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# SCHODACK

CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT



SEPTEMBER 2013

## Community Members Needed for Educational Summit

This school year, Schodack CSD will hold community engagement forums to help determine the scope of a potential Capital Project that would address building and facility infrastructure needs and academic improvements.

The community engagement efforts begin with an Educational Summit on Tuesday, Sept. 24 from 5:30 to 9:30 p.m. in the High School cafeteria. The format of this summit will allow for small group discussions so everyone will be able to express their ideas. Anyone interested in participating is encouraged to contact the District Office at 732-2297.

"We have some serious infrastructure needs we must address. Our water main in the High School basement and our leach field are both 59-years-old and the county has ordered us to get off well water," said Superintendent Bob Horan. "This Educational Summit will offer all our community stakeholders an opportunity to discuss the future of their schools."

The Educational Summit will be facilitated by educational planner Robert Hendricks, who has worked with hundreds of school districts over the past 30 years including Albany, Queensbury and Saratoga Springs. He will provide a structured process for participants to discuss the key issues that affect the district's strategic planning process.

Community forums will also be scheduled during the school year to provide additional community engagement opportunities.

"We want to hear from everyone in our community, whether they have children in our schools or not," said Mr. Horan. "We'll involve students, parents, senior citizens, teachers and any group interested in the future of their schools."

Mr. Horan noted that the community engagement efforts dovetail well with the merger study the district completed two years ago. The Educational Summit will continue discussions such as building conditions and what 21st century schools need to educate students.

"While a merger between Schodack and Ichabod Crane ultimately did not make sense for our communities, the Educational Summit will allow us to consider other options for the future of Schodack schools," Mr. Horan.

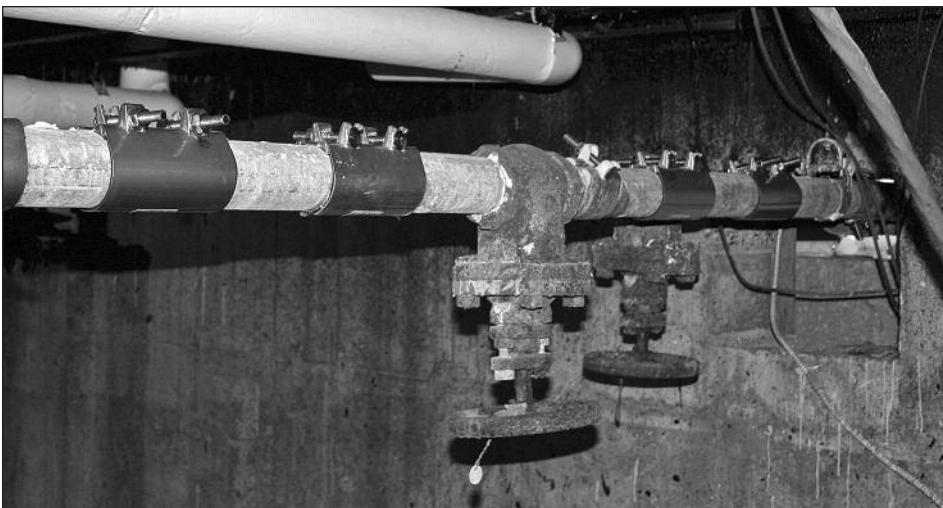
Last year, the district started looking at a possible Capital Project by forming a Facilities Committee. The committee examined infrastructure needs and classrooms to ensure they can deliver the Common Core Learning Standards. Several concerns were identified during the tours.

"We've been able to upgrade our facilities, like installing wireless internet in schools and energy efficiency lighting, at no cost to the district through state efficiency grants," said Mr.

Horan. "But we cannot do everything we need to do through grants alone. We need community support and the current state aid available to us."

The State Education Department is considering decreasing the level of aid it provides to schools for Capital Projects in the year future. Currently, the state reimburses the district for 76.6% of the cost for Capital Projects, with an additional 10% for anything safety or security related.

"If our community does support a Capital Project, it would likely cost us less now than it would in a few years," Mr. Horan said. The district is looking at the possibility of a Capital Project vote sometime in early 2014.



*A 59-year-old water main in the High School that needs replacing.*

### District Ranked #15 in Capital Region –

For the second year in a row, Schodack CSD was ranked 15th out of 88 Capital Region schools in the *Business Review's* annual school rankings issue.

Nearly all of the districts ranked higher than Schodack were much larger schools, making Schodack one of the highest

ranked small schools in the Capital Region. The rankings are based on NYS Education Department performance measures for language and reading; social studies; science; math; and graduation results. Schodack CSD was the third highest ranked district in the county, behind only much larger districts East Greenbush and Averill Park.

# Students Participate in Free Science Program at RPI

Thirteen Schodack students had an opportunity over the summer to work with Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute engineering students as part of a free program encouraging young women to explore careers in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM).

Working in RPI's labs and meeting spaces, Schodack students in grades 9-12 worked alongside students from Averill Park and Rensselaer CSDs on hands-on projects such as designing a mousetrap powered car while being mentored by female RPI students enrolled in engineering programs.

"I'm interested in architectural engineering and this is a good way to find out what engineering is about," said 10th grader Destiny Bruno. "The speakers have been great. They show you what options you have."

The week-long Engineering Institute for Young Women program was made available to Schodack students thanks to Superintendent Bob Horan's involvement with the Northeast Advanced Technology Education Center. NEATEC is led by Hudson Valley Community College and brings together



business, educators and government to help build a highly-skilled technical workforce to meet the employment needs of the region's growing technology center.

"One of NEATEC's goals is to help get young women interested in traditionally male dominated fields," explained Mr. Horan. "RPI ran a similar program last year for other schools so I approached them about offering it to our students and others in Rensselaer County."

The program was open to any interested female students who will be in Maple Hill High School this year. It was at no cost to students or the district

as NEATEC paid for the program, including bus transportation for students. Mr. Horan said the goal is to expand the program next year.

"This is just the beginning of the type of summer camps the district would like to offer to all our students, no matter what they're interested in," said Mr. Horan. "There are a lot of opportunities for students to help keep them engaged over the summer and be ready for the new school year."

# School Cafeterias Improved at No Cost to District

School cafeterias are receiving new equipment and improvements this year at no cost to the district thanks to funding received from a settlement between the parent company of Chartwells food services and New York State's Attorney General Office.

Last year, the state Attorney General announced a settlement with Compass Group USA after the company did not pass on rebates from vendors, manufacturers and distributors. As a result, Schodack CSD was one of dozens of schools to receive part of the settlement. Schodack received \$105,000.

"I want to stress that we could not use this money for anything except to improve our food services. The State Attorney General's Office was very specific about that," said Superintendent Bob Horan. "We decided the best way to use the money was to improve our facilities for students."

Each school will receive new point-of-sale terminals as well as new refrigerators for the Middle School and High School and



new cabinets and additional seats in the Elementary School.

The most immediate improvements are at Maple Hill High School, where the cafeteria was painted and updated with new seating areas, offering a more college-like environment. An area also will allow large group instruction as well as community use for events. The Middle School cafeteria will also see improvements later this year.

"Not only is it a better environment for our students to eat, but the seating makes the space more conducive to learning for study halls that are held there during the day," said Principal Ron Agostinoni.

Mr. Horan stressed that the settlement with Compass Group USA does not reflect the district's relationship with Chartwells.

"Chartwells' staff who provide meals to our students were not involved in this and have been outstanding to work with," said Mr. Horan. "They work with us and our students to provide excellent food options in our schools."

# Start-Up Businesses Provide Student Opportunities

In a basement corner of Maple Hill Middle School, a group of four entrepreneurs are excited about the future of their start-up company and the opportunity to work with Schodack students.

Brent Solina moved his MICROrganic Technologies company into the Middle School basement over the summer. Gym mats and old desks were moved out of storage to provide Mr. Solina a low-cost space to develop his business while offering Schodack teachers real world business and science projects for students to learn from.

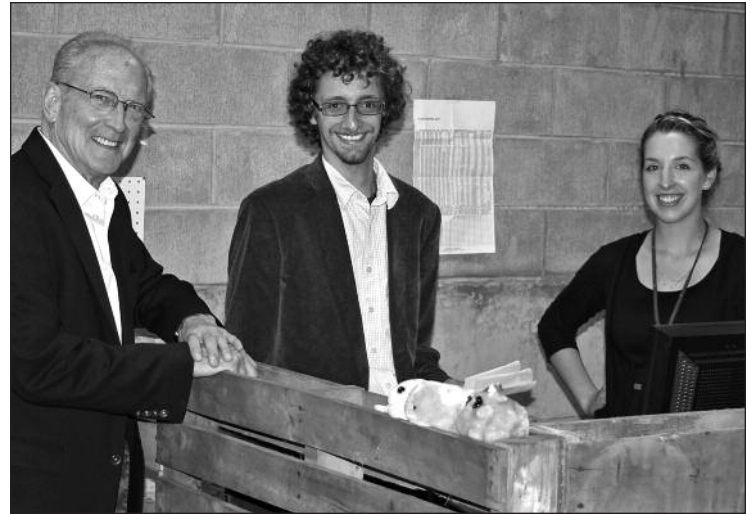
“Working with students is something we’re really interested in and being here allows us to work more closely with the school,” Mr. Solina said. “Schodack has something really special going on here and we’re excited to be a part of it.”

A graduate of Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, Mr. Solina created MICROrganic Technologies in 2010 to develop microbial fuel cell technology for industrial and municipal waste water treatment.

“It allows microorganisms to break down waste and create electrical current,” Mr. Solina explained. “Our bugs are able to break down waste more efficiently and create power. Our slogan is ‘Treatment today. Power tomorrow.’”

For the past two years, Mr. Solina has worked with Castleton-on-Hudson’s water treatment plant as well as students in Schodack schools to develop the fuel cell technology. Board of Education member George Warner approached Mr. Solina after a presentation he attended, introducing him to the village and the school.

Students in Maple Hill High School’s Principles of Engineering class have already worked with Mr. Solina over the past couple years. He said he’s impressed by how engaged students are, reading on their own and posing thoughtful questions and ideas.



“Students get this technology more than the adults do,” said Mr. Solina. “It’s a real life example where students can learn about something that’s not even in textbooks yet.”

Superintendent Bob Horan noted MICROrganic Technologies is just one of several start-up companies the district is in the process of locating in the Middle School basement to provide additional opportunities for students. While the process has taken months due to state regulations about businesses operating in schools, Mr. Horan said the efforts have been worth it.

“By leasing the space, we’re getting some additional revenue but the real benefit is for our students,” said Mr. Horan. “By working side-by-side with start-up companies, our students will have the opportunity to work on real business world projects. That will help them be better prepared for college and careers.”

## James Derby Named New MHMS Principal

James Derby, an educator formerly with the Taconic Hills Central School District, is the new principal of Maple Hill Middle School.

Mr. Derby was named principal in July. He replaces Michael Bennett, who now serves as Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction and Pupil Personnel Services. Mr. Bennett took over for Donna Watson, who left for a position with the Troy Enlarged City School District.

“I’m extremely excited to be a part of the Schodack Central School District and the community,” said Mr. Derby. “I look forward to meeting and working with students,



parents, faculty and staff and the entire community.”

Mr. Derby previously served as Assistant Principal at Taconic Hills Elementary School, where he oversaw a student body of approximately 700 students. He started his educational career as a High School Social Studies teacher at Chatham CSD. Mr. Derby

lives in the town of Schodack with his wife Christina and 3-year-old son Everett.

“We’re really excited to have him here. He has a lot of enthusiasm and excitement,” said Superintendent Bob Horan. “He will be perfect for our middle school and the excitement that’s going on there.”

Superintendent Horan noted that one of the benefits of the staffing change is the restructuring of administrative duties it allows. While serving as Middle School principal, Mr. Bennett also worked as the Committee for Special Education Chair for grades 7-12. Those duties often required Mr. Bennett to leave the Middle School for meetings.

Mr. Derby will not handle those additional duties. Instead, he will also serve as the chief information officer for the district, coordinating all the data reporting that the state requires. Those duties, Mr. Horan noted, will not pull Mr. Derby from the building.

“This will keep James in the building for students, parents and faculty,” said Mr. Horan. “His main focus will be where the Middle School is going.”

**Schodack Central School District**  
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### TAX RATE INCREASE LOWER THAN PROJECTED

Due to an increase in the town of Schodack's tax base, the tax rate increase for 2013-14 school tax bills is lower than originally projected.

While the 2013-14 school budget that voters approved in May required a 4.94% increase in the tax levy, the tax rate increase for town of Schodack residents will be 3.92%.

"The town's tax base increased due to new homes built within the Schodack district," explained Monica Kim, Director of Business and Support Services. "As a result the tax levy, or amount the district collects in taxes, was spread across more properties and lowered the tax rate increase for homeowners."

Ms. Kim noted the increase in the town's tax base is welcome news after it had decreased in three of the previous five years. The tax base decreases in previous years were largely the result of tax certiorari settlements between the town and Hannaford in 2011 and EPCOR Power in 2010.

For information about school taxes, visit [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us) for a Tax Q&A that answers common questions.

### Register for Continuing Education Classes

From yoga to zumba to creative writing, Schodack CSD is offering more than a dozen Continuing Education courses this fall. Two free finance and investment courses will also be offered on Social Security and Stocks, Bonds and Mutual Funds.

For a full course listing and registration forms, visit [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us), or call Continuing Education Coordinator Lisa Smith-Auer at 732-2124 ext. 1318.

Please note, the district's Continuing Education program is self-supporting and has no bearing on the District's tax rate.

### District Calendar Available Online

Schodack Central School District's 2013-14 school calendar is available on the school website, [www.schodack.k12.ny.us](http://www.schodack.k12.ny.us), in an easy to print format.

Please note, due to the district's efforts to cut costs, the calendar will again not be mailed to residents this year. We apologize for any inconvenience this may cause; however we feel this is a prudent cost-saving measure given the current cost of mailing and printing.

If you would like a calendar and do not have access to a computer, please stop by any one of Schodack schools' main offices to pick up one of a limited number of printed copies. You can also contact the District Office at 732-2297 if you need one mailed to you.

**Follow Schodack Schools on Twitter** – Schodack CSD has started three new Twitter accounts for the Middle School, High School and district as part of the school's continued efforts to improve communications with the community.

Twitter users can follow the district at: [www.twitter.com/SchodackCSD](http://www.twitter.com/SchodackCSD)

Maple Hill Middle School at [www.twitter.com/MapleHill\\_MS](http://www.twitter.com/MapleHill_MS)

Maple Hill High School at [www.twitter.com/MapleHill\\_HS](http://www.twitter.com/MapleHill_HS)

Maple Hill Athletics also has a Twitter account: [www.twitter.com/MH\\_Athletics](http://www.twitter.com/MH_Athletics)

The district is also continuing its Facebook page, [www.facebook.com/SchodackCSD](http://www.facebook.com/SchodackCSD), which currently has nearly 500 subscribers. Please note, all Twitter and Facebook accounts are at no cost to the district.

