



## Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES

502 Court Street • Utica, NY 13502

www.oneida-boces.org

# News

*For Immediate Release*

## Audio and eBooks Bring Adventures to Local Students

**May 18, 2020 (New Hartford, N.Y.)** – COVID-19 and stay-at-home orders have dramatically changed our lives over the last several months, but this dramatic change may be most evident for our students. Education has gone virtual, activities have been canceled and interaction with peers is limited and sometimes, even nonexistent. But there is at least one constant that still remains -- the ability to seek distraction and refuge in the story of a good book. In the words of American aphorist and professor Mason Cooley, “reading gives us someplace to go when we have to stay where we are.”

And while students are staying home, and libraries are closed, many educators have turned to the Oneida/Herkimer School Library System (O/H SLS) for ways to help make sure the adventures and exploration offered through books continues.

As part of the O/H SLS, students from schools throughout the region are able to borrow audio and eBooks from their school and public library collections using the Sora student reading app on their own mobile devices or computers. The Sora app allows students to set their own pace, return borrowed titles automatically, take notes and define words while reading, track their reading progress and even select a font option that’s easier to read for children with dyslexia.

Since remote learning began in March, Thomas Jefferson Elementary School, in the Utica City School District, has consistently been at the top of the list of O/H SLS schools that have the most students using Sora.

Jefferson Elementary Principal Vanessa Rejrat says that students have exceeded the school’s expectations in utilizing the Sora platform and credits the app’s accessibility, diversity and achievement recognition system for her students’ increased participation.

“Our students have access to more genres now which has piqued their interest,” said Rejrat. “Many of these genres may not have been available in our school library or were on long holds due to popularity. This platform encourages student choice and interest, hence their increased engagement.”

Rejrat also believes that the enthusiasm and forethought of School Librarian Kirsten Learnard have been crucial to increasing independent reading among students.

Contact: Rebecca Neary • Public Relations Specialist  
Phone: 315.793.8528 • E-mail: [rneary@oneida-boces.org](mailto:rneary@oneida-boces.org)

"Kirsten is in her first year of teaching but came to us with a wealth of knowledge, especially when it comes to the use of technology," noted Rejrat. Learnard began introducing her students to Sora even before the transition to remote learning occurred, which has made them even more likely to utilize it as a resource while learning from home.

"I love Sora and personally use the public library service, that is similar, to listen to audiobooks and to find books that I can read and record for my students to listen to," Learnard said

Jefferson Elementary's partnership with the O/H SLS has certainly been successful in providing reading materials for students of every age, interest and ability -- a fact that the Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES takes great pride in.

"Our local school librarians' efforts have really paid off and it is so great to see their enthusiasm passed on to their students," said Elizabeth Hartnett, OHM BOCES Coordinator of SLS & Media Services. "We're so pleased that we're able to bring equity to students who may have had a tough time accessing books if they hadn't known that this service is available to them."

Rejrat and Learnard recommend that teachers tryout Sora as a way to open up a whole new world to their students during these unusual times. "Allow student choice and interest to drive your students' independent reading. The ebooks and audiobooks are all-inclusive, so there is stimulating content available for everyone."

The O/H SLS is an organization of 22 school districts and four nonpublic schools in the OHM BOCES region that provide library coordination and services to member libraries under a plan of service approved by the Commissioner of Education. The O/H SLS promotes and facilitates equitable access to information through coordinated resource sharing, and leads the investigation and introduction of effective technologies to member libraries.

The Oneida-Herkimer-Madison BOCES serves the following school districts: Brookfield, Clinton, Holland Patent, New Hartford, New York Mills, Oriskany, Remsen, Sauquoit Valley, Utica, Waterville, Westmoreland and Whitesboro.

###