

South Colonie Schools

EXPECTING EXCELLENCE — DELIVERING RESULTS

A Look at Our Program Effectiveness



The South Colonie Board of Education and staff take their responsibility of providing a quality education for students while maintaining fiscal accountability very seriously. So, what do South Colonie taxpayers get for their tax dollars?

Overall Achievement as a School District

▶ South Colonie is consistently ranked high among 85 school districts in an 11-county area in an analysis performed by the Albany *Business Review* newspaper. These rankings are based on graduation data and results on state tests in English, math, social studies and science.

▶ South Colonie has been named a Blue Ribbon District by *Expansion Magazine* — which ranked it in the top 33 percent of school districts in United States. *Expansion* is a monthly business publication for company executives looking for a place to expand or relocate their facilities. Two elementary schools have also been named Blue Ribbon Schools.

A letter from South Colonie Superintendent Jonathan Buhner

Celebrating our successes as a school district

Dear community members,

As we turn the calendar to 2010, the entire South Colonie community celebrates our successes as a school district and looks ahead to the upcoming initiatives and challenges that we all face together.

With that being said, please take a minute to browse through this special publication which presents some interesting facts on the effectiveness of South Colonie's educational program as well as the specific ways the district is working to be cost effective.

Some of our recent accomplishments include:

- Enhancements to our early intervention program with the expansion of Universal Pre-Kindergarten and the transition to full day kindergarten district-wide;
- A New York State School Report Card which rates South Colonie as being "in good standing" academically, and ongoing implementation of systems to monitor and track the growth and success of every single student;

- continued on page 6



▶ While all students are now required to graduate with a New York State Regents diploma 56 percent of the Class of 2009 earned an Advanced Regents diploma, and 25 percent of the class had a Grade Point Average of 90% or higher.

▶ Nine out of ten graduates continue their education at two- and four-year colleges, earning more than \$1.6 million in scholarship money last year.

▶ Colone Central High School students are well rounded with 75% of students, on average, being involved in athletics and/or student clubs and various organizations. The district takes pride in developing a wide range of opportunities for all students.

College and Work Force Preparation

▶ Pupils start learning about careers in elementary school with exposure to career fairs and Junior Achievement projects. By high school, many of our students have focused their interests by taking upper level courses and Advanced Placement offerings and electives such as Forensic Science, Biotechnology, Aerospace Engineering, CISCO Networking, Computer Integrated Manufacturing and Web Page Design.

▶ South Colonie pupils are offered opportunities to earn a number of college credits while in high school by taking classes in English, Foreign Language, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies through the State University at Albany, Hudson Valley Community College and the College of Saint Rose. The District continues to develop a variety of articulation agreements to support and assist our students and their families.

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More Examples of Program Effectiveness

- ▶ Curricula in general engineering and biomedical engineering are offered through the nationally recognized pre-engineering program Project Lead the Way.
- ▶ CCHS students continue to be very competitive at US FIRST Robotics — a national event where young people solve engineering design problems.
- ▶ In May of 2009, 179 CCHS students completed 245 Advanced Placement courses with 76 percent earning a score of three or higher on their AP exams.
- ▶ South Colonie Foreign Language courses begin as early as fifth grade, and the high school offers Foreign Language courses in French, Spanish, Italian and Japanese.

Beyond the books

- ▶ South Colonie faculty continue to set the bar high with many authoring books and curriculum material, lecturing at national and state conventions, and participating in enrichment activities they share with their students after returning from Japan, South America and the Galapagos Islands to name a few.
- ▶ South Colonie educators have been named Teachers of the Year by business and professional organizations for leading and mentoring today's youth, while others have been featured as Educators of the Week by local media outlets. One teacher earned the prestigious Presidential Award for Excellence in Science, Mathematics and Engineering Mentoring in 2009.
- ▶ South Colonie student athletes excel on the field and in the classroom — with many of its teams capturing Sectional titles while being named New York State Scholar Athletes with their 90% or better academic averages. Additionally, the District receives awards on a regular basis for overall sportsmanship.
- ▶ South Colonie pupils benefit from a wide range of fine arts programs such as the award-winning Line & Cue theater group, performances in state bands and orchestras, and having artists regularly featured in local art shows.
- ▶ Community service and education go hand-in-hand in South Colonie. Each year, the district's Stuff the Bus with Toys for Tots program helps the U.S. Marine Corps provide gifts for needy children throughout the Capital District and the North Country during the holiday season. Schools and school organizations have also been honored for their Character Education efforts to assist the community in events such as the Penny Harvest program. Roessville Elementary was recently named a Capital Region School of Character by the Sage Colleges, and Shaker Road Elementary a "Champion for Children" by the Northeast Parent and Child Society.
- ▶ South Colonie recognizes and welcomes its senior citizens by offering enhanced STAR reducing school property taxes for qualified individuals, offering evening courses at reduced rates, providing free admission to student athletics, plays, dinner theaters, concerts and more.
- ▶ Some 50 graduates have been inducted into the Colonie Central High School Hall of Fame — established in 1994 to honor South Colonie alumni who serve as role models and a source of inspiration for our students based on their numerous accomplishments after graduation.





South Colonie Schools

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More Examples of Program Effectiveness

Building Strong Bodies and Healthy Minds for Life

- ▶ The school district's mission includes fostering the personal growth of all pupils and giving them lifelong skills that can keep them healthy and enrich their lives.
- ▶ South Colonie Food Services has been honored with a New York State OGS Best Practices Award in recognition of the district's innovative and creative use of government commodity foods in the school meal program.
- ▶ The District has expanded its Physical Education program meeting all state requirements. Additionally, the District has implemented a Physical Education/Wellness report which assists students in the monitoring of their own fitness.

Providing Safe Schools

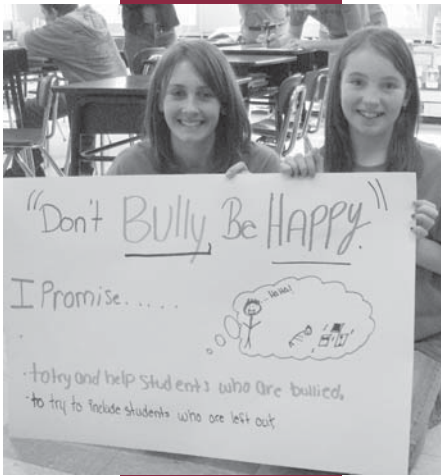
- ▶ Safety is a theme that runs throughout our K-12 school programs. This includes bus safety, bicycle safety, offering Driver's Education, providing year-long, research-based anti-bullying programs, activities and campaigns, promoting police interaction in our schools including a comprehensive DARE program and School Resource Officers at the high school and middle schools, and providing carefully thought-out substance abuse prevention lessons. This proactive approach continues to benefit South Colonie students.
- ▶ The District has an active Safe Schools Committee in place which monitors safety procedures and emergency plans for all of its schools and facilities.
- ▶ South Colonie school bus drivers have been honored for driving safety and acts of heroism including recent awards from the Albany County Traffic Safety Division and the Hudson Valley Chapter of the Automobile Association of America.

Strong Communications

- ▶ South Colonie has implemented a district-wide emergency alert information system that automatically notifies parents by telephone in the event of an unforeseen school closing.
- ▶ As part of its participation in the BOCES Communications Service, the district is redesigning/modernizing its web site this year at no extra cost to South Colonie taxpayers.
- ▶ The District continually works to keep its parents and residents informed through a variety of timely, award-winning community newsletters and web site information.
- ▶ The District continues to transition to electronic communications to reduce expenses.

A Friend to the Environment

- ▶ The EPA honored South Colonie this year for reducing greenhouse gas emissions through superior energy management.
- ▶ Veeder Elementary School was the first school in the state and 10th school in the nation to achieve designation as a "Certified Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary."
- ▶ South Colonie school buses were one of the first in the area to participate in the American Lung Association's "anti idling" campaign to lower exhaust emissions.



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Examples of Cost Effectiveness

Each year, South Colonie dissects the budget line by line to ensure it is operating as cost effectively as possible.

Controlling expenses also means seeking grants and donations where possible and adhering to comprehensive procedures to prevent misuse of funds. The Business Office takes pride in its internal controls which track the use of school funds, while meeting numerous auditing and accountability standards.

Energy & Utilities Savings

- ▶ Since 2001, South Colonie has had an aggressive energy conservation program in place and has exceeded its energy savings projections, avoiding more than \$2.7 million in energy usage.
- ▶ South Colonie has an Energy Educator who continually monitors energy usage and researches the latest technology available to keep costs under control. As a result, six schools have earned an Energy Star label from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) — signifying that they operate more energy efficiently than 75 percent of the schools in the United States.
- ▶ South Colonie is among 18 school districts, businesses and organizations recognized by the EPA for achieving significant energy savings and leading their fields in responding to the agency's Energy Star Building Challenge. The District has been used as an example at statewide conferences presentations.
- ▶ The district capitalized on additional New York State Excel Aid available to schools in 2006 to replace antiquated roofs and approximately 35-year-old school boilers and heating systems. Again, this was done to make the buildings more energy efficient, thereby lowering long-term districtwide utility costs.
- ▶ Installing energy-efficient, auto-on, auto-off lighting fixtures in many schools and offices has substantially lowered lighting costs.
- ▶ The District uses a computer-automated system to monitor and control heating and lighting in all of its schools, and expects to continue modernizing this equipment in future years. The system is zoned for specific rooms and can be controlled from a computer at the District Office and from remote locations if needed.

Salaries and Benefits

- ▶ The District continues to focus on initiatives while finding efficiencies in scheduling and operations.
- ▶ South Colonie uses BOCES services when it is cost-effective to do so. This can be significantly less expensive than hiring people outright, particularly since the District is reimbursed for a portion of the cost of the cooperative services through state aid.

▶ Negotiated changes to the District's health insurance policies are saving South Colonie a significant amount of money. South Colonie employees and retirees also contribute to their health insurance costs.

▶ The District obtains its insurance through NYSIR — New York Schools Insurance Reciprocal. NYSIR uses only "experience ratings" of school districts, which in turn, saves school districts money on insurance premiums.

▶ The District's attention to safety policies and potential safety risk has reduced the premiums it pays on general liability insurance for many years. The district also reduced premiums by sharing risk management ideas and practices with other districts statewide.

▶ South Colonie saves money through its participation in a 15-school-district consortium that buys indemnity plan health insurance as a group. Self funding of Worker Compensation and unemployment benefits also results in savings.

Transportation Costs

- ▶ The District purchases its diesel fuel and gasoline for its school buses and vehicles through New York State contracts, saving about \$1 per gallon.
- ▶ The district has maintained a yearly bus replacement schedule, taking aging school buses out of service and replacing them with new vehicles. This helps spread the purchase price out over a number of years, maximizes trade-in value and state aid, and controls repair and maintenance costs associated with older vehicles. We thank the community for its annual support of our bus replacement plan.
- ▶ Public Information, Hazard Communications training, and instruction for specific special needs students are purchased cooperatively through BOCES when it is cost effective.

2010-2011 District Budget Development

If you are a parent, a senior citizen or just a concerned resident, the South Colonie Board of Education wants you to get involved in your schools.

The school board invites you to participate in the annual budget development process and be a part of the planning for the 2010-2011 school year. It's easy ... just attend one or all of our budget workshops and let your voice be heard. A schedule is listed on the right, with all meetings leading up to the annual School Budget Vote on May 18th. At these meetings, you will be treated to an informative presentation on various budget topics and have an opportunity to comment and ask questions.

So please help spread the word and help make the budget development process a real community affair!

All meetings are held at the South Colonie District Office with the exception of the Special Open Budget Discussions/Q & A sessions and the May 4 public hearing.

2010-11 Budget Calendar

| DATE/TIME | TOPIC |
|------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Tuesday, January 12 7:00 p.m. | Transportation, Operations and Maintenance, and Secured Youth Detention Facility |
| Tuesday, January 19 7:30 p.m. | Regular Board Meeting |
| Tuesday, February 9 7:30 p.m. | Regular Board Meeting including the following budget presentations: <i>Support Services</i> — Board of Education and Central Office expenses, Public Information/Printing/Postage, Legal Expenses, Insurance, Debt Service, Interfund Transfers, Continuing Ed, and Interscholastic Athletics |
| Thursday, February 11 7:00 p.m. | Special Budget Meeting — Open discussion with Q & A Session held at Veeder Elementary School Cafetorium |
| Thursday, February 25 7:00 p.m. | Special Budget Meeting — Open discussion with Q & A Session held at Saddlewood Elementary School Cafetorium |
| Tuesday, March 2 7:30 p.m. | Regular Board Meeting <i>Topics</i> — Special Ed and Pupil Personnel Services |
| Thursday, March 4 7:00 p.m. | Special Budget Meeting — Open discussion with Q & A Session held at Shaker Road Elementary Library |
| Tuesday, March 9 7:00 p.m. | <i>Fringe Benefits & Instructional Program</i> Enrollment Projections, Instructional Staffing, Support Staffing, Textbooks, Curriculum Development, Staff Development, Library & Media Technology, Building Budgets, Summer School, Central Avenue Learning Center (CALC) and Information Technology |
| Tuesday, March 16 7:30 p.m. | Regular Board Meeting (1st draft of the Budget) |
| Tuesday, March 23 7:00 p.m. | Budget Meeting/Work Session/Budget Adjustments |
| Tuesday, March 30 7:30 p.m. | Regular Board Meeting Budget Review — Second budget draft presented |
| Monday, April 19 | Last day to file petition for School Board member |
| Tuesday, April 20 7:30 p.m. | Regular Board Meeting — Budget Adoption |
| Tuesday, May 4 7:00 p.m. | Public Hearing on recommended Budget – Saddlewood Elementary School Cafetorium Regular Board Meeting — 7:30 p.m. Copies of Budget materials also available in schools |
| Tuesday, May 18 | District Budget Vote & School Board Elections 11:00 a.m. - 9:00 p.m. Voting at all five district elementary schools ONLY |

Volunteers needed at the polls, call 869-3576, ext. 2443

Jonathan W. Buhner
Superintendent of Schools

Tim Backus
Assistant Superintendent for Instruction

Beverly Miller
Assistant Superintendent/
Management Services

David Seaver
Director of Human Resources

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A letter from South Colonie Superintendent Jonathan Buhner

- continued from page 1

- Comprehensive programs which promote good character in our young people across all grade levels.

As a District we continue to prioritize and focus on a few specific initiatives:

- Early intervention services to ensure student success from the start;
- Continuation of tracking individual student growth;
- Enhanced professional development for South Colonie instructional staff members;
- Research-based programs focusing on Character Education and the celebration of diversity;
- Continued monitoring, evaluation and maintenance of your public facilities;
- Unveiling of new parent communications/information tools with the redesign of the district web site along with the implementation of a new emergency notification system.

Finally, as we engage in another challenging budget development process, we will continue to evaluate all facets of our operations to provide quality programs at a reasonable cost. Many difficult decisions will have to be made as we build the 2010-2011 budget and we certainly welcome input from our community members. We invite you to attend our budget workshop sessions (*a schedule is on page 5*).

With New York State facing another difficult budget year it is important that we all work together to find a responsible

One of the strengths of South Colonie is the quality of its schools and the commitment to making sure that all students are prepared to compete anywhere and find success in the 21st century.

budget balance which maintains critical programs for our children and keeps the District moving forward in a positive direction. One of the strengths of South Colonie is the quality of its schools and the commitment to making sure that our students are prepared to compete anywhere and find success in the 21st century.

As the budget process moves ahead leading up to our school budget vote on May 18th, we will be providing you with continuous updates and additional information on the budget in the *In Focus* community newsletter and on our district web site at www.southcolonieschools.org. If you have additional questions please call the District Office at 869-3576.

Our Board of Education, administration, teachers and support staff members are committed to providing the quality programs you expect at a cost the community can support.