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# SCHODACK

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



DECEMBER 2015

## Capital Project Plans Focus on Student Learning

Educators are excited about the final design plans for the district's Capital Project which will transform the 60-year-old High School building into a 21st century school that meets the educational needs of students and faculty.

"Since our community approved the Capital Project vote, we've had dozens of meetings with faculty, staff and students," said Superintendent Bob Horan. "We've had great conversations about how we can best deliver instruction to our students. Our architects used those discussions to design an exciting vision for our school that stays within the budget our community approved."

The project is still on schedule to be completed by fall 2017. However, the timeline depends on a State Education Department (SED) review. Currently, it can take nearly a year for the department to approve school capital projects due to staffing cutbacks.

"Renovating a school isn't like renovating a house," explained Mr. Horan. "We have to wait for SED to review our design plans. But we submitted our plans on time and we consult with SED regularly so we should be on track for the 2017-18 school year."

### Renovations Focused on Improving Learning and Security

Much of the Capital Project renovations will occur at the High School building, which will educate students in grades 7-12 when the project is completed. Middle and High School students will largely be on separate floors to create distinct learning communities but with opportunities for younger students to have more accelerated options.

Discussions with faculty and staff over the past year brought out creative ideas for classrooms that are flexible to allow for different types of teaching, such as small or large group instruction and more use of technology. Modernizing 60-year-old sci-

ence classrooms is a key focus of the Capital Project to ensure facilities match the quality of the science program that Maple Hill teachers offer.

Art and music programs will also have improved instruction areas in their own wing. Teachers provided much input on the design of the classrooms, including visits to colleges to explore room designs that would better facilitate music and art instruction.

Discussions with students also guided the project, including not only classroom design but areas where students are comfortable to gather together.

"It was really important for us to talk to our students about where and how they like to learn," said Mr. Horan. "Too often school districts design schools around how adults like to learn and forget to ask students how they like to learn."

A new building entrance at the middle of the school will also transform the exterior of the building while improving security. The building design includes much more use of glass to provide bright learning areas that show the learning that occurs in classrooms.

"We want a learning environment that is bright and inviting for our students and staff," explained Mr. Horan. "Instead of traditional school designs that featured a lot of concrete walls, our building will look more like modern colleges or businesses."

Castleton Elementary School will also see some improvements, although far less given the extensive renovations completed in 2009 as part of the last Capital Project.

A new entrance will improve building security and a science lab will help support science instruction for K-6. Other classroom space in the original school building will also be renovated for art and music instruction. To see more photos of the Capital Project, visit [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us).



# Wireless Devices Bring Technology to the Classroom

The days of students walking to a computer lab are becoming a thing of the past as wireless devices increasingly put technology in the hands of students in their classrooms.

From kindergarten to grade 12, Schodack CSD students regularly use tablets, laptops, Chromebooks and other devices to research topics, collaborate together and stay engaged in their classes.

“If we’re going to prepare our students for 21st century careers, it’s essential they’re fluent using technology,” explained Superintendent Bob Horan. “It’s the world we live in. Our teachers do an outstanding job using technology to engage students and make learning fun.”

While technology can be expensive, Schodack CSD employs numerous strategies to lower the cost.

Jim Yox, the district’s Computer Network Manager, explained the district has largely stopped purchasing desktop computers and instead uses the funding to buy laptops, tablets and other wireless devices that are often cheaper. All three schools now have wireless access so students can use the devices in their classrooms.

The district also takes advantage of grants and school aid targeted for technology whenever possible. For example, Mr. Yox and Computer Network Administrator Matthew Purificato

installed 30 Chromebooks in the Castleton Elementary School library last summer by using federal Race to the Top funds to help buy the devices.

At Maple Hill Middle School, a state competitive grant the district applied for paid for 40 Chromebooks with mobile internet. The devices are available for students to take home when they do not otherwise have internet access at home.

“We’ve been piloting Chromebooks with our students because they’re cheaper and you can log in in less than 30 seconds, so you’re gaining instruction time,” said Mr. Yox. “But we need to evaluate if they meet the needs of our students. We’ll be interviewing students to see how they like them and make sure the devices are working for them.”

By partnering with local businesses and colleges, the district also has received tablets, 3D printers, electronic textbooks and other technology for free or at a reduced cost.

Even outdated computers are put to good use by allowing the Middle School’s Computer Club to take them apart and put them back together as they learn how the machines work and how to fix them.

“With the Capital Project and the Smart Schools Bond Act, we need a plan for technology so we invest wisely,” said Mr. Yox.

## Flipped Learning Provides More Time with Teacher

Technology is helping math teacher Amy Hirschhoff spend more time working with her fourth grade students.

Using a teaching method called “flipped learning,” Mrs. Hirschhoff creates short videos for students to watch at home. The videos teach students math concepts which they can practice the next day in class.

“The feedback has been extremely positive. The students love it and it gives me more contact time in the classroom where we can practice the concept together,” said Mrs. Hirschhoff.

Videos are posted to Mrs. Hirschhoff’s website, where students can access any of the lessons she has recorded. If a student does not have internet access at home, videos can be placed on a USB flash drive to take home.



Not only do the videos provide students with more one-on-one time with their teacher, but they can be helpful if a student has difficulty with a math concept.

“When you’re in class, there’s no rewind button. But with a video, they can pause and rewind it to watch it again. They can really learn at their own pace. Students can work ahead and I let them. They take ownership of their learning. It’s also great if students are absent because they will not miss the teaching of any specific concept,” said Mrs. Hirschhoff.

Principal Jason Chevrier praised Mrs. Hirschhoff’s initiative to embrace a different type of teaching in order to spend more time working with her students.

“She is using technology to improve instruction and student learning. Students are able to watch the video at home and then have more time getting help from her in class,” said Mr. Chevrier. “Parents can also watch the videos if they want to learn how to help their children.”

A number of parents have told Mrs. Hirschhoff that they enjoy watching the videos with their children.

“It can create a lot of frustration at home when kids have to go home to practice a skill they haven’t independently mastered yet,” she said. “Parents want to help but sometimes don’t know how to. I like that parents can watch them too. The flipped lessons alleviate math homework tension at home.”

Mrs. Hirschhoff stressed that the flipped method does not work for every type of learner and some students will require additional one-on-one instruction. However, even if a student requires additional direct instruction, the videos are still a great way to introduce a concept to students.

“Homework math videos are a great means to introduce technology in a safe and age appropriate way for students,” she said. “Parents tell me their kids often get to their homework as soon as they get home. They’re excited to use the technology and they feel successful.”

# Chromebooks Create Educational Opportunities

When 8th graders had difficulty using triple beam scales for a lesson on calculating density, science teacher Maureen Carreau brought out a set of Chromebooks so students could practice with a virtual density testing lab.

As she walked around the classroom giving one-on-one help, students eagerly took to the devices to determine the volume, mass and weight of minerals while recording their results on a worksheet.

“The computer simulation allows students to practice over and over really quickly to gain experience,” explained Ms. Carreau. “There are so many skills they’re working on right now. Tomorrow, we’ll go back to the scales to try what they’ve learned.”

Every day, students in Maple Hill Middle School classrooms are using Chromebooks not just in science, but English, social studies and other content areas.

The devices, which resemble a laptop, use web-based software that makes them light and much less expensive than normal laptops. They also have long-lasting batteries that do not require charging as often.

“They’re used all day long. Students can take notes on them, write assignments, create spreadsheets, check out books from the library and collaborate together,” said Principal James Derby. “Students even vote for student council elections on them.”

The Google devices integrate well because each Maple Hill student receives a Google email address and account, with parent permission, when they enter 6th grade. As a result, students can log into any Chromebook with their account and have immediate access to all their work that is saved to cloud storage.

There also is no loss of instruction time waiting for the devices to boot up. Within seconds of turning them on, students can use them and access their accounts.

“We got rid of a computer lab last year because the students can use Chromebooks in their classroom,” said Mr. Derby. “The High School also uses them so when our students get there, they will be used to the technology.”



## BOE Approves Veterans Property Tax Exemption

Veterans in the district are eligible for a new partial property tax exemption next year after the Board of Education approved a resolution authorizing the exemption at its September 17 meeting.

New York State already provides veterans with a partial property tax exemption for county, town and village taxes. But the state allows school districts to decide whether to provide a similar exemption for school taxes.

At its meeting, the Schodack CSD Board of Education approved the Alternate Veterans’ Exemption at the state’s basic maximum level.

“The Board was pleased to be able to provide this concrete way to thank our veterans, young and old, for their past and continuing sacrifice for our country,” said Board President Michael Hiser.

For more information about the exemption, please visit [www.tax.ny.gov](http://www.tax.ny.gov) or contact the town assessor’s office.

## Art Department Creates Facebook Page

Want to see the outstanding artwork our students create every day?

Check out the Art Department’s new Schodack Art K-12 Facebook page where teachers Janel Gregoire and Suzanne Pazienza share photos of what students are working on in art class. A link is available on the district website, [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us).



Schodack CSD continues to expand its use of social media to share the great things going on in our schools with our community.

The district’s Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/SchodackCSD](http://www.facebook.com/SchodackCSD), now has nearly 1,000 followers. The district’s Twitter page, [www.twitter.com/SchodackCSD](http://www.twitter.com/SchodackCSD), has almost 650 followers.

In addition, each school has its own Twitter account as well as the Athletics program, Superintendent Bob Horan, and many of our teachers and staff. For a full list of Schodack CSD’s social media sites, visit [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us).

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# Networked Calculators Help Engage Math Students

A new generation of scientific calculators is not only helping Maple Hill High School students solve complex math equations but creating more engaged learning opportunities.

When teacher Bridget DeBardelaben, for example, gives her class a geometry problem to solve, students are eager to use the networked calculators to share their answers through a poll question she creates on her smart board at the front of the class.

“The calculators allow me to see who has answered the question and who is working on the problem so I can walk around the room and see who needs help,” explained Ms. DeBardelaben. “Students like seeing their answers on the smart board and see who can answer it first. They really like the technology and it helps keep them engaged.”

The calculators, which have increased computing power as well as a screen like a smartphone, use wireless internet to connect the class together. That allows teachers to use the devices in ways beyond traditional scientific calculators.

“Many students don’t want to raise their hand if they got the answer wrong. The calculators allow our teachers to know who got it wrong without singling a student out,” said Principal Ron Agostinoni. “It’s a way to engage our students at a higher level. It meets them where they are. They’re used to interacting digitally.”

Whether a student struggles with math or excels in the subject, the calculators allow teachers to use the devices differently to engage all students. In addition to poll questions, homework assignments can be sent to students who can save their work using the calculator. The devices have also proven to be great for test preparation.

“I use them differently for each class. They allow students to work at their own pace,” said Ms. DeBardelaben. “I can even let students come up to the board and teach. It allows them to



be more creative. It’s fun to see students who might not be the first to raise their hand help others learn.”

Many students purchase their own calculators. Others pick up the devices that the district provides as soon as they walk into class. Mr. Agostinoni admitted he was a little dubious when faculty first asked the district to purchase a class set of the calculators.

“My first question was ‘Will it help student achievement?’ When they showed me how it could help students learn, we were on board,” Mr. Agostinoni said. “It’s really a one-to-one teaching environment with calculators.”