director of Instructional Technology Scott Staub. "Tech Expo is a premiere event. It's high-quality professional development. Seeing how other districts are implementing tools that we use is important. It helps us make a lot of decisions. It's always great to be here."







Jennifer Mazza, Clarkstown Schools' Director of STEM & Instructional Technology, agreed. Clarkstown had five teacher groups presenting this year, she said.

"Tech Expo gives me a chance to get together with colleagues and share our stories and meet people who might have solutions to some of the challenges we are facing," Ms. Mazza said.

Keynote Speaker Susan Maynor, in her opening address, urged a balance between technology and the uniquely human skills students need. She challenged educators to step out of their comfort zones and create opportunities for students to be compassionate innovators.

"When you create things that bring you joy, purpose bubbles up," said Ms. Maynor.

Several of the 70+ sessions were presented by honorees at TLI's annual TELL Awards, which recognize innovation in educational technology.

Pelham's Alicia DelMastro led Beyond the Code: Vibe Coding Your Way to Innovation. Clarkstown's Instructional Technology Facilitators Christina Amendola and Katie Kelley, co-led Gems are Outrageous: Hands-On Customization for the Modern Classroom. North Rockland's Instructional Technology Coach Kaitlyn Shields presented Teaching in the Margins: Discern, Build, Send.

Day 2 keynote speaker Dr. Mervin Jenkins focused on the power of teacher-student relationships, sharing his journey from reluctant learner to engaged student. Music came easy to him, and he was cast as a drummer in the school play. "But when the lead got sick, I was asked to play MacBeth!" he said. "That stuck with me!"

Dr. Jenkins recited Shakespeare and even rapped, demonstrating that vocabulary is more than knowing words. It's about comprehension and life-long confidence.

By late afternoon on Day 2, Port Chester teachers Aferdita Osmani and Estrella Marziani were beaming. The pair had presented on integrating advanced instructional technology to enable teachers to create tailored instruction.

"Students have so many challenges," Ms. Osmani said. "Believing in them, and seeing them, is so important. It's my job to show them that they can do it," said Ms. Marziani. "We are all learners."

PLCS team partners with leader in Project-Based Learning for Spring institute

Immersive experience leverages PBLWorks framework to strengthen practice, build capacity

The Center for Professional Learning & Curriculum Support (PLCS) launched a new professional learning experience this spring, partnering with PBLWorks to advance high-quality Project-Based Learning across the region.



Held April 28–30, the immersive institute brought together 27 educators, including members of the PLCS Core Team. The experience was designed to strengthen instructional practice and build regional capacity to help districts implement NYSED's NY Inspires: A Plan to Transform Education and achieve their Portrait of a Graduate goals.

Facilitated by PBLWorks National Faculty member Randi Downs, the three-day event guided participants through designing rigorous, standards-based PBL units that connect academic content to real-world challenges. Educators explored strategies to support student voice and choice, collaboration, critical thinking, and equitable learning experiences that promote deeper engagement for all learners.

Using the PBLWorks Gold Standard Project Design framework, participants collaborated to develop project vision, define learning outcomes, establish assessment criteria, and design aligned instructional activities. The resulting projects spanned English Language Arts, Library Science, Biology, Social Studies, Current Events, and Forensics, representing diverse grade levels across the K–12 continuum.

By the conclusion of the third day, each participant produced a well-developed PBL unit nearly ready for implementation. Members of the PLCS Core Team also strengthened their capacity to support districts in aligning instructional design with the core competencies of a Portrait of a Graduate: communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, and learner agency.

This initiative reflects PLCS's ongoing commitment to delivering high-impact professional learning that advances instructional excellence, supports district transformation, and prepares students to thrive as future-ready learners.

SWBOCES News

Tracy Racicot appointed Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services



The Board of Education of Southern Westchester BOCES appointed Tracy Racicot to the position of Assistant Superintendent for Educational Services at its May 6, 2026, meeting. Ms. Racicot has been SWBOCES' Director of Adult and Community Services since 2019 and brings more than three decades of experience in education as a teacher, principal, and director to her new role. She succeeds James A. Gratto, who retired at the end of the school year.

Center for Career Services

SWBOCES teachers selected to speak at national conference in Nashville

ENL Consultant Teacher Vitaliya Popovych and Math Consultant Teacher Dr. Zsuzsanna Kozmane-Fejes, who both teach at SWBOCES' Center for Career Services, have been selected to present at the 2026 Making Schools Work Conference in Nashville from July 14-17.

Ms. Kozmane-Fejes and Ms. Popovych will discuss how their subjects can be made more accessible for CTE students.

"I will focus on how to build project-based assignments that are accessible for all students," Ms. Popovych said. Dr. Kozmane-Fejes will present on how math can be meaningfully embedded into CTE programs through real-world applications. Both presentations will showcase practical, classroom-tested strategies that have proved effective on the Career Services campus.

"We started doing this many, many years ago," Dr. Kozmane-Fejes said. "With CTE becoming more widespread in schools, I think our approach here is hopefully getting recognized more."



Adult Literacy supervisor, teacher honored by statewide association for those who serve adult learners

Maria Guerrero, Maria de Fatima Braga lauded at annual conference

Two veteran members of Southern Westchester BOCES' Adult Literacy Program have been honored by the New York Association for Continuing and Community Education at its 2026 conference.

Supervisor Maria Guerrero was awarded NYACCE's prestigious Lawrence Levin Award, while veteran teacher Maria de Fatima Braga received the 2026 Adult Education Award.

SWBOCES' Adult Literacy Program delivers ESL instruction and GED and Citizenship exam preparation to thousands of Westchester residents each year. The association provides information and support for professionals serving the needs of life-long learners.

The Lawrence Levin Award is named for a member and 2006 recipient and is awarded to individuals who demonstrate exceptional leadership, dedication, and a "student-first" mindset.

"I am deeply honored," Ms. Guerrero said. "To be recognized by NYACCE—an organization that stands at the forefront of lifelong learning—is truly humbling."

She credited the collective work of her team. "This award represents the values I strive to bring to adult education every day: advocacy, leadership, and a commitment to student success."

Director of Adult & Community Services Tracy Racicot nominated Ms. Guerrero, saying she embodied the spirit of the award and the legacy of its namesake.

Ms. Braga called the honor bestowed upon her a highlight of her career. She has seen 2,000 students go on to receive their American citizenship. An immigrant herself, she recalled her own ESL studies through SWBOCES.

"What started as a dream became my life's work," she said. "For over 20 years, this school has been my home, and my purpose has been to support others on the same path I once walked."

Teaching has been a journey of shared growth, she said. From her students, many of them refugees, she has learned about perseverance, culture and determination.

"This award is not just about me," she said. "It represents every student who walked into a classroom with courage, every story of perseverance, and every dream that became reality."





SWBOCES' Tracy Racicot, Lisa Zarkower honored by Westchester County for their work on behalf of students



Director Tracy Racicot and Office Assistant Lisa Zarkower, both of the Center for Adult & Community Services at Southern Westchester BOCES, were honored this spring for their dedication and innovation on behalf of those in the care of the Westchester County Department of Correction.

Ms. Racicot and Ms. Zarkower were recognized at WCDOC's annual Women's History Month celebration in Valhalla.

Ms. Racicot was lauded for expanding educational opportunities, including High School Equivalency, English as a New Language, and workforce training. She has also helped create employment pathways, such as HVAC-R training.

"The work we do in adult and community education—especially within the Westchester County Jail—is about more than instruction," Ms. Racicot said. "It's about opportunity, dignity, and the belief that people can grow, change, and build a better future for themselves and their families."

She praised Ms. Zarkower for "her dedication, compassion, and steady support to make this work possible every single day." Ms. Zarkower was recognized for her role in coordinating educational services, ensuring residents are properly assessed, enrolled and supporting daily program operations.

"It is an honor and privilege to formally recognize these remarkable women who, through their dedication and tireless work, continue to bring support, hope and healing to the residents at WCDOC," Westchester County Executive Ken Jenkins said.

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Brian Howard, *Director of Communications*
Jeffry Braun, *Graphic Illustrator*

SWBOCES NON-DISCRIMINATION POLICY

The Southern Westchester Board of Cooperative Educational Services, its officers and employees, does not discriminate against any individuals, including but not limited to students, employees or applicants on the basis of race, color, national origin, ethnicity, religion, creed, sex, gender (including gender identity and gender expression), sexual orientation, disability, age, citizenship status, marital status, partner status, genetic information, predisposing genetic characteristics,weight, military status or service, political affiliation, or domestic violence victim status.

This policy of nondiscrimination includes access by students to educational programs; counseling services for students; course offerings and student activities; recruitment, appointment and promotion of employees; and employment pay and benefits.

Inquiries regarding this policy should be directed to the Compliance Officers at Southern Westchester BOCES, 17 Berkley Drive, Rye Brook, NY 10573. (914) 937-3820.

Civil Rights Compliance Officers

Suzanne Doherty, *Senior Director of Human Resources*
Stephen J. Tibbetts, *Assistant Superintendent for Business & Administrative Services*
Tracey Lizzo, *Director of Personnel*

Contact Information
17 Berkley Drive, Rye Brook, NY 10573
complianceofficer@swboces.org

Complaints can also be filed directly with:

U.S. Department of Education Office of Civil Rights
New York Office
32 Old Slip, 26th Floor, New York, NY 10005-2500
(646) 428-3800 (tel) • (646) 428-3843 (fax)
Email: OCR.NewYork@ed.gov

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Center for Interscholastic Athletics



Section One Student-Athletes Lead the Way at Spring Leadership Events

Section One Athletics was well represented at two recent spring leadership events, as student-athletes from across the section took the opportunity to grow as leaders and to share what they've learned with peers back home and statewide.

At the 2026 NYSPHSAA Student Leadership Conference, April 15–16 at the Hilton Albany, 19 students from 14 Section One schools joined nearly 200 student-athletes from across New York for a day of speakers, presentations and breakout sessions focused on leadership development.

Section One's Student-Athlete Advisory (SAAC) representatives—Rye Neck's Owen Wagner and Putnam Valley's Julia DiMichele—played active leadership roles before and during the event by facilitating icebreaker activities. Last month, Julia and Owen also presented to nearly 100 Section One athletic administrators about the statewide Mental Health Awareness Week campaign they helped craft.

"All of the breakout sessions were incredibly informative in their own way," Owen said of the Albany conference, the second he attended. "I feel like I've really undergone a shift in the way I view being a leader. I'm looking forward to returning next year."

Meanwhile, at the 2026 Section I/IX Student-Athlete Leadership Summit on April 20 at Mount Saint Mary College in Newburgh, approximately 100 participants from Section One, including 70 student-athletes from 28 schools, gathered for a series of discussions. Mamaroneck High School Athletic Director Bari Suman, assistant Dave Halbreich, and eight student-athletes led a breakout session drawing on the school's "Athlete to Athleader" leadership workshop. They guided an interactive discussion on leadership in action and how to apply these skills in a school community.

"To me, the most valuable piece was the student leaders being able to explain why having each other — leaders in other sports, on other teams — was such a valuable resource," Ms. Suman said.

Both events align with Section One's continued commitment to growing student-athlete leadership opportunities.

"What we really tried to do this year was provide authentic opportunities for leadership that is student-driven," Section One Assistant Director Jesse Merchant said. "Our next phase is to deliberately expand the things we're currently doing and add our own Student-Athlete Advisory Committee in Section One."

Our Mission

Southern Westchester BOCES supports students, districts and communities across our region through innovative, future-focused services, and forward-thinking leadership, centered on equity, access, and opportunity for all.