

Schenectady

June 2007
Committed to
teaching and
learning...
one child at a time

City School District

A national award
winning district



Look Inside...

- ▶ **Page 2: The Early Childhood Center at Fulton**
- ▶ **Page 3: Summer construction plans**
- ▶ **Page 3: PTO Council finds success in first year**
- ▶ **Page 5: Top ten graduates of the class of 2007**
- ▶ **Page 6: Chinese language program at Howe magnet school.**
- ▶ **Page 7: Make learning part of your summer plans**
- ▶ **Page 8: Tax collection changes**

‘Attacking’ the middle schools Changes for coming school year set to make significant improvements

When it comes to learning over one’s lifetime, there are no years like the middle school years. Across the state and the nation, achievement in the middle schools seems to be on a downturn – something educators have blamed on everything from hormones to hard tests.

However, in Schenectady, Superintendent of Schools Eric Ely says there is no excuse for poor performance in the city’s middle schools. It is in these critical years, he points out, that most students decide whether or not they are going to succeed in high school and beyond. It is in these years that students decide whether or not they are going to drop out of school or go on to college.

For these reasons, Ely and his team of educators have put together a plan designed as a “middle school attack” – a plan for the future of our schools and the success of our students.

A plan for all students

Next year, all sixth graders in the three district middle schools will follow an elementary school model with one teacher,

in one classroom, for the core subjects of math, science, English, reading, social studies and study skills. Reading and math will be supplemented by remedial teachers, who are being added next year to ensure that fewer students fall behind.

Sixth graders will go out for their “specials” – art, music and gym. They will also have lockers right outside or near their classrooms and will have the option of taking part in open gym during their lunch period.

“This way, students entering the middle school will have less of a transition to make,” Ely said. “The only transition will be the change of the building.”

Central Park Middle School Principal Mary Ozarowski said it will be an adjustment for her sixth grade teachers to teach four or five courses rather than the one they had been teaching.

Continued on page 4

Top Ten in 2007



Congratulations to the Top Ten Graduates in the class of 2007! See who they are on Page 5.



JUNE 2007

Teaching our youngest citizens

Early Childhood Center set to open at Fulton School this fall

When the Early Childhood Center at Fulton opens in September, the staff will be prepared to teach some of the district's youngest students everything from reading and writing to speaking and motor skills.

The school's principal, Susan Gorman, said she will be working along side the district's maintenance and facilities personnel all summer long to get the school in great shape by the fall. She's also working around the clock to staff the new school and prepare a curriculum for students in pre-k, kindergarten and pre-first grade.

Gorman describes the school as "one small building focusing on the early skills." The skills her staff will focus on the most will be reading, writing, speaking and listening.

The new school is a direct result of the district's strategic plan, as well as Governor Eliot Spitzer's call for a stronger focus on the early grades. Gorman points out that success later in life – socially, emotionally and academically – is often defined by what students learn and how well they progress in the early years.

While the district already has strong kindergarten and pre-k programs, Gorman said the Fulton School will be different because of its size.

"My staff will be able to focus on the reading, writing, speaking and listening skills of four to seven year olds," Gorman said. "Everything, even the specials such as music, art and physical education, will be focused on only this age group and how they develop."

These four basic skills will be integrated into all areas at the school in hopes that students will leave Fulton reading and writing at high levels. However, staff at Fulton

will also take part in ongoing staff development aimed at how to teach this age group everything they need to know.

For example, students this age may not know how to properly hold a pencil and staff members need to know how to teach them this basic skill. Or perhaps a particular student may not have developed the motor skills he or she might need to skip down the street without falling. It may seem so simple, but Gorman points out that these little things are often overlooked. Because of the size of Fulton, the staff will be able to focus on the needs of the whole child.

The pre-k program at Fulton is open to all district residents, while the kindergarten and pre-first grade classes are available to students in the attendance zones for Van Corlaer Elementary School, Hamilton Elementary School, Academy of Culture and Communication at Pleasant Valley, and Lincoln Elementary School.

Gorman said students will be placed in the pre-first program, which is designed for students who are ready to leave kindergarten but are not quite ready to enter first grade, only after a teacher referral and parent meeting. This program is



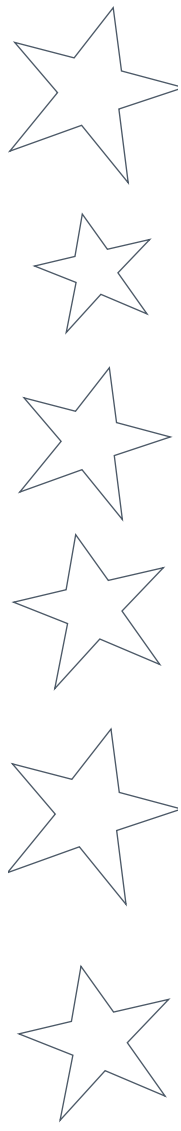
The Fulton School on Eleanor Street will house the district's Early Childhood Center, set to open this coming fall. The school will serve approximately 300 students in pre-k, kindergarten and pre-first grade.

only for students who are considered to be behind their peers academically and she hopes that many of them will be able to enter second grade after a year at Fulton.

The school will also offer a before-and-after-school program for all students for a fee, and transportation will be available for students who live more than one mile from the school.

For more information on the Early Childhood Center at Fulton, visit <http://www.schenectady.k12.ny.us> or call 370-8101 ext. 142.

"Everything, even the specials such as music, art and physical education, will be focused on only this age group and how they develop."
- Susan Gorman
Principal, Early Childhood Center at Fulton



Construction plan for the summer

\$30.5 million capital project approved in 2004 to be completed

As students prepare for their summer break, construction crews, electricians, plumbers and many others are preparing for work at several district schools. The work to be completed this summer is the remainder of the \$30.5 million capital project, which was approved by voters in 2004.

Here is what is expected to be completed this summer:

At the Career Center at Steinmetz:

- The installation of new windows in the original building;
- The installation of a new roof and ceiling tiles (where needed);
- Masonry repairs;
- Improvements to the ventilation system to make it more efficient; and
- Miscellaneous mechanical and electrical upgrades.

At Paige Elementary School:

- An off-street parking lot will be constructed on Walt Whitman Drive;
- The installation of a new roof and ceiling tiles (where needed);

- The installation of a new fire alarm system; and
- Improvements to the ventilation system.

At Lincoln Elementary School:

- The installation of a new roof and ceiling repair (where needed);
- Masonry repairs; and
- Mechanical repairs.

Elmer Elementary School

- Repairs to the heater in the gym;
- The construction of an off-street parking lot and bus loop along Eastern Avenue;
- The installation of fencing on the Eastern Avenue side;
- Upgrades to the front entrance; and
- Miscellaneous mechanical upgrades.

Oneida Middle School

- Replace some doors;
- Plumbing and heating upgrades;

- Miscellaneous mechanical upgrades; and
- Repairs to the roof.

Yates Magnet School

- The construction of off-street parking with a bus loop;
- Masonry, ceiling tile and window repairs; and
- Miscellaneous mechanical upgrades.

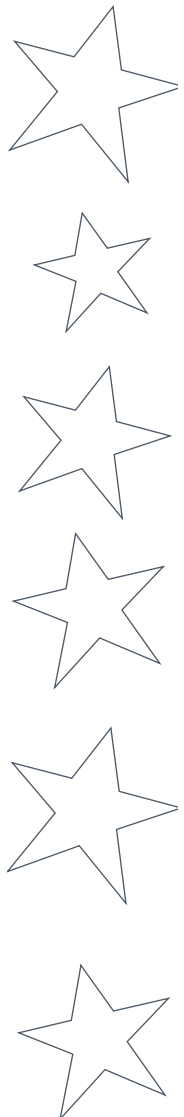
Fulton School

- The installation of two new boilers;
- The construction of an off-street parking lot;
- The installation of a new roof;
- The installation of a new bathroom; and
- The installation of a new fire alarm system.

Please note that because of the urgency of opening the Early Childhood Center at Fulton, work that was previously scheduled at Central Park Middle School and Van Corlaer Elementary School for this coming summer will be completed in the summer of 2008.



JUNE
2007



PTO Council finds success in first year; looking to expand

When parent liaison Catherine Canavan joined the district last summer, one of the first things she did was establish a PTO Council — a group made up of representatives from each school's PTO or PTSO.

Looking back, Canavan said the first year of the council has been a success and she's looking forward to what the future brings.

"They seem excited to be sharing information, giving advice,

**Want more information on PTOs?
Call Parent Liaison Catherine Canavan at 881-2506, or visit www.schenectady.k12.ny.us**

and learning about how things in the district work," Canavan said of the group, which has roughly 11 to 15 people from 11 different schools involved.

The mission of the council has been to bring the different PTOs together to collaborate on ideas, collect and share information, and be a strong voice for parent concerns. Canavan said it has also strengthened the PTOs across the district.

Canavan said that by working together the PTOs are better able to plan their fund-raisers, events and meetings to make sure they don't overlap.



Sights also set on early childhood education, high school

It's a fact that you start building your educational foundation the first day you enter school, if not before. These early years affect the middle years, which hopefully lead to graduation day. Efforts are underway to improve literacy and math skills at the elementary level so that students enter middle school with the skills to succeed.

This coming September the district will open the Early Childhood Center at Fulton (*See page 2*), which will hold about 300 students in pre-k, kindergarten and pre-first grade. Teachers will focus on literacy – a key building block to success in school and in the workforce, not to mention in every avenue of life.

A new extended-day program will also be implemented at all district schools, including the five houses of Schenectady High School. The program will offer academic services on a voluntary basis for an extra hour at the elementary level and

an extra hour-and-a-half at the middle and high school levels.

Officials have also set their sights on increasing graduation rates. Last year a credit recovery program was implemented, allowing students who had failed a course

to make it up using an online program. The district will also be expanding its GED program for high school students.

“We want to make sure that every student leaves here with some kind of diploma,” Superintendent Eric Ely said.

Plan follows state's Contract for Excellence, Strategic Plan

In the 2007-08 state budget, the Schenectady City School District received an increase of more than \$14 million in state aid. Under the state's Contract for Excellence, the district must spend most of this funding on reducing class sizes, expanding early childhood education, extended-school day efforts and professional development – things the district targeted in its strategic plan.

“These are things we've been trying to do,” Superintendent Eric Ely said, referring to the state's requirements. “The extra money from the state has allowed us to do them earlier than planned. We were pleased to see that the state has the same education goals as we do.”

Because of the increase in state aid, the district will be able to hire more teachers in order to decrease class size and add remedial help, open the Early Childhood Center at Fulton, implement an extended-day program, and much more, without increasing the tax rate.

Continued from Page 1

Middle Schools:

However, the schools are doing staff development for these teachers over the summer and she is sure they will rise to the occasion.

“The teachers will be helping each other and relying on each other's strengths,” Ozarowski said. “We have a good, solid group of sixth grade teachers and that will make the difference.”

Seventh and eighth graders will change classes for the different subjects, just like they have been doing in the middle schools. However, by increasing the number of teachers, class sizes in all three middle schools should be smaller next year. Sixth grade classes will be roughly 20 students, while seventh and eighth grade classes will be close to 24 students.

Behind the scenes, teachers in the middle schools are going to start “vertical teaming.” This is when teachers from across the grade levels who teach the same subject will meet and work together on lessons and curriculum. For example,

“The important thing is to keep improving.”

- Gary Comley
Principal, Mont Pleasant Middle School

math teachers from seventh and eighth grade will meet to plan their lessons, making sure there are no holes in the curriculum and all required subject matter is covered between the grades.

“This is critical when you are working to improve your curriculum,” Ely said. “Students won't notice a difference in scheduling, but we hope they will notice a difference in the way they are being taught.”

Improving the middle schools is an ongoing process. No one knows that better than Mont Pleasant Middle School Principal Gary Comley, who in the last few years

has seen several changes take place at his school, all of which have been aimed at increasing student achievement.

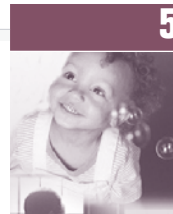
“The important thing is to keep improving,” Comley said.

Enrollment on the rise

In 1989 there were roughly 7,600 students in the Schenectady City School District. By 2006, that number jumped to more than 9,000 students and school officials see this growth continuing. Growing enrollment puts a strain on school buildings as well as class sizes.

Efforts are underway to relieve this strain. More teachers will be added for the 2007-2008 school year and additional classroom space will be added in some schools through the capital project approved by voters in January of this year.

Year	Enrollment
1989	7602
1999	8889
2006	9749



Top Ten Graduates of the Class of 2007

1. Peter Runfola

Peter is an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma candidate. His extracurricular activities include National Honor Society, varsity Masterminds, playing the oboe, varsity crew and varsity swimming. He also participated in the Telluride Association Summer Program (TASP) at the University of Michigan in 2006. His academic interests are history classics and economics. Peter plans to pursue these fields at Princeton University in the fall.

2. Jessica Hunter

Jessica is an International Baccalaureate (IB) honor student. She has had several roles in a number of plays with the Blue Roses Theatre Company and has been a member of the Symphonic and Chamber Choirs. She has been a member of Umoja, an African dance group, and National Honor Society. Jessica has also taken part in Science Olympiads, Science Honor Society and two summer programs at Union College — the Engineering and Design-Girls Education (EDGE) and the Summer Science Workshop. Jessica will be attending RPI this fall as a nuclear and mechanical engineering major.

3. Sean McGrath

Sean is an International Baccalaureate (IB) honor student. His extracurricular activities include National Honor Society, Science Olympiad, the Science Bowl, Rube Goldberg, Masterminds and peer tutoring. He also enjoys hiking and weight-lifting. He plans to attend Cornell University in the fall.

4. Melissa Woods

Melissa has participated in Science Olympiad, Educating Girls for Engineering, Rube Goldberg, GE Pathways and the Langmuir Chemistry competition. She has played piano for ten years, is a 10x10 playwright and a member of the Bell Choir.

Melissa has also worked backstage for the Blue Roses Theatre Company and played varsity volleyball. She has also been a part of Umoja, an African dance group. Melissa has been active in National Honor Society, National Science Society, Tri-M Music Society and Foreign Language Merit Society. Melissa is a full International Baccalaureate (IB) student and will be attending RPI in the fall where she will study engineering.

5. Jeremie David Carlson

Jeremie will be receiving International Baccalaureate (IB) certificates in many areas, and an Advanced Regents Diploma with Honors. He is involved in clubs such as student government, Peer Mediators, Student Ambassadors, Key Club and Best Buddies, as well as crew, track and field, swimming and diving, gymnastics and Tai Kwon Do. He has won two awards at the National Fine Arts Festival and has earned the National English Award. Jeremie was involved in both the Hurricane Francis and the Hurricane Katrina relief team efforts, Promised Companions, Youth Ministry and Neighborhood Meals in Hamilton Hill. Jeremie will be attending RPI in the fall as a pre-medicine major.

6. Justin Friello

Justin has been very involved in the arts community at Schenectady High School and the Sayles School of Fine Arts. He has been involved with Capital Region Area All State, Albany Pro Musica, the Troy Savings Bank Music Festival, and private lessons in piano, voice, and viola. He also co-founded the Composer's Forum at SHS. Justin will be attending SUNY Purchase this fall studying musical composition.

7. Philip A. Morris

Philip 'Lecco' Morris has grown up in an environment that values artistic expression. He is an accomplished pianist, actor and composer. Lecco will be attending New York University this fall to study musical composition.

8. Peter Lezzi

Peter has excelled in the fields of science and technology. He will be graduating with an Advanced Regents Diploma with Honors. Peter has participated in many clubs and activities including track and field, cross country, French Honor Society, Science Honor Society, Science Olympiads and Rube Goldberg. He has also volunteered for the Ed Kosiur campaign and the Grout Park Run, and maintains a part-time job. Peter will be attending RPI in the fall as a materials engineering major.

9. Jennifer Rusnica

Jennifer's activities include National Honor Society, orchestra, and Chamber Orchestra. She also writes articles for the PHOENIX (SHS school newspaper). Jennifer has a genuine interest in working with people and business management. She plans to major in business at Syracuse University in the fall.

10. Ryan Leichenauer

Ryan will be graduating in June with an International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma and an Advanced Regents Diploma with Honors. He has participated in Foreign Language Merit Society, Masterminds, student government, National Honor Society, Science Honor Society, and Blue Roses Theatre. Ryan also wrote several ten-minute plays and a separate called "Managing Me". He also wrote and was assistant director for the film "Qu'est-ce Que C'est Love?" which was shown at Proctor's Theatre. Ryan will be attending Tufts University in the fall as a political science major.

Mandarin the language of the day at Howe

New Chinese program to expand next year

For the last 10 weeks or so, fifth and sixth graders at Howe International Magnet School have been immersed in the Mandarin Chinese language, as well as the Chinese culture, for 20 minutes every day.

So far they have learned to say “hello” and “thank you”, introduce themselves and talk about their families. They have also learned numbers and can tell you their birthdays and ages in Chinese.

The Chinese language program, made possible by a three-year Foreign Language Assistance Program grant, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Education, was piloted this year at the magnet school. Next year it will move into three more elementary schools and one middle school, and by 2009 it should be offered in all district schools, including SHS.

Finding success in year one

“The students are pretty good at mimicking the sounds and they have fewer inhibitions than adults, which is helpful when learning a new language,” Chinese language teacher Cynthia Cramsie said. “Almost every week I have a kid who says that he or she went to a Chinese restaurant and was able to say ‘hello’ to the waiter in Chinese.”

Students are also learning about China itself. They’ve learned about

the capital city of Beijing, China’s over-population problems and efforts to solve them. Recently Catherine Snyder of Union Graduate College visited Cramsie’s classes as a guest speaker. She played a game called “China Chairs” with the students, in which chairs are set up to represent both the United States and China. Nine chairs represented each country – however, only 3 students represented the United States and 13 represented China. The fact that 13 students had to cram into nine chairs showed the students in a very visual way how crowded China really is compared to the United States.

“We can only really touch the surface and try to give them an introduction to promote their curiosity about China,” Cramsie said. “We hope that they will want to go on and learn more.”

Looking ahead

Cramsie discovered her love for both Chinese language and culture while attending the Middlebury College Summer Language Institute during a summer break from college. Since then she has lived in China for varying periods of time both studying and teaching English. She will go to China again this summer to take part in a summer language program for



Students in Mrs. Morrow’s 5th grade class at Howe magnet school learn to do calligraphy during the school’s China Day. The day was a celebration of the school’s Mandarin Chinese program, which was piloted at Howe this year. The program will move into three more elementary schools and one middle school next year. By 2009 the program should be in all district schools, including Schenectady High School.

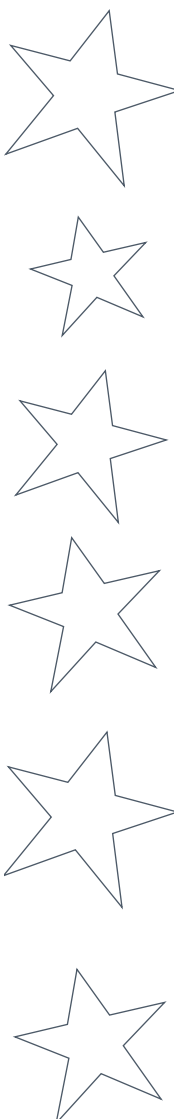
Chinese language teachers, sponsored by the U.S. Department of State.

Next fall she will return to Schenectady to continue her work at Howe, as well as the Academy of Culture and Communication at Pleasant Valley, Hamilton Elementary School, Van Corlaer Elementary School and Mont Pleasant Middle School. All fifth and sixth graders will take a 10 week course, while all seventh graders will take it for 20 weeks.

Based on the success of the program at Howe, Cramsie said she is encouraged about the expansion of the Chinese classes into the other schools.

“I think we’re going to be able to get that same excitement because it’s such a unique program,” she said. “These students are so fortunate to get to learn Chinese at their age.”

In order to get students at ACC@PV, Hamilton, and Van Corlaer up to speed with the students from Howe, the district is offering a two week intensive summer program for a group of 30 students from these schools in August. An “e-pals” program is also in the works, which would create an e-mail exchange between the Schenectady students and students in China.



JUNE
2007

Making Learning Part of Your Summer Plans

Another hectic school year is finished and students and parents alike are thinking about their summer plans. While summer is a time for a well-deserved break, it doesn't mean that children should take a break from learning.

With students facing higher academic expectations on state assessments, they need to continue to challenge themselves and use what they've learned to be able to reach these goals. To do this, reading, writing and math need to be a part of the family's summer routine.

Ideas for summer

Parents are encouraged to make learning a part of their family's summer activities. Here is a collection of some fun and simple ideas your family might enjoy.



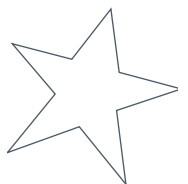
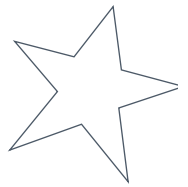
- ✓ Plan in advance to avoid boredom. Talk to your children about what activities they would like to do over the summer. Gather brochures and pamphlets and have them read through them for ideas.
- ✓ Take a trip to a bookstore or your local library so the kids can pick out their own books.
- ✓ Whether you pitch a tent in your backyard, spread out sleeping bags on the living room floor, or go camping in the wilderness, pass out books and magazines along with flashlights. Children can read, sing songs, and tell stories until their eyes close. Encourage your kids to write their own ghost stories to share with the family.
- ✓ Let your kids help plan the family vacation. They can practice their research skills by helping you find a vacation destination on the Internet. They'll be able to practice their organizational skills by writing out a schedule for the day. Ask your children

to compute gas mileage or use their map skills. A journal and disposable camera is a great way for your child to document memories of the trip! Colorful gel pens are a fun, creative way for your child to write captions for those photos describing all the fun things they did on vacation.

- ✓ Schedule family game nights. Many games, such as Scrabble and Boggle, will help improve your child's reading skills.
- ✓ Having a family reunion later this summer? Encourage your children's interest in their own family history. Help them interview older relatives, record family stories and make a family tree. Displaying them at the reunion will make it even more enjoyable for everyone!
- ✓ It's hard to compete with video games, TV and instant messaging, so don't. Have the family decide on a time, each day, when they whole family "unplugs" so that reading can take priority.
- ✓ Make time for hands-on activities. Look through craft books or on Web sites for craft projects. Ask your child to read the instructions aloud as you work on the projects together.
- ✓ Don't forget those summer reading assignments, summer math packets, and other handouts from classroom teachers that are specifically designed to keep learning going strong this summer!



JUNE
2007





**JUNE
2007**

School Tax Payments

The City of Schenectady will no longer be collecting school taxes. Effective July 1, 2007, taxes for the Schenectady City School District will be collected by the school district.

TAXES CAN BE MAILED TO:
Schenectady City Schools
PO Box 13150
Albany, NY 12212

School taxes can also be paid in person at the Schenectady Key Bank branches located on State Street, Brandywine Avenue and Broadway.

Anyone with questions about this new process should call 881-3988.

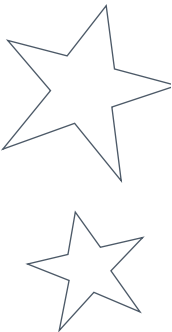
'Tips from Teachers' spots appear on WNYT Thank you to business partners

This spring, several Schenectady City School District "Tips from Teachers" spots ran on WNYT, Channel 13. The thirty-second promotional spots, supported by four business partners, were taped in three middle school classrooms and included tips presented by teachers Meegan Mostransky (Oneida Middle School), Lucky Palmer (Central Park Middle School) and Bernice Rivera (Mont Pleasant Middle School) and their students.

The Schenectady City School District extends a warm thank you to our community and business partners:

- ▶ **Key Bank**
- ▶ **CDPHP**
- ▶ **Brown Transportation**
- ▶ **Schenectady Community College**

The Schenectady City School District is grateful to all the community and business partners who continue to support our schools and promotional efforts each year.



Board of Education

- Jeff P. Janiszewski, President**
Warren R. Snyder, Vice President
 Linda Bellick
 Maxine J. Brisport
 James R. Casino
 John F. Mitchell III
 Lisa Russo

Administration

- Eric D. Ely, Superintendent**
 Sharon Therriault, *Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction*
 Michael San Angelo, Ed.D, *Assistant Superintendent for Business*
 William Roberts, Ed.D, *Assistant Superintendent for Operations*
 Arnold A. Spadafora, *Associate Superintendent*

Editor: Adrienne Leon

Schenectady City School District

108 Education Drive
 Schenectady, New York 12303
 518-370-8100 Fax: 518-370-8173
www.schenectady.k12.ny.us

Non-Profit Org.
 US POSTAGE
 PAID
 Permit No. 108
 Schenectady, NY

**Residential Customer
 Postal Patron**