Everybody counts.
Everybody learns.

2021-22
Dear Schenectady Community,

We are pleased and excited to share the 2021-2022 edition of the Spotlight on Schenectady. This has been an exciting year filled with challenges, change, excitement, passion, partnership, promise and growth. We have taken many steps forward and have begun laying the groundwork for what we expect will be an exciting and innovative future.

It was just one year ago in July when I arrived in Schenectady to serve as your Superintendent. At the time, I was aware of the challenges and many uncertainties that still existed as we began to prepare for the opening of a new school year amidst an ongoing pandemic. My first goal and commitment to our school community was that all students return to full in-person learning five days a week. We did it. I am pleased and proud that all our schools were open from the first day through the last day of the school year. It was not always easy but because of the dedication, flexibility, care, and commitment of all of you, we made it work.

I am proud of the Schenectady High School Class of 2022. It has been a challenging couple of years as most of our seniors had not been on campus since March of their sophomore year. The graduating class, which included 589 students, is one of the largest classes we have had in recent years. Our students worked hard and were persistent. Their parents were supportive and our faculty and staff would not let them fail. You can read more about them on the following pages.

Last summer, I shared how we would change our district’s organizational structure and move forward with increased accountability, focus on improving the culture, a promise of transparency, commitment to equity, leadership support, and with a team that is dedicated to ensuring that our change initiatives are successful. I was pleased to assemble an experienced and diverse leadership team that is committed to work that supports the goals of our strategic plan and success of our students.

In November, the board of education reinstated its commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) with the unanimous approval of the district’s first ever DEI Policy. The policy is aligned with the district’s strategic plan, vision, and core values. It serves to advance our work through a constant DEI lens so that all students can reach their highest potential. You will see throughout the Spotlight how this is reflected in all that we do. #SchenEQUITY

As you flip through the pages, you will also read about the many initiatives that were launched including the recommitment and expansion of My Brother’s Keeper, the kick-off of our community schools initiative, and our secondary school redesign with the inaugural phase of “City as Our Campus” with our partners at Proctors and SUNY Schenectady. This will be launched with the start of the upcoming school year.

Engagement and communication with all stakeholders remain priorities. At the end of the school year, we launched a new website and our district’s first ever mobile app. In addition to offering a tool that is one touch for “everything Schenectady in your pocket,” it improves accessibility with easy translation options and features for those who have disabilities. If you haven’t downloaded our app yet, please do so by scanning the QR code on the next page.

On July 23, 2021, I published and delivered my first Superintendent’s Brief. This weekly communication would become my means of sharing important information, updates, and news with our school community. The brief was sent out and posted every Friday throughout the school year. I am pleased to share that my Superintendent’s Brief was recognized with an “Award of Excellence” from the National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA). My commitment to accessible, timely and ongoing communication will continue.

Upon arriving in Schenectady, it did not take me long to realize what a special community Schenectady is. I wish to thank all our community partners who have availed themselves to support our efforts and work. I am overwhelmed by the outpouring of interest, care and support of our district and I do appreciate you.

Thank you for reading our Spotlight. I hope you enjoy. We always welcome questions and feedback at any time through our Let’s Talk application, which is always available on our website.

Never forget, we are a team and all in this work together. #SchenectadyRising

We look forward to seeing you soon.

Sincerely,

Anibal Soler, Jr.
Superintendent of Schools
NEW MOBILE APP AND WEBSITE
It’s everything Schenectady Schools, in your pocket.

In June, our brand-new website and mobile app launched. Our web address has changed to www.schenectadyschools.org and the mobile app can be downloaded from Apple or Google Play. Simply search for “Schenectady Schools” and you have everything Schenectady Schools in your pocket. You can access documents, events, news, menus, athletic schedules, district, and school updates as well as receive alerts and push notifications. Both the website and app provide easy translation of dozens of languages and are ADA compliant, which means users who are blind, deaf, and those who must navigate by voice, screen readers or other assistive technologies are able to access all our content.

Our intention with the mobile app is to provide accessibility and increase engagement with our school community. We know most families use their phones as primary means of communication. The custom-built app will help families stay up to date with school announcements and events, important notifications, and provides easy access to needed contact information quickly.

Scan the QR code to download The Schenectady Schools app.

About us and Our schools

The Schenectady City School District serves nearly 10,000 students in grades pre-K through 12, making it one of the largest school districts in the Capital Region.

Our incredibly diverse population of students speak more than 30 different languages. Our schools, filled with culture and richness, foster awareness and acceptance. Students not only learn to value and respect people of all races, backgrounds and cultures, they appreciate the differences and are prepared to be citizens in a multicultural world.

The district is comprised of 11 elementary schools (pre-K through fifth grade), three middle schools (grades 6-8) a high school (grades 9-12), a career and leadership academy and an adult education center. In 2022-23, our high school will include satellite campuses at Proctors and SUNY Schenectady. The neighborhood school that a student attends is based on residence.
Class of 2022 Graduation

» Charlie Barnett Co-Valedictorian, Class of 2022
If you can look at your life with the mindset that every obstacle is a chance to grow rather than something that will hold you back, when you find success it’ll be all the more real. This has been especially significant over these past few years which have been in a constant state of uncertainty and difficulty but the very fact that it has been so challenging makes our success today mean so much more. Success, like failure, is only what you make of it. A day like today allows us to reflect on how our failures over the past four years have shaped our growth into the people we are today. So, wherever your lives are going, whether it’s to college, a job or elsewhere I hope that you remember everything you went through to reach this point and I hope that you face your future with the same determination to keep growing one step at a time.”

» Tania Akter (Co-Valedictorian), Class of 2022
“This achievement of yours should be the thing you remember the most because of how hard you all worked to get here. You should remember the excitement you are feeling right now, the feelings of accomplishment of these 12 years of education. You should recall your high school memories and experiences and the lessons you have learned. Remember the hardships and struggles you’ve faced and how you overcame them. Remember the people who truly loved and supported you. Remember the time when you were at your lowest and still did not give up, no matter how impossible reaching the finish line seemed. You made it!”

» The district unveiled its new video scoreboard to the families and students in attendance at the commencement ceremony. The scoreboard was installed just days before graduation.
Smart Transfer

Graduates

21 Schenectady seniors earn college degrees while in high school

Schenectady Smart Transfer Early College High School is a grant-funded program which allows high school students to pursue and obtain associate’s degrees while earning their high school diplomas.

This group of students is the second group of seniors to graduate from SUNY Schenectady as part of the Smart Transfer Early College High School Program and will have the opportunity to automatically transfer to a 4-year institution to complete their bachelor’s degrees.

Funded by New York State Education Department, Smart Transfer is a partnership between SUNY Schenectady, University at Albany, SUNY Delhi and Schenectady High School. Students apply and are accepted in 8th grade after undergoing a multi-stage application process and then participating in a rigorous 6-week summer program at SUNY Schenectady.

Smart Transfer is modeled after the existing Early College High Schools in the country, but is new for the Schenectady community and in the Capital Region.

Smart Transfer Students will spend their first two years of high school full-time at SHS and their junior and senior years primarily at SUNY Schenectady.

CLASS OF 2022

589 GRADUATES

79.2% Projected Graduation Rate

1. Co-Valedictorian, Charlie Barnett,
2. Co-Valedictorian, Tania Akter
3. Emma Lindenfelser
4. Emma Chank
5. Jasmine Sardos
6. Lydia Ragubir
7. Elizabeth Petta
8. ZuZu Guilfoyle
9. Leah Russo
10. Ravenna Ganpat

A national award-winning district
Schenectady City School District
On Tuesday, March 8, the Schenectady High School Class of 2022 was brought together in the auditorium to hear the surprise announcement that every one of them had been granted early instant admission to SUNY Schenectady in the fall. Approximately 400 students were presented with acceptance letters and next steps to begin planning for their future.

This commitment between our district and SUNY Schenectady, called the “Schenectady Promise,” ensures that every one of our graduating seniors has access and the opportunity to attend college including those who, prior to this, may not have considered college as an option.

“As of this day, the question asked by many of our high school seniors changed from, “can I get into college,” to “what do I want to study in college?”

Superintendent Soler

Removing the barrier of access supports the district’s work around equity.

The district is extremely grateful to Dr. Steady Moono, President of SUNY Schenectady, and his team at the college, for their continued partnership in education and for this incredible pathway and opportunity that was made available to our students.

To watch a video of “The Schenectady Promise”, visit the district’s YouTube channel.

Holi added to district calendar

Schenectady becomes first district in New York State to recognize holiday

The Schenectady Board of Education in March voted unanimously to recognize Holi as an official school holiday, capping off a yearslong effort to have one of the most sacred holidays of the Hindu faith recognized.

Members of the Schenectady Hindu community were in attendance as the board voted 7-0 approving a calendar for the 2022-23 academic year that officially recognizes Holi as a school holiday.

The Schenectady City School District is believed to be the first district in New York State to recognize the holiday, according to Superintendent Anibal Soler Jr.

“It is a historic day for the Schenectady residents who are part of the Guyanese and Hindu communities,” he said.

Recognizing the holiday aligns with the district’s diversity, equity and inclusion policy, which was also approved by the board. The district plans to examine the possibility of recognizing other religious holidays like Ramadan in the future.
My Brother’s Keeper
City and District accept the MBK Challenge

In February, the district hosted an exciting event in which Mayor McCarthy, members of city council and the community, New York State’s Assistant Commissioner of Education, board members, faculty, and staff from our schools, and more than 40 students came together to announce our commitment to the My Brother’s Keeper (MBK) initiative along with a call to action to the greater community.

The focus is on building a community in which everyone plays role in the success of our students and in the work to close the opportunity gap for our students of color. As part of the presentation, Schenectady High School Seniors Nate Dale and Trey Tillman spoke about the MBK program and how it has impacted them over the last four years. They spoke from their hearts and were what many described as, “inspirational.”

As a district, we are taking steps to become an official “MBK Community” and are calling on representatives from all corners of our community to join us in these efforts.

Watch the full presentation and an abbreviated video compilation of the speakers on the district’s YouTube page.

New York State MBK Challenge Milestones:
- Ensuring equitable access to high quality schools and programs
- Expanding prevention, early warning and intervention services
- Using differentiated approaches based on need and culture
- Responding to structural and institutional racism
- Making comprehensive and coordinated support services widely available
- Engaging families and communities in a trusted and respectful way

A CALL TO ACTION
“...In a country as prosperous and dynamic as ours, we all have an obligation to lift up communities that have consistently had the odds stacked against them. It is an ambitious call to action; to make sure that every boy and young man of color in this country has the opportunity to achieve their dreams…” Former President Barack Obama
Late in the 2021-22 school year the district launched a “City as Our Campus” initiative. The event was held in downtown Schenectady, outside of Proctors, which will be one of the two new Schenectady High School Leadership Communities being launched in the fall. The other is SUNY Schenectady’s Center City campus on the opposite side of State St.

Christopher Chank has been selected to serve as the cohort principal for early college high school, and as a member of the secondary school redesign committee, expressed excitement about this work and opportunity.

“With the city as our campus and working as partners with the community, we are opening doors and providing educational adventures, new opportunities, and exciting pathways for our students to learn, engage and enjoy. This is just the beginning. It’s the springboard for what opportunity, access, equity, and education will look like in Schenectady.”
Community Schools in Schenectady

“What is a Community School and what does it look like in Schenectady?”

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS ARE PUBLIC SCHOOLS THAT PROVIDE SERVICES AND SUPPORT THAT FIT EACH NEIGHBORHOOD’S NEEDS, CREATED AND RUN BY THE PEOPLE WHO KNOW OUR COMMUNITIES.

In June, more than 80 Schenectady community organizations and agencies came together at Liberty Church to learn about community schools, and how they can partner with the district in this work. Leaders from many different sectors and corners of the community showed interest and commitment to partnering with us to build community schools.

A collaborative community-wide approach serves to remove barriers and provides accessibility to resources and supports that our students and families need from health, food, clothing, well-being and childcare to transportation, social service and legal support. In order to transform the education system so that all students are successful, we can’t work in isolation. These community conversations were the first steps toward building school communities that will help our students, families and the community thrive. The district formed an advisory council, including members from throughout the community who will design the approach and roadmap moving forward with an eye on having some community school supports in place for the new school year.

To learn more about community schools and what they could look like in Schenectady, visit the district’s YouTube page and what our video titled, “Schenectady Community Schools”

WANTED: COMMUNITY PARTNERS

“The one place every family, regardless of their language, regardless of their background, knows how to get to is school…and so our concept is how do we continue to make the school the central point for families, parents, students, and the community as a whole?” - Superintendent Aníbal Soler, Jr.
Everybody counts. Everybody learns.

OSAR Wins Grant

Student club wins $25k grant from State Farm, beating out national organizations and corporations.

In late September, the Oneida Middle School OSAR (Oneida Students Against Racism) Club learned that they were one of the winners of a $25,000 grant from State Farm Neighborhood Assist. This win was quite an accomplishment as OSAR was up against large organizations and corporations from across the country.

Thank you to all community members who voted for the OSAR club. The district would also like to recognize Yacouba Sangare, the OSAR team of advisors and the many students in the club who are committed to promoting anti-racism. The club used the funding to visit Washington, D.C. and to attend an anti-racism book festival.

They also plan to visit the National Museum of African American History and Culture and are interested in launching other activities.

OSAR students also worked on a campaign to raise the Black Lives Matter and Pride flags outside of Oneida Middle School, which included a presentation to the Board of Education.

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SCSD Educational Foundation

During the 2021-22 school year, the SCSD Educational Foundation awarded 38 grants, totaling $40,000 to Schenectady teachers. Since 2006, the Foundation has awarded nearly $400,000 in funding. The foundation’s annual celebration returned in 2022 after being cancelled in 2020 and 2021.

2021 SCSD NBCT

» Rebecca Benjamin
» Jessica Kohout
» Ellen Lin
» Julie Neugebauer

Carrie White was selected as the 2021 SCSD Teacher of the Year. Superintendent Soler, board members and district administrators joined Mrs. White’s family in surprising her with the honor in front of her class at Yates Elementary.

The Schenectady City School District named Carrie White a second grade teacher at Yates Elementary School the 2021 Teacher of the Year. White, in her 14th year as a teacher in the district, received 19 letters of support, including several from former students currently enrolled in college.

One former student, Juliana Mastan, now a sophomore in college, described White’s classroom as a safe haven, adding White continually checked in on her throughout her academic career.

"Mrs. White’s classroom was someplace where I felt safe and supported," she said in a statement. In seventh grade she emailed my 8th grade teacher to reach me, letting me know she was thinking about me.

Watch the surprise presentation of the award in Mrs. White’s classroom on our YouTube Channel.

NATIONAL BOARD CERTIFIED TEACHERS

Four SCSD teachers earned National Board Certification in 2021. NBCT is the most respected certification available in education.

Over the years, 77 Schenectady educators have earned the NB certification. This is the second highest number in NY state, with the exception of NYC.

Rebecca Benjamin
Jessica Kohout
Ellen Lin
Julie Neugebauer

YouTube Channel: Schenectady City School District

2021 SCSD NBCT
District Launches eSports

Can you really get a college scholarship for playing video games?

In March, Schenectady High School opened the brand new eSports room. The eSports program was created just before the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic and members met virtually during 2020 and 2021.

The club was born after high school cohort principal, David Preston, and high school librarian, Andrew Yauchler, visited Gaming Insomniacs, a competitive eSports league in downtown Schenectady and saw how engaged the young competitors were.

The district hosted members from the Capital Region Chamber of Commerce for a ribbon cutting ceremony unveiling the new eSports room. The room was completed in partnership with Capital Region BOCES. The eSports Club presents an exciting opportunity for all students to participate, compete and watch eSports competitions.

More than 100 students signed up to participate in the eSports club during the school year.

The growth of eSports in our region has provided college scholarship opportunities to a number of students and the popularity continues to grow.

Summer Youth Employment

Seventy-five students were selected for a summer employment program through a partnership with the City of Schenectady and the Schenectady City School District.

The city used $300,000 in American Rescue Plan Act funding to create the summer youth job program that will bolster career and learning opportunities for those who participated.

Carlos Cotto, the district’s assistant superintendent of innovation, equity and engagement, said students interested in participating in the program were placed with positions through Schenectady County Connects and offered part-time jobs throughout the summer, based on student interests.

For All

Class of 2022 Job Fair

The SHS School Counseling Office hosted a Graduating Seniors Job Fair on June 8th at SHS.

Area employers met with graduating seniors to share information on job openings, with some being interviewed and hired on the spot.

The fair was targeted toward seniors looking for direct entry into the workforce. Among the businesses that participated were UPS, Price Chopper/Market 32, Kingsway Community, Spectrum Mobile and more!

Opportunity for All

On Thursday, June 2, graduates of Washington Irving Education Center’s GED program walked across the SHS stage to receive their diploma. This year’s class included 37 graduates and was the first time the ceremony was held since 2019.
District hosts first Unified Sports Day

On Tuesday, June 21, the district partnered with the Special Olympics for our first ever Unified Sports Day.

Students in grades K-5 from our elementary schools were invited for a day of fun and inclusive events on the turf at Schenectady High School.

Many staff, coaches, and volunteers worked to make the event happen and brought big smiles to our student athletes’ faces.

Niomi Rogers

» Set a new SHS record in the Pentathlon during the Suburban Council Championships
» One of 13 ribbon and 10 Sectional patch winners at Section 2 track and field championships
» Received the Goosehill Neighborhood Association Youth Good Neighbor Award

Devauhn Miller

» Scholar-Athlete award winner from the Capital District Chapter of the National Football Foundation and Hall of Fame
» Friends of Schenectady Patriots Male Scholar Athlete of the Year
» Jazz Ensemble award recipient

4x200 relay team qualified for States and Nationals after winning the Section 2 championship: Pictured left to right; Deron Davis, Jelani Wells, Che Samuel & Dior Roberts

The Class of 2022 organized a Staff Vs Students Basketball Game that was held the final day of school before winter break. The students predicted a win for their team in a pregame interview, but it was the staff who won. Watch the highlights on our YouTube channel.
The Schenectady City School District has been awarded a $100,000 Farm to School Implementation Grant from the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA). The funding will be used to continue expansion of the district’s Farm to School Program, including training food service staff, providing additional education in classrooms and cafeterias, increasing the volume and variety of local specialty crops such as fruits, vegetables, herbs and grains used in school lunches, providing hands-on curriculum tied to core subject areas, and expanding and improving school gardens and related programming.

The district is grateful to the many community partners who continue to support the district’s Farm to School Programming, including SiCM Urban Farms, Cornell Cooperative Extension, and the Schenectady County Farm Bureau.

Second Step
Social Emotional Learning program teaches K-5 students confidence and goal setting.

Elementary classrooms around the district participated in weekly lessons around empathy, compassion, and social-emotional well-being during the 2021-22 school year. The lessons were part of a new curriculum called “Second Step.”

The program provides teachers an easy-to-implement, engaging way to teach social-emotional skills and concepts. Second Step programs are designed to help children thrive and be more successful in school—ultimately setting them up to be thoughtful and productive adults.
SEP at a GLANCE

- **11 SITES**
- **20 Days**
- **360 Total staff**
- **1,492 Students** (pre-K through 12)
- **100 Teachers**
- **111 Para-professionals**
- **26 Social workers/counselors**
- **16 Nurses**
- **120 Hours of Programming**

2022 PROJECT-BASED LEARNING

- **FIRST GRADE:** Read, stretch & write
- **SECOND GRADE:** Engineering with MiSci
- **THIRD GRADE:** Farming at Mabee Farms
- **FOURTH GRADE:** Optical illusions
- **GRADES 5-8:** Crime lab investigation
- **HIGH SCHOOL:** Athletic camps

Summer Enrichment Program reaches record enrollment numbers

SEP answers age-old question:
“**What are my kids going to do over the summer?**”

SUMMER SCHOOL HAS NEVER BEEN MORE POPULAR THAN IT WAS THIS SUMMER.

More than 1,600 applications poured in for the Schenectady City School District’s Summer Enrichment Program (SEP).

In its fifth year, the four-week program expanded from eight sites to ten, with extended school day opportunities at the high school.

Students in the program focused on a mixture of academics, social-emotional learning and relationship building. The program blends computer-based math and literacy with activities such as swim lessons, tennis lessons, author visits, and STEAM projects.

“To see the kids laughing and learning just a few weeks after the regular school year ends makes it all worthwhile,” program director Simone Miranda said.

Organizers focused on grade-specific project-based learning, and involved as many community partners as possible. The partnerships include visits from MiSci, local children’s book authors, poets, and farmers.

“We feel these lessons are very valuable for students to help make them confident learners,” Miranda said about the lessons during the Summer Enrichment Program, “It’s hands-on and relevant.”

The program is designed to help combat summer slide, which is when students lose academic gains made during the previous school year. Another goal is to provide students a safe, fun, and educational environment for part of their summer.

New this year were a number of athletic camps held at Schenectady High School and run by coaches and student athletes. More than 50 students participated in the camps each week, with the goal of exposing younger students to a number of sports before they reach middle school and have a chance to play at the modified level.

At the end of the 2021-22 school year, our partners at MiSci gifted a summer family pass to every elementary student and their family. MiSci also provided in-classroom lessons during our Summer Enrichment Program.
School Climate and Safety

The Office of School Climate and Safety established in 2021-2022, is led by Director Jeff Russo, and is responsible for the safe operation of district schools and serves as a liaison with the Schenectady Police Department, Schenectady Fire Department, and other community safety resources and agencies. A network of safety team members has been established with a presence in each district school. In 2021-2022, the district also launched a pilot program with the Schenectady Police Department which brought two Community Engagement Officers (CEO) into Schenectady High School for part of the year. The safety team and the CEO pilot program are both set to expand.

2021-22 Tax Levy

The SCSD continued its commitment to providing taxpayer relief in 2021-22. The tax levy remained flat for the third consecutive year, and remains at its lowest level since the 2008-09 school year.

The budget assured all programs and services returned to pre-pandemic levels and included a full return to in-person learning.

LET’S TALK!

The Schenectady City School District is dedicated to fostering positive relationships, building trust and effectively communicating and engaging with our parents, staff, students and community members. In order to do this, we always maintain an open line of communication and hear what you have to say about important topics and current initiatives. We are listening.

Let’s Talk! provides you with an opportunity to share what’s on your mind anytime, from anywhere. We are here to listen 24/7 and will respond to your questions, comments and concerns. There is a team behind each specific topic ready to assist you. You can now text Let’s Talk at 518-900-7318 or find the Let’s Talk tab on the right side of our website.
The Class of 2022 held a Field Day before Memorial Day weekend. Students took turns dunking their cohort principals in a dunk tank.