

# CaSS Makes a Difference!

**We're proud to share feedback from our CaSS families.**

*"The CaSS Program offered a safe, supportive environment allowing space to not only accomplish academic goals but additionally to foster the freedom to explore individual gifts and talents. My child has gained confidence in navigating life."*

*"Through the most challenging years of my son's adolescence, it was wonderful to have a place where he felt safe, and people who he trusted to think through and process his feelings and stressors. The kind, supportive staff of CaSS was a great team to work with. As parents, we were kept informed of his progress. Our son fondly thinks back to his years in CaSS and he knows he is well prepared for his future."*



# CaSS Program Student Profile

The Communication and Social Skills Program (CaSS) is designed to meet the needs of students who have the diagnosis of, or demonstrate characteristics consistent with, Asperger's Syndrome.

## **The many students we serve are in grades 6-12 and may:**

- Have near average or advanced intelligence with some variation in academic achievement.
- Struggle with a limited understanding of social situations.
- Find making and keeping friends difficult.
- Be most comfortable with routines or in predictable environments.
- Experience difficulties with organization.
- Focus on an area of high interest that could pervade many aspects of life.
- Have a very concrete or literal view of the world.
- Exhibit atypical speech patterns.

### **Contact Information:**

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# Communication and Social Skills Program (CaSS)



# About the CaSS Program

The goal of the Communication and Social Skills Program (CaSS) is to help students in grades 6-12 who demonstrate characteristics of Asperger's Syndrome work toward attainment of their full potential. Our mission is to honor the unique individuality of each student. We seek to assist in her/his self-construction via a responsive environment, with the student as the "teacher" and the adult as the student's "guide and advocate" to ensure IEP implementation.



Responding to a dearth of programmatic options for adolescents struggling with the challenges of Asperger's Syndrome within traditional educational settings, Dr. John Erhart and BOCES 2 Administration co-created the CaSS Program. This collaboration yielded the CaSS curriculum, a credit-bearing course with the major focus of increasing social-communication skills. Our ultimate goal is to increase options for students upon transition to the adult world.

The CaSS Program is included on the statewide clearinghouse for Effective Practices in Special Education, serving as a model for schools and districts across New York State. The program was recognized as an "Effective Practices Site" by The NYS Education Department, and has been replicated by other state schools and agencies.

# Benefits and Educational Approach

## *The CaSS Program offers our students unique benefits, including:*

- An experienced, multi-disciplinary team made up of special education teachers, mental health workers, speech/language staff, assistive technology staff, occupational therapists, autism specialists and our consulting psychiatrist.
- An individualized, small group learning environment with opportunities for mainstreaming in areas of ability and high interest.
- Specially-designed instruction that ensures access to the general curriculum through modifications, so that students can meet the same academic standards and make progress toward meeting their IEP goals and objectives.
- A deep sense of community and understanding enhanced by regular, social skills learning opportunities.
- A strong family component with family counseling and ongoing parent meetings, parent support and respect for family priorities.
- Time spent on independent living skills, such as cooking and sharing meals, hygiene and preparation for employment and career.
- Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist John F. Erhart, M.D. is the psychiatric consultant to Monroe 2–Orleans BOCES. Dr. Erhart, in conjunction with the program supervisor, visits classrooms on a regular basis to work with staff, students and families.
- The increased hope and positive changes that the program brings into students' lives. Students feel heard and encouraged to learn in ways they have never experienced before, achieving academic success and acquiring friends.

The CaSS approach is an aid to life that focuses on the development of social and communication skills, integrating the use of Structured Teaching and Montessori philosophy and methodology.

## *The program includes, but is not limited to:*

- Adherence to rigorous NYS Next Generation Learning Standards
- Extensive use of visual strategies
- Online learning options for self-directed special interest courses
- Interactive math materials
- Individually-based instruction
- Organizational skill focus
- Strength-based practices
- Respect-based philosophy
- Focus on student interests.

