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schools

focus

Preparing World Class Citizens

February, 2009

District to offer full day kindergarten in the fall

Program to provide children early start critical to long term academic excellence

South Colonie Schools will begin offering full-day kindergarten in all five elementary schools next fall to provide the early start which is so critical for long term academic excellence.

The district-wide full day program will replace half day sessions now offered at Forest Park and Veeder Elementary schools, and the Transitional Kindergarten program at Saddlewood, Shaker Road and Roessleville schools. Beginning in September, South Colonie kindergarten students will begin their school day in the morning and end it in the afternoon, just like all of their elementary peers in grades 1-4.

Since 2006, the New York State Board of Regents has proposed and supported a statewide movement toward full day kindergarten for New York State school districts. The Regents believe that requiring children to start school sooner and spend more time in school will help to improve overall student achievement. The strategy is to intervene early and give all students a solid head start toward early literacy.

"The district will have a well defined program with highly qualified teachers in

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Full day kindergarten will debut at all five South Colonie elementary schools in the fall, with increased instructional time, and more opportunities to explore technology.

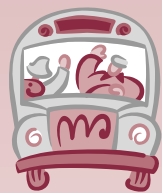
School budgeting in difficult economic times

South Colonie District cuts costs, prepares for less state aid in 2009-2010 school year

Turn on the news or open the newspaper today and you'll see another grim headline about recession, company bailouts and job losses. There is no doubt our nation and state are facing difficult economic times.

Since as much as 20 percent of New York State revenue comes from taxes on Wall Street earnings, the current crisis is hitting New York doubly hard, and schools are right in the middle of it all. New York State is facing a more than \$15 million deficit, and in response, Governor Patterson has proposed reducing state support for schools

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place,” said South Colonie Superintendent Jonathan Buhner. “We know this will be a wonderful program for the children of South Colonie.”

It is important to note that educational research shows that early intervention such as preschool and full day kindergarten can make a significant difference in how well children perform later on in school.

“Kindergarten is not simply play time, social interaction and taking a nap,” said Saddlewood Elementary Principal Ernie Casile. “We integrate academics such as reading, writing, mathematics, language development, communication, and technological literacy into each day.”

There are fiscal advantages to offering full day kindergarten as well. Next school year, South Colonie expects to receive additional “Full Day Kindergarten State Conversion Aid” to move to a full day program. Also, while it is difficult to put an actual number on projected savings, it is important to note that the district anticipates a reduction in long-term program costs due to the early intervention benefits.

According to Tim Backus, Assistant Superintendent for Instruction, there is adequate classroom space in each elementary school to house full day kindergarten thanks to the community’s history of support of South Colonie bond projects. The district will also have to hire minimal additional staff to implement the program. In the meantime, South Colonie has formed a district-wide Full Day Kindergarten Planning Team “to complete the logistics for this very important change,” he said.

Frequently asked questions

Who is eligible for full day kindergarten?

To qualify for kindergarten in South Colonie Central School District next school year, children must be five years of age on or before December 1, 2009.

What are the educational advantages?

Research shows there are numerous educational advantages to offering full day kindergarten. A few include:

- **Helping children with limited or no preschool experience.** For some children, kindergarten is their first school experience. These students quickly gain academic skills in literacy rich classrooms and progress socially as they interact with their peers.
- **Expanding on the preschool experience.** Many children who enter South Colonie kindergarten have already attended a preschool program for one or two years. These students will remain challenged and will grow academically with differentiated instruction designed for their specific needs.
- **Limiting the number of students being referred to long term remediation.** The district’s goal is to have students “on grade level” early and feeling successful about school. This formula is a “win-win” for the students, parents and the community.
- **Increased Instructional time** We all know that instructional time is very important. This full day program will allow our teachers to use additional strategies and implement a comprehensive curriculum.



What can parents expect from the program?

South Colonie parents and guardians should expect a comprehensive curriculum, outstanding activities, literacy rich learning environments, social development opportunities and highly skilled teachers.

What if I have questions about the program?

More information will follow over the next few months and, as always, we invite you to call your local elementary school with additional questions. An informative flier with more frequently asked questions about full day kindergarten can be downloaded from the district web site.

Board of Education seat to remain open until May election

The Board of Education seat made vacant following the resignation of Vernon Fonda will remain open until the May 19 election. Fonda resigned from his board seat in December after 14 years of service, citing personal reasons. His third, five-year term on the nine-member school board is set to expire on June 30.

ARE YOU INTERESTED IN RUNNING FOR THE SOUTH COLONIE BOARD OF EDUCATION?

School board members would be happy to meet with potential candidates to provide an overview of board operations and duties to anyone interested in serving. Contact the District Office for information.

The school board had two other options: they could have chose someone to fill the seat until the next school board election on May 19 or they could have eliminated the seat.

Candidates for the vacant board seat must file petitions with the District Clerk no later than 5 p.m., April 20, at the District Office. The seat now held by Board of Education President James Tim Ryan is also up for election in May. Both seats carry five-year terms beginning July 1, 2009.

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as well as counties, towns, cities, health care agencies and more.

Based on the state budget proposed by Governor Patterson in December, South Colonie is facing a significant state aid funding cut of more than 12 percent of the District's total state aid package or approximately \$2.5 million. While we don't know what state lawmakers will ultimately do with next year's school aid formulas as they debate the state budget in Albany, the District is working from a worse case scenario and building a school budget based on the original numbers proposed by the Governor's Office.

"In spite of these fiscal challenges," said Superintendent Jonathan Buhner, "I want to assure the public that we are doing all we can to control costs and reduce expenditures, while still meeting important educational initiatives for our students."

Like the Governor, the South Colonie administration and Board of Education began work on next year's budget more than a month early, and began implementing cost controls immediately. Some examples of cost controls for the 2009-10 budget include:

- Hiring freeze on current year personnel and staffing reductions for next school year (all positions are being evaluated)
- Reductions in part-time summer employees
- Reduction in teacher's retirement costs and negotiation costs
- Reductions in midday transportation costs
- Reduction in total debt service utilizing capital project funds that came in under-budget
- Conversion of the CCHS library heating system from electric heat to hot water – utility savings
- Additional reductions are also under discussion at this time

The district and Board of Education continue to encourage the South Colonie community to get involved and learn more about the budgeting process by attending one or more public workshops that have been ongoing since January. A schedule was included in the last two issues of the *InFocus*, and is available for download any time on the South Colonie web site. Look for budget updates on the web and in upcoming newsletters prior to the annual school budget vote on Tuesday, May 19.

Lisha Kill collects holiday cards for St. Jude's Ranch

Students from Lisha Kill Middle School collected, counted and cut some 6,000 used holiday cards donated by South Colonie staff, students and the community for St. Jude's Ranch. The children at St. Jude's Ranch will use the donated cards to create new holiday cards next year. The project also helped to save the earth by recycling instead of generating garbage.



District honors Dr. King

Sand Creek student reads essay at King celebration

Dylan Ngu, a sixth grader at Sand Creek Middle School, was an honored guest and participant in this year's New York State Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Observance. Held at Albany's Empire State Plaza, the annual ceremony honors Dr. King's messages of peace and nonviolence through word, art, dance, and music.

Dylan and his classmates wrote essays that required them to reflect on ways to celebrate Dr. King's birthday and legacy in everyday life. Students submitted their essays to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Fine Arts and Essay Display.

After reading thousands of essays from students across the state, representatives from the State Office of General Services were especially impressed with Dylan's, and they invited him to read his essay during the memorial observance.



Math + Art = History at Shaker Road Elementary School

Elizabeth Dollard's fourth grade class at Shaker Road Elementary School discovered that Math + Art = History. They did this during an assignment in which they were given shaded photo areas on one-inch square pieces of paper. Working together, they were then asked to enlarge their mystery square onto an 8-inch x 8-inch piece of paper. Collectively they combined their work on a grid and discovered the fruits of their labor — Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. just in time for his birthday celebration in January.

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Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

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