

Strengthening Student Support & School Environment

This year, Schodack Central School District has put new initiatives and frameworks in place to strengthen its existing academic and emotional support systems for all students. These initiatives are Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (MTSS) in Schodack schools and the creation of a district Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) Committee. Both are an effort to bring all our students back together, keep them engaged in school and address their varied needs after a few very difficult years.

Overseeing these efforts in Schodack is the district's Director of Teaching and Learning, Alyssa Sabbatino. Her position was created in the 2021-2022 School Year and Ms. Sabbatino works closely with Schodack teachers to provide leadership for the ongoing development, implementation and evaluation of the district curriculum and instructional support services. As the one overseeing the district rollout of the MTSS and DEI initiatives, Ms. Sabbatino met with all faculty members on professional development days shortly before students returned for the year to ensure they were all up to speed when school started. We checked in with Ms. Sabbatino so readers could get an idea of what these initiatives are about and how they benefit Schodack students.

MULTI-TIERED SYSTEMS OF SUPPORT (MTSS) FOR STUDENTS

"Multi-Tiered Systems of Support (or MTSS for short) is a new district-wide structure we've put in place to help us to support our students in all the ways they may need it, whether it be emotionally, academically or behaviorally," said Ms. Sabbatino.

With a variety of students comes a wide range of needs and abilities to self-manage them. Some students may need less ongoing direct support, but we want them to know extra help is there if they need it and have an awareness of when to seek it. Other students may need much more direct support and may not have developed a full awareness of how to seek that help when they need it.

MTSS is designed to address that wide range of student needs since it breaks down into multiple tiers (or levels) to determine what degree of individualized support they might need. An easy way to understand MTSS structure is by thinking of it as a pyramid. All students are a part of Tier 1 (the base of the pyramid), where they all receive a universal level of academic, behavioral and emotional support at school. Most students will not need support beyond Tier 1, but when they do the MTSS structure accounts for it. Students may move into Tier 2 (the middle of the pyramid) or Tier 3 (the top of the pyramid) depending on their unique needs, where more targeted

approaches are taken to help them achieve success. Tier 2 focuses on supporting small groups of students with similar needs and Tier 3 focuses on students who require the highest individualized level of one-on-one support at school.

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION (DEI) COMMITTEE

The Diversity, Equity, Inclusion work being implemented in Schodack is based on the New York State Education Department's Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Framework. This NYS framework is rooted in helping school faculty and staff set standards to best meet the needs of an expanding, culturally diverse student body. Schodack has started a Diversity, Equity, Inclusion (DEI) Committee that is now meeting biweekly as of late October. The DEI Committee is working to put standards into effect within the district by following the four guiding principles of the NYS framework. These guiding principles are:

- 1. Welcoming and Affirming Environment.** School is a space where students can find themselves represented and reflected, and where they understand that all are treated with respect and dignity.
- 2. High Expectations and Rigorous Instruction.** The school environment is academically rigorous and intellectually challenging but is considerate of the different ways a diverse group of students learns.
- 3. Inclusive Curriculum and Assessment.** Providing opportunities for learning about perspectives different from one's own and empowering learners to be agents of positive change.
- 4. Ongoing Professional Learning:** Teaching and learning is an adaptive process. Ongoing professional learning opportunities allow school faculty/staff to develop and modify instruction to effectively teach all kinds of students.

"The DEI team that we have put together so far is a wide representation of people from across all grade levels, school buildings and subject areas," said Ms. Sabbatino. "Everyone in our district has a valuable perspective to add to this kind of committee and we want representation from all those groups. Not only teachers but also special education staff, specialists, secretaries, monitors, TAs, facilities staff and transportation staff. Additionally, soon we will be reaching out to students and parents/guardians to directly participate in this initiative. With the DEI Committee's efforts intended to directly benefit the students, their involvement and their families' involvement will be crucial to its success."

Universal Pre-Kindergarten Program Kicks Off in Schodack, Spots Available for Eligible Students

Schodack Central School District is now operating a New York State grant-funded Universal Pre-Kindergarten (UPK) Program that is facilitated and operated by Story Place Preschool Inc. Story Place is located within the Schodack CSD District Office, which some may know as the former Middle School.

The program kicked off at the start of the year and has been going great! The program is divided into three classrooms – Awesome Owls, Busy Bees and Shooting Stars – and we paid a visit to the Awesome Owls classroom to check-in. We spent some time with

our youngest learners while they were using STEM boxes (STEM stands for Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) to get their creativity working. You can see some pictures from our visit to the Awesome Owls classroom on this page!

If you are interested in enrolling your eligible student in Schodack's UPK Program, you can find more information in the FAQ below and on the district website at www.schodack.k12.ny.us/district/universal-pre-kindergarten/.



What is the UPK Program?

A state and district-funded program that provides educationally-based, high-quality pre-kindergarten for 4-year-old children. The program is free to all eligible children. UPK provides developmentally appropriate activities to help 4-year-olds prepare for Kindergarten. As our state's school standards and expectations become more rigorous, making sure young children enter school with basic skills in place is critical for success.

Who is eligible for the UPK Program?

UPK is open to children living in Schodack CSD who are 4 years old on or before December 1 of the current school year. Income eligibility is not a factor, and all families are encouraged to apply.

Who oversees the UPK Program?

UPK is overseen by Story Place Preschool Inc. Schodack CSD collaborates with Story Place to ensure that all NYS UPK programmatic requirements and curriculum standards are met.

What activities are involved in the UPK Program?

Some of the many activities include: Reading readiness and early literacy development, early exposure to literature (fiction and nonfiction), math skills, science lessons and discovery, social skills, self-help skills, motor skill activities, music, dance, library and art.

Will I be guaranteed a spot in UPK for my child?

While a limited number of spots are still available, please keep in mind that while the district would like to accommodate all requests, not all children who register will get into the program. If the number of registrations is higher than the number of open UPK spots, admittance is done through a random lottery drawing.

How will I be notified that my child was selected for UPK?

Story Place, in cooperation with the district, will mail acceptance letters to all families who are selected for the program.

What happens if there are no spots available in UPK?

You will automatically be placed on a waiting list.

What if I want to talk with someone about UPK?

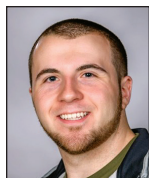
To learn more about UPK please contact Michele Rose at (518) 477-7103 or Mrose@storyplacepreschool.com.



District Welcomes New Principal and Athletic Director

During the Summer of 2022, Schodack welcomed two new administrators to its team. Jason Breh took over the role of principal at Maple Hill Jr./Sr. High School when Jacqueline Hill transitioned to her new position as Director of Student Services and Daniel Bentley was appointed as the new Athletic Director when Mike Silver

transitioned to a full-time teaching position. We checked in with them shortly after they started their new roles to introduce them to the community and hear how they were preparing for students to return in the fall. Now that the school year is in full swing, we checked back in with each of them to see how things have been going.



DANIEL BENTLEY, Athletic Director

For those who may have missed our first check-in when you were hired, could you briefly sum up your background and what brought you to Schodack?

I received my bachelor's in Physical Education from Sage College. After that, I enrolled in the Sports Administration master's program at Canisius College. Prior to joining Schodack, I worked with General Education and Special Education students at Questar III BOCES. After my undergraduate work, I worked in Schodack as a long-term sub and as that position was ending I knew I wanted to be a permanent part of the district if I ever had the opportunity. Being from a smaller district myself, I know what it's like to have a close school community and I enjoy being part of one.

Since you started as Athletic Director/PE Teacher over the summer, how has your job evolved since school started?

Obviously, things were pretty quiet when I started during the summer, mostly it was a lot of planning and learning. After the first day of fall season practices, things picked up quickly and even more so once students returned to school. There's a lot of moving parts to being an athletic director and a lot more behind-the-scenes logistics and planning than many probably realize, so I've been keeping on my toes. Seeing the students come in every day excited and enthusiastic about being here makes all the work worth it.

As a first-time Athletic Director, what's something you've found you love about the job so far?

Here in Schodack, I'm proud to say we have some of the best coaches in the section I've ever met. I have a great working relationship with them and we are constantly in touch about student-athletes, teams and games. Getting to work with them and hear from them daily about what's going on with the teams – especially when you get to hear from them immediately after one of the teams has won a match or game – is something I really love.

Have any past experiences helped you adjust to being a first-time Athletic Director?

When I was in school I used to speak with my Athletic Director a lot about his work and what he did as an AD. Even at that younger age, I was interested in all the little things an AD does that many people wouldn't know about unless they talked with one frequently like I used to. Those conversations with him have stayed with me and his advice has already helped me with some things this year.



JASON BREH, Principal of Maple Hill

For those who may have missed our Q&A when you started, could you sum up your background and how you came to Schodack?

I started my education career as a high school Visual Arts Teacher and went on to become Middle School Principal in Berlin, NY. A few years later I continued my administrative career at Albany High School and then Mont Pleasant Middle School in Schenectady. I first learned about Schodack in 2010 when attending BOCES principal meetings and hearing about all the great things the district was doing. When I saw Maple Hill was hiring a new principal, I jumped at the chance to apply. It's the best of both worlds - helping middle school students transition to a new experience while helping all the students in the school achieve their goals as they get closer to graduation.

What are some of your favorite things about being a principal at a school like Maple Hill and in a district like Schodack?

I love how involved our school families and community are. It was inspiring to see such a wide variety of student's family members, friends, and alumni at Fall Sports Weekend in October. It was really an amazing display of love and support for our students. Our faculty and staff are just as involved, always planning fun opportunities to learn and socialize, like field trips and dances. Since starting here I've encountered so many positive people and experiences, being a part of it all is truly a blessing.

What from your past experiences has been helping you be an effective leader at Maple Hill?

Of course, my past experiences as an administrator in other districts have helped me, but my experiences as an art teacher and a parent have also been very useful for me in my role as principal of Maple Hill. Being an administrator who is also a dad and a former teacher helps me understand the variety of perspectives that our parents and teachers bring to the table. That way we are all able to collaborate effectively to help our students find their own beautiful, and at times challenging, directions in life.

What are some things you're looking forward to as the year continues?

I've visited a lot of classes already and I'm definitely looking forward to visiting more of them. The same goes for meeting more students' families. There are plenty more events planned that I'm also excited to attend like winter & spring athletic season games, concerts, dances and pep rallies!



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Food Backpack & Holiday Giving Programs for Schodack Families

Schodack Central School District is very fortunate to live in such a generous community that truly cares about our school and its students. We wanted to make you aware of a couple of programs that we offer. Please know that these programs are CONFIDENTIAL.

- **Food Backpack Program** – Our school has been selected as a site for the Backpack child nutrition program by the Regional Food Bank. This allows any student and their families with food insecurities to take a backpack full of food home with them on the weekends and breaks. Backpacks are already being sent home with students and will continue through late Spring.
- **Holiday Giving Program** – The holidays can put a strain, financially, on families. This program allows families to supplement their gift-giving to their children. Wish lists are made (typically 2-3 items) and faculty/staff/community members donate these wish list items. You also have an opportunity to request a free turkey for Thanksgiving. This program will begin in mid-November.

If you are interested in having your child(ren) participate in one or both of these programs, please reach out to our School Social Workers. Their names and contact information are listed below.

Michelle Stilson – Maple Hill JR/SR HS (Grades 7-12)

Email: mstilson@schodack.k12.ny.us
Phone: 518-732-7701 x1256

Jennifer Sober – Castleton Elementary (Grades K-6)

Email: jsober@schodack.k12.ny.us
Phone: 518-732-7755 x3445



Maple Hill students during October Spirit Week.