

# SCHENECTADY CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT

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August 19, 2021

## ANNOUNCEMENT OF CABINET APPOINTMENTS

The Schenectady City School District is pleased to announce that the board of education approved the following cabinet appointments at the meeting held on August 18, 2021.

- **Lynne Rutnik** has been selected to fill the position of **Deputy Superintendent**.
- **Carlos M. Cotto, Jr., Ed.D.** has been selected to fill the position of **Assistant Superintendent of Innovation, Equity and Engagement**.
- **Shaun M. Mason, Ed.D.** has been selected to fill the position of **Assistant Superintendent of Planning and Accountability**.
- **Andrea Tote-Freeman** has been selected to fill the position of **Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services**.
- **Joseph R. DiCaprio** has been selected to fill the position of **Executive Director of Elementary Schools**.

“It is my pleasure and honor to announce the appointment of Ms. Rutnik, Dr. Cotto, Dr. Mason, Ms. Tote-Freeman and Mr. DiCaprio to these critical district leadership team roles,” said Superintendent Anibal Soler. “Each of these leaders offers extraordinary leadership knowledge, experience and skills. They each have an exceptional record of accomplishment, respect, and a shared vision for improving student outcomes, ensuring equity and inclusivity, and strengthening Schenectady. We have significant work before us, but we are building an amazing team that is ready to navigate Schenectady forward.”

The positions are newly created as part of an organizational redesign being implemented by Soler and in response to the BOCES needs assessment that was conducted in February along with recommendations for improvement. The change reflects a reorganizational shift in operations, management, and reporting. It serves to provide a clearly articulated path of roles and responsibilities with a focus on creating an organization that is employee-centered and cross-functional.

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EVERYBODY COUNTS. EVERYBODY LEARNS.

## Lynne Rutnik

*Deputy Superintendent*

Lynne Rutnik is currently Superintendent of the Lake George Central School District, a position she has held since 2017. She has worked in education for the last 27 years and has knowledge and experience in all aspects of school leadership.

As superintendent at Lake George Central School District, Rutnik led the inaugural strategic plan resulting in renewed mission, vision, and values for the district. She successfully navigated the district through the pandemic using a three-phased re-entry plan that allowed students to remain in-person for instruction for the school year. She passed five budget cycles and one capital improvement project.



Rutnik holds high expectations for student achievement and understands the importance of serving the “whole child.” She is aligned with Schenectady’s vision and commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusivity. She noted that her greatest accomplishment was re-aligning Lake George’s student support systems to prioritize resources and greater understanding around social emotional learning as well as responsive teaching and learning (RTI).

“I am both humbled and honored to be chosen as the future deputy superintendent at the Schenectady City School District,” said Rutnik. “This leadership position provides me with the opportunity to partner with a superintendent, leadership team and school community who share my core values around equity and excellence. I will strive each and every day to meet my goal around servant leadership – to support the people who support our students, faculty/staff, families and greater community.”

Prior to working as a superintendent, Rutnik served as the director of special education/administrator for student support services in the Niskayuna Central School District for eight years. From 2006-2008, she worked as an academic administrator for special education in the Shenendehowa Central School District. She also worked as a principal for special program at Capital Region BOCES. She began her career in education as a special educator in 1997.

“I want to take this time to express my gratitude to Superintendent Soler and the Schenectady City School District Board of Education for their confidence in choosing me to continue the work that I am deeply committed to, in an organization that is highly committed to my values and purpose around equity, diversity, inclusivity and excellence for every student,” said Rutnik. “I look forward to building connections, trust and collaborative relationships with all stakeholders.” She added, “to say I’m ‘all in’ is an understatement and it is with deep gratitude that I accept this awesome responsibility on behalf of our SCSD students.”

Among her responsibilities as deputy superintendent, Rutnik will provide day-to-day leadership and direction to all departments and ensure that the district’s work is aligned with the strategic objectives and goals. She will serve as a representative of the superintendent and a top adviser on issues within the district.

Rutnik has many professional and community affiliations including Glens Falls YMCA Board Member, Lake George Rotarian Member, Warren County Economic Recovery Task Force, New York Administration for Women in Administration and serves on several WSWHE BOCES committees. She is an active member in both state and national leadership organizations including Association for Supervision and Curriculum and Development, American Association for School Administrators and NYS Council of School Superintendents.

Rutnik earned a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from the State University of New York at Plattsburgh, a Master’s in Special Education from the College of Saint Rose, and both a School Administrator District Administrator (SAS) Certificate and a New York State School District Administrator (SDA) Certificate from the State University at Albany.

## **Carlos M. Cotto, Jr. Ed.D.**

*Assistant Superintendent of Innovation, Equity and Engagement*

Carlos Cotto comes to Schenectady from the Rochester City School District where he is the principal of Enrico Fermi School No. 17. Prior to this role, he served as executive director of health, physical education, and athletics since 2008.

He oversaw all aspects of interscholastic sports, physical education, and health programs for the Rochester City School District, which consists of 52 schools and approximately 30,000 students. Under his leadership, interscholastic programming increased by 25% and Rochester sports produced more than 50 sectional champions.

Cotto has been instrumental in creating partnerships with the city of Rochester and youth community organizations, to increase access and opportunities for youth across the Rochester area.



“More now than ever we have to find innovate ways to keep our scholars engaged in learning throughout their educational journey in order to prepare them for college and/or career opportunities,” said Cotto. “I truly believe that when scholars are provided with opportunities that spark their individual and personal interest, they can accomplish anything. I am excited to lead these efforts and look forward to working with all stakeholders who have a vested interest in the success of our students and their futures.”

Cotto is a member of the Latino Educational Task Force of La Cumbre, a member of the Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents (ALAS), a national organization that advocates for Latinos and Latino educators, regional director and secretary for the New York State Association of Latino Administrators and Superintendents, member of a community Latino Leaders. Roundtable, an active member of Rochester’s My Brother’s Keeper initiative and a member of the New York State Athletic Association and New York State Championship Advisory Committee.

Cotto understands the importance of collaboration and is committed to partnering with the school community. He shares the district’s vision and commitment to equity and engagement and says he is excited to serve Schenectady in this leadership role.

“I believe the community that serves our scholars is rich in resources and it will be extremely important for us to work collaboratively with our community partners and organization to access the resources for our staff, students and families,” said Cotto. “I am excited to bring my 23 years of experience to the Schenectady City School District and I look forward to working closely with district leadership, staff, students, families and the community.” Cotto added, “innovation, equity, engagement can only be successful when we have a collective voice with a focus on our students and their future. We must treat every scholar like they are one of our own and exhaust every effort to ensure that they are ready for college and/or career.”

As assistant superintendent of innovation, equity, and engagement, Cotto will serve as a key member of the superintendent’s cabinet. He will be responsible for implementation of key district-wide priorities and initiatives and serve as a change agent. Among his responsibilities, Cotto will administer the district’s athletic programs, oversee the adult and continuing education programs and work with community groups and organizations. He will establish and lead the implementation of parent centers and a community schools’ strategy. He will work to promote the district’s equity, diversity and inclusion goals, address culture and climate matters, work to recruit and create a pipeline of diverse applications, and lead various initiatives including My Brother’s Keeper.

Cotto earned a Bachelor of Science in Physical Education from Springfield College, Master of Science in Educational Administration from St. John Fisher College, and a Doctoral Degree in Executive Leadership at St. Fisher College.

## **Shaun M. Mason, Ed.D.**

*Assistant Superintendent of Planning and Accountability*



Shaun M. Mason has been working as the manager of school operations support for Baltimore City Public Schools since 2018. He comes to Schenectady with more than 20 years of educational leadership experience. He is detail-oriented and results-driven and has demonstrated success driving program design with a focus on strategic planning and change management. He has an extraordinary skillset and vast experience monitoring and analyzing education data including climate, academic, attendance and the many areas that impact student achievement. He also brings knowledge and experience with budget planning and preparation, leading and facilitating behavior intervention programs including restorative practice, and has served as a lead collaborator with school and district teams to develop, implement and monitor safety plans. Mason has provided technical assistance to schools to resolve issues around transportation and to improve and support the delivery of instruction and climate programs. He has studied root causes of staff absenteeism and implemented strategies for improvement. He is also knowledgeable and has been responsible for ensuring compliance with federal and state laws as well as implementation of board policies.

Mason said he is clear about one thing, he is “about the business of educating children.”

“I want to be a leader in Schenectady because I want to be a support and resource to schools to assist them in changing the lives and trajectory of every student,” said Mason. “My focus is on improving outcomes for children by perusing the data, identifying gaps in education, improving attendance, and reducing the number of core course failures district-wide.”

Prior to working for Baltimore Public Schools, Mason served as principal at Good Shepherd Services, in which he oversaw program design, implementation and evaluation, including grant writing for Title I and Title II projects. He was responsible for crafting curriculum and evaluating outcomes to ensure student needs were being met. From 2012-2016, Mason worked as the coordinator of behavior services for the District Columbia Public Schools. He provided technical support to schools with high populations of students with emotional disabilities and schools with behavioral challenges. He successfully implemented plans, strategies, and protocols, leading to positive outcomes. In 2008-2012, he worked as an assistant principal at District of Columbia Public Schools where attendance increased by 10% under his leadership. He designed and implemented a number of engagement strategies, including the development and mentoring program for 6<sup>th</sup> grade male students called, “The Gentlemen’s Club .”

As assistant superintendent of planning and accountability, Mason’s work will focus on using data and leadership development to close opportunity gaps and eliminate disproportionality at the school level. He will be responsible for analyzing performance measures using multiple sources of data and linking them to curriculum culturally responsible instruction, authentic assessments as well as providing oversight of federal and state accountability requirements related to the Every Child Succeeds Act (ESSA) and other reporting requirements. Mason will report to the superintendent of schools and lead a team of administrators in the functions and responsibilities of the office of planning and accountability which include ensuring alignment between the district’s strategic plan and the schools comprehensive education plans through a lens of equity. He will provide leadership in the area of school improvement planning, administrative professional development and evaluation. He will also provide oversight to central registration, technology, data, home instruction plans, grant program implementation, pre-kindergarten programming, assessment programs and the summer enrichment program.

## Andrea Tote-Freeman

*Assistant Superintendent of Student Support Services*



Andrea Tote-Freeman has been working as district director of pupil personnel services in the Schenectady City School District since 2016 as a member of the district's executive leadership team, leading the pupil services and special education department. In this role, she maintained oversight to a \$51 million budget and to services provided by teachers, nurses, administrators and related service providers. Tote-Freeman has been an advocate for equity in her work including that of policy development and practice. She is a

member of the district's Guiding Coalition Team, leads the district Trauma Sensitive Schools Core Team, is chair of the district's Strategic Plan Family and Community Engagement Pillar Team, oversees the district's Crisis Prevention Team and implements the My Brother's Keeper Mentoring Program. Tote-Freeman also served as the district COVID coordinator throughout the pandemic.

"It is an honor and a privilege to serve in this leadership role. Supporting the social, emotional, developmental, health and wellness of our students is especially critical right now, as we work to ensure students return to a safe, supportive, and welcoming environment," said Tote-Freeman. "The Student Support Services Department is made up of dedicated and skilled professionals who are committed to using a whole child approach, so that each child is healthy, safe, engaged, supported, and challenged."

Tote-Freeman's career in Schenectady started in 2007 as a behavior intervention counselor at Oneida Middle School and then a school counselor at Schenectady High School from 2010-2015. She held administrative intern and interim positions at Schenectady High School and served as a summer school principal and night school principal at Schenectady High School in 2014. She was named assistant director of special education from 2015-2016 before being selected as district director in 2016.

Tote-Freeman embraces challenge, is optimistic and remains committed to the district's vision and work to ensure equity.

"While the last 15 months have brought many challenges, I am optimistic about the future, and I look forward to partnering with all stakeholders as we refine our priorities and goals to ensure students have the support, they need to achieve academic success," said Tote-Freeman.

As assistant superintendent of student support services, Tote-Freeman will serve on the superintendent's cabinet with a focus on providing leadership and support in the areas of pupil personnel, special education, nursing and school-based health centers, private school placements, Medicaid reimbursement, McKinney Vento, behavior support and related programs, school counseling and social emotional development. Tote-Freeman will be responsible for overseeing the coordination and supervision of several services including crisis intervention and, home and hospital instruction. She will also be responsible for ensuring district compliance with state and federal laws.

Tote-Freeman earned a Bachelor of Science in Human Development from SUNY Empire State College, and Master of Science in School Counseling from Sage Graduate School, and a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership (SDL and SBL) from the College of Saint Rose.

## Joseph R. DiCaprio

*Executive Director of Elementary Schools*

Joseph R. DiCaprio has been working as an elementary school principal for the last 13 years. He served as elementary principal in Schenectady from 2008 through 2015, first at Pleasant Valley Elementary School and then at Woodlawn Elementary School beginning in 2012. Since 2015, he has been working as principal of Rosendale Elementary School in the Niskayuna Central School District.

DiCaprio spent most of his educational career in the Schenectady City School District. He started as a first grade teacher in 1999 at Pleasant Valley where he taught first, fourth and fifth grade respectively. In 2007, he was named instructional coach at the school, a year prior to being selected as the school's leader.



DiCaprio, also a graduate of Schenectady High School, said he is excited and looking forward to returning to Schenectady.

“It is with the greatest honor and excitement that I return to the Schenectady City School District,” said DiCaprio. “As a former student in the district, it is my singular goal to give to our students all of the wonderful love, support, and guidance the district gave me as a student years ago.”

In his new role, DiCaprio will serve as a leader to school principals by guiding and helping each increase instructional leadership capacity as a means to improving teaching and learning. The focus of his work will be developing a culture of support as a means to continuous improvement.. Among other things, DiCaprio will work one-on-one and partner with principals to support using data to improve practice, strategies, and results. In his work, he will collaborate with the executive director of secondary schools to ensure a collaborative and seamless transition program for students as they move through the system. Part of his work will also be collaborating with administrators to be sure work is aligned with the district's strategic plan.

“I am looking forward to building off the foundational strength within our elementary school communities, with an aim to lead, guide, and support academic and social emotional growth for all of our children,” said DiCaprio. “Our work with elementary principals, faculty, and staff begins with a focus on fostering positive relationships and trust as we welcome our youngest learners back to our buildings, and I cannot wait to begin this work together.”

Early in his career, DiCaprio spent time as an early reading assessment research assistant at Syracuse University in which he worked on a research project supported by the National Institute of Health.

His volunteer work includes coaching Pop Warner Football in Schenectady, coaching Girls' Softball at JC Little League, working five years with the D.A.R.E. Program in Schenectady, and twelve weeks with a sixth-grade classroom in Cortland.

DiCaprio earned a Bachelor of Science in Elementary Education with a Concentration in English/Cum Laude from the State University of New York College at Cortland, a Master of Science Degree in Educational Administration (K-12) from the State University of New York College at Albany, and is attending the State University of New York College at Plattsburgh to obtain a School District Leadership Certification, which he anticipates will be completed in 2022.