



# NYS Student Support Services Center

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## NEWS RELEASE

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### OSSINING SCHOOL DISTRICT HONORED FOR EFFORTS TO IMPROVE STUDENT HEALTH, ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

(*Ossining, N.Y.*) – The Ossining Union Free School District was recently honored by the New York State School Health Alliance, a group of non-governmental agencies and organizations in support of school health, for their commitment to graduating students who are healthy in both mind and body. The inaugural New York Healthy STARS (School Teams Achieving Results Successfully) awards recognize school districts for excellence in promoting comprehensive school health and learning. Ossining earned a Silver Level award.

“We are so pleased that our efforts to reduce childhood obesity and increase awareness of the importance of good nutrition, physical activity and other health and wellness issues have been recognized through this award,” said Dr. Robert J. Roelle, superintendent. “Our Wellness Committee, composed of administrators, teachers, a nutritionist, parents, students and a school nurse, developed strong guidelines for healthy changes in our district, and their efforts are complemented by utilizing the Westchester County Department of Health’s FIT KIDS program to disseminate nutrition information to students and their families.”

The Ossining School District is committed to maximizing the health and wellness of the school community. The district, through the strong support of the Superintendent and his staff, has made sure that the necessary resources are available to create change in the district and the community. In addition, the district was given a lot of support from the Westchester Department of Health through information, grant opportunities, and incentives for special programs. Through this support the very active and well represented Wellness Committee has been established. The Wellness committee created a very comprehensive plan to implement the necessary changes to create a healthy school environment in Ossining.

The district boasts an extraordinary lunch program, under the direction of Lyn Prestia of Whitsons Culinary Group and her staff. Many changes have been made to the menu to ensure that students are getting a healthy, well balanced meal. The success of the new menu is evidenced by the number of students who are buying their lunch at the school. Not only is the food healthy but it tastes great and looks good.

Students are very involved in all aspects of the wellness activities that occur in the district. Faith Lippe, who is the Nutrition Consultant for the district, believes that student involvement is a critical component in ensuring that children understand the reasons for making healthy changes. If the students are involved, they are able to take ownership of the concepts and are more likely to embrace the changes that need to be made.

The school district has a great deal of support from the community and shares what is going on in the district via newsletters, meetings and its website. There are many school and community events to encourage physical activity and health. These include participation in the Westchester Department of Health's FIT KIDS program, as well as No Junk Food Week, Turnoff TV Week, ACES (all children exercising simultaneously), a Safe Routes to School Event, a Wellness Club for the high school, and a Junior League's Child-Nutrition Fair just to name a few.

The connection between supportive learning environments, student health and academic achievement is clear. According to recent studies, higher levels of academic achievement were linked to students who were safe, healthy and connected to their school community. Also, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) recommends school districts adopt a comprehensive school health program to provide an environment where students and adults can lead healthier lives while excelling academically. The New York Healthy STARS program is based on this CDC recommendation.

Other school districts honored were Oceanside Union Free School District, Rochester City School District, McGraw Central School District, Honeoye Falls-Lima Central School District, Cortland Enlarged City School District and Commack Union Free School District.

These districts completed the Healthy STARS checklist, a voluntary self-assessment tool, to determine their level of achievement in the area of comprehensive school health. Following successful completion of the checklist, a team from the New York State Student Support Services Center was dispatched to conduct a site visit and evaluate the districts.

The awards were presented at a ceremony held in Albany on Thursday, June 28th at the Holiday Inn Turf. The keynote address was presented by Assemblyman Felix Ortiz, a strong advocate of creating a school environment that fosters healthy choices.

Collaborators on the Healthy STARS program include the New York State Student Support Services Center; New York State Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation and Dance; American Cancer Society; American Heart Association, American Diabetes Association; American Lung Association of New York State; Wellness Councils of America; and many other organizations.

For more information about the Ossining Union Free School District Healthy STARS award, please contact *Maja Tarateta*, (914) 762-5760 x461, [mtarateta@ossining.k12.ny.us](mailto:mtarateta@ossining.k12.ny.us), [www.ossiningufsd.org](http://www.ossiningufsd.org).

### **About the School Health Alliance**

*The School Health Alliance is made up of 22 non-governmental agencies and organizations and is led by the New York State Student Support Services Center, located in LeRoy, NY. The Alliance supports schools in promoting supportive learning environments with healthy behaviors and lifestyles for students and the greater school community through the adoption of coordinated school health programs. Coordinated school health programs result in higher academic performance; increased attendance; positive youth development; improved school morale; and enhanced learning and development.*