



District Introduces First Dedicated Robotics Course

This fall, Schodack Central School District launched its first-ever dedicated robotics course. It is almost entirely hands-on and is designed to spark curiosity, creativity, and problem-solving through the growing field of robotics. Exclusively for 7th-grade students, it is one of Maple Hill Jr./Sr. High School's quarterly 7th Grade Skills rotation courses. This means each quarter of the school year, a new group of 7th graders has the opportunity to explore robotics fundamentals, including programming, design and how robots are increasingly used in everyday life.

While currently offered only to 7th-grade students, the district hopes this course serves as a foundation for eventually offering more robotics and engineering opportunities to students in the higher grade levels as well.

The course is taught by teacher Brandon Bear and focuses heavily on engineering and problem-solving skills. Students have been learning that robotics is about seeing a problem, setting a goal, assessing available supplies, and revising plans as you go to achieve a solution. This planning, testing, and revising process is meant to mirror how professional engineers approach their work.

"It's about the process," said Mr. Bear, whose background is in physics and engineering. "Students learn that sometimes their first design doesn't work, and that's okay. They have to go back, think critically, and try again. We're dipping our toes in the water. The goal is to introduce students to the wide breadth of what robotics can offer since it's becoming more and more a part of everyday life."

Projects to demonstrate robotics foundational concepts have included:

- **Programming with Ozobots:** Students use Ozobots (small programmable robots) to learn the language of robots and how they respond to instructions using color coding and block-based programming.
- **Art Bots:** Students build "art bots" with cup bodies and marker feet. Small DC motors and battery packs are then used to make them vibrate to create art.
- **Prosthetic Hands:** Students also build non-automated robots, such as prosthetic hands, using common materials like strings and rubber bands. A seemingly simple project at first, it demonstrates to students the challenges of recreating human dexterity, flexibility, and range of motion.

The course also explores real-world robotics to connect with what students are learning. This includes discussions about the costs/benefits of automation in society and watching videos about topics like Mars Rovers and the DARPA (Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency) Robotics Challenge.

Looking ahead in the course, Mr. Bear hopes to incorporate programming software that will allow students to build and test virtual robots. This will give them opportunities not restricted by the costs and material access limitations of physical robots.

While still new, the course has been a hit with the 7th-graders so far, with students enjoying the creative atmosphere it offers them. As the first quarter of the year ended and Mr. Bear was preparing to welcome a new group of students, many of his current ones asked, "Why can't we just do robotics all year?"



Color Coding for Ozobots



Testing Art Bots



Building Non-Automated Prosthetic Hands

Checking in with Ryan Palmer and Mary Sheedy

Last summer, Schodack Central School District welcomed two new administrators to its leadership team. Ryan Palmer as the new Assistant Superintendent of Business & Support Services and Mary Sheedy as the new Director of Teaching & Learning. When Mr. Palmer and Ms. Sheedy started, we did a Q&A with both to introduce them and hear about the work they would be doing in Schodack. With the school year now fully underway, we checked in with both of them again to see how things are going and what they are looking forward to during the rest of the year.



RYAN PALMER, ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF BUSINESS & SUPPORT SERVICES

Tell us a bit about your background and how it brought you to Schodack.

From Fall 2011 through Fall 2021, I was a high school math teacher, and I spent the last five years of my teaching career at the Coxsackie-Athens Central School District. During that time, I earned my SDBL (School District Business Leader) and SDL (School

District Leader) certifications.

In December 2021, I transitioned into my first administrative position as the Administrator of Business & Finance at Coxsackie-Athens. I held that position for just under four years, until I was offered a position working in my hometown here in the Schodack Central School District.

For those who don't know, what does the Assistant Superintendent of Business & Support Services do?

My job includes oversight of Schodack's Transportation, Facilities, Food Service, and IT Services departments. I also collaborate with the Business Office team to ensure procurement rules are followed, invoices are paid and that all of our faculty and staff have the resources they need to serve students effectively. In addition, I play a significant role in developing and presenting the district's annual budget.



MARY SHEEDY, DIRECTOR OF TEACHING & LEARNING

Could you sum up your background and how you came to Schodack?

I began my career as a special education teacher in North Carolina. In 2019, I returned to my home state of New York and began my journey in school leadership at KIPP Tech Valley Primary School in Albany. While there, I was an Assistant Principal and also the

Founding Director of the Primary School's Upper School program, where I oversaw development of teacher training, curricular design, and program implementation in the school's upper grade levels. I joined the Schodack team as Director of Teaching & Learning in July and have truly enjoyed getting to know the school community over the past few months!

Explain what you do as Director of Teaching & Learning.

I support the administrative team, teachers, and students to ensure that instruction and curriculum across the district are rigorous and aligned with research-based best practices. A major focus of my work in this position is working with those groups to ensure our students have access to an education that maximizes their strengths.

What have been some of the most rewarding aspects of working in Schodack so far?

I get to come to work every day alongside people who care about educating students as much as I do. My favorite part of working in education has always been seeing students achieve their goals. One of my favorite daily moments is watching the students get off the bus, as it's the beginning of their daily interactions with all the departments I'm fortunate to oversee.

Transportation gets them here safely, Facilities ensures our buildings are clean and maintained, IT supports 21st-century digital learning and Food Services provides the meals that help keep our students going.

As the year continues, what are you looking forward to?

I'm looking forward to seeing how the budget continues to support our teachers in providing a first-class education to our students. Additionally, attending school events will always be a passion of mine, whether they be sporting events, elementary morning assemblies, classroom presentations, performing arts productions and so forth. It's rewarding to watch the students succeed in and out of the classroom, so I will continue trying to attend as many events as I can this year and beyond.

What are some of the most rewarding aspects of working in Schodack so far?

I love being in the classrooms and seeing learning in action. It's inspiring to watch the dedication, planning, and data-informed work of our teachers and staff come to life for students. Everyone rallies together for the benefit of our students, and that's something truly special.

As the school year continues, what are you looking forward to?

Big picture-wise, I'm excited to see continued growth and impact for students as the year continues. As we collect and analyze important data points like assessments and attendance, we'll set goals around those trends throughout the rest of the year.

I'm also just as excited about the smaller, yet equally meaningful, moments like watching kindergarteners blend sounds to read their first words or seeing high schoolers apply their skills to solve complex problems. Those day-to-day moments capture why this work is so meaningful, and it's a privilege to witness that growth up close.

STUDENT VOICES ON THE BOARD:

Q&A With Maple Hill Senior Addison Loszynski

At the start of the year, Maple Hill Class of 2026 Senior Addison Loszynski was appointed as ex officio Student Member of Schodack's Board of Education for the 2025–26 School Year. Addison has been attending this year's Board meetings and will continue doing so for the remainder of the year to serve as a representative for her peers. While Addison is a non-voting member, she is an active participant in meeting discussions and ensures the Board's decisions are informed by student needs, concerns and opinions.

We checked in with Addison so you could learn more about her responsibilities, interests and what she hopes to achieve this year.

Tell us about this role and what's expected of you as the student board member.

As the student representative on the Schodack Board of Education, I'm expected to be the voice of the entire Maple Hill student body this year. My main job is to make sure that the highest level of school authority knows the opinions and concerns of the students.

How were you selected?

Mr. Santarcangelo [Maple Hill High School Principal] sent me an email to see if I was interested in this position, and I was very



Addison Loszynski at Maple Hill Volleyball Senior Night

excited to be asked because it's such an important role. I wrote back saying I was and explaining why I thought I'd be a strong candidate for the position this year.

What was it that interested you and made you want to take on this role?

I've always been very vocal about my opinions and helping my peers' voices be heard. I knew this would be an important role because it allows the student body to be heard at the highest level by someone who is actually part of the student body and therefore has closer connections to the students. It's often easier for students to voice concerns

and opinions to a peer rather than someone in an authority position, so the student board member position allows us to advocate for not only the loud voices but also the quiet ones.

Do you have any goals during your time in this role?

My main goal is just to help my fellow students voice their opinions and be heard. The Board's decisions have a great effect on the students at Maple Hill, so it's important that its members hear the opinions of those impacted by their decisions.

When you're not devoting your time to academics and being a student board member, what activities and extracurriculars do you participate in?

I've played on Maple Hill's Volleyball and Basketball Teams for years now and have had so many great moments being part of our school's athletic programs. I participate in both travel volleyball and basketball, giving me opportunities to play in out-of-state tournaments and grow as a player, which hopefully helps me play at the next level after I graduate. In addition to my school activities and athletics, I also have a job at Labella's, an Italian restaurant in Valatie.

BOARD OF EDUCATION UPDATES MISSION AND VISION

During Summer 2025, Schodack's Board of Education updated its Mission and Vision Statements to better reflect the Schodack Central School District of today and guide its future. We checked in with Board President Shelley Palmer to find out more.

The idea of updating the statements had been a topic of discussion during the Board's summer retreats for the past three years. "This past summer, the Board decided it was time to focus specifically on the update," Ms. Palmer said. The process was a collaborative effort, with board members working alongside district leadership.

A goal was to make the statements more concise and direct. The core of the updated Mission is in its first three words — **Educate. Support. Unite.** — and the updated Vision concludes with: **Once a Wildcat, always a Wildcat.** "Those three words at the start of the Mission guide what we do for Schodack students, and the Vision ends with our goal of sending them out to the world knowing they are prepared and that they are part of our community forever," stated Ms. Palmer. The updated statements are now actively guiding the Board's work, with Ms. Palmer confirming they "are in our minds at all times."

NEW BOARD MISSION STATEMENT: Educate. Support. Unite. We prioritize innovative learning, safety and well-being, inclusive connections, and communication with purpose — empowering students to succeed and communities to grow stronger together. #WILDCATPRIDE

NEW BOARD VISION STATEMENT: Our vision is to provide a nurturing and challenging environment that develops civic readiness and social-emotional competence. Our students will develop into critical thinkers, innovative problem solvers, and well-rounded learners—emerging as effective communicators who are college and career-ready, equipped to lead lives of purpose and contribute meaningfully to their communities and a global society. **Once a Wildcat, always a Wildcat.**



1477 South Schodack Road
Castleton-on-Hudson, NY 12033

NON PROFIT ORG.
Postage Paid
Permit #10
Castleton, NY 12033

ECRWSS

POSTAL CUSTOMER

BOARD OF EDUCATION MEMBERS

- Shelley Palmer, President
- Kurt Maier, Vice President
- Angela Beber
- Dr. Melissa Boles
- Tylea Gebbie
- Marion Spar
- Blake Kush
- Jennifer Rogowski
- Mary Yurista

Produced by Questar III Communications Service

Substitute Opportunities in Schodack

Schodack Central School District always welcomes new members to join its substitute list! If interested, contact Rebecca Zerrahn by email (rzerrahn@schodack.k12.ny.us) or phone (518-732-2297 ext. 2319) to learn more. You can also find substitute applications online at www.schodack.k12.ny.us/district/employment.

Applications are accepted on a continuing basis for the following substitute opportunities:

Teachers

- Certified Teacher: \$135/Day
- Non-Certified Teacher: \$120/Day
- Retired Teacher: \$145/Day

Teaching Assistants & Aides

- Classroom Personnel: \$16.50/Hour

Nurses

- Registered Nurse (RN): \$28.58/Hour
- Licensed LPN: \$19.34/Hour

Transportation

- Bus Driver: \$23.50/Hour
- Retired Bus Driver: \$29.80/Hour
- Bus Attendant: \$16.50/Hour

Custodial/Maintenance

- Maintenance Personnel: \$16.50/Hour

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES: Join Us in Supporting Our Students!

Whether you're a school parent, an alumnus, or a community member who wants to be more involved with their local schools, Schodack CSD welcomes new volunteers year-round!

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL PARENT TEACHER ORGANIZATION

(PTO): Plan/organize and help at popular events for students and families. Examples include the Fall Community Fair, the Holiday Bazaar, the Science Fair, the Strawberry Festival, and many more! Email thecespto@gmail.com to learn more.

MUSIC PARENTS ASSOCIATION: Support and expand music education in Schodack and help at annual district music events! Email mhmusicpa@gmail.com to learn more.

ATHLETIC BOOSTER CLUB: Help support Maple Hill student-athletes at some of the district's year-round games/matches and tournaments! Contact Booster Club at mhboosterclub@gmail.com to learn more.

SCHODACK WILDCAT FOUNDATION: A New York State Not-For-Profit Corporation founded by local members of our school community with a passion for helping Schodack students. This can take many forms, like organizing student programs/activities, holding fundraisers, helping locate grant opportunities, and more. Contact the District Office at **518-732-2297** to learn more.