

Seneca High School
COMMUNITY NEWSLETTER
Fall 2019

Board of Education Corner:

Make no mistake about it--the number one duty of a school district is to contribute to and provide opportunities for student success. Having a well-trained expert staff is perhaps the primary way in which Seneca High School can contribute to student success. Over the last four years, approximately one-third of our veteran teachers have retired. While we said goodbye to outstanding educators, our hiring protocols have brought to the district great new teachers whose efforts are yielding phenomenal results. Another way school districts contribute to student success is by providing a safe and well-maintained learning environment. We offer our students a first-class campus, and as a board, we are committed to maintaining our wonderful building and exemplary grounds according to established high standards. Lastly, a third way in which schools provide opportunities for success is by offering a top-notch curriculum. We are proud of our educational programming, which provides students of varying interests and aptitudes with a solid core curriculum, courses in music and art, career and technical education (vocational programming), and opportunities to earn college credit. Thus, the administration and staff continually tweak course offerings as a result of our belief in the continuous improvement of the curriculum.

For students to be truly successful, however, schools cannot do it alone. Student success is the product of an equal partnership among school, home, and most importantly, the student. This partnership is like a three-legged stool. All legs must be working for the stool, or in this case, the student, to function well. So, without equally contributing legs, the stool falls. Similarly, we have found that when parents set expectations for their children to attend school every day, give great effort in their schoolwork, complete assignments on time, and civilly conduct themselves, students can maximize their learning opportunities. While the home sets expectations for success, ultimately the student's effort and perseverance yields the greatest results. When students give school all they have, they enjoy the fruits of their labor, regardless of whether their plans include college, work, trade school, or the military.

The Board of Education of Seneca High School takes its responsibility to promote student success very seriously. We work closely with the administration to continuously improve all aspects of the district and appreciate the outstanding support we receive from our community. On behalf of the entire SHS Board of Education, we wish you a happy and safe holiday season.

Ron Frye
SHS Board President

From the Desk of SHS Superintendent, Dr. James Carlson

Greetings from the Superintendent's Office! Seneca High School has much for which to be proud. We have wonderful facilities, strong finances, great kids and families, a supportive community, visionary school board leadership, and an outstanding faculty and staff. Just as in life, every school year has its bumps along the way, but as I reflect upon what defines SHS, the picture is always a rosy one.

At SHS, we have been blessed with a great bunch of educators. These folks are very good. Period. End of sentence. Despite their prowess, and whether veteran or new teacher, as a collective, they continue to make great efforts to improve professionally. Quite rightly, the focus of their efforts is the academic achievement of our students. The world is changing, and with it, the demands placed on schools. No longer does a high school diploma guarantee post-secondary success, or is schooling merely about preparing students for the ability to regurgitate information

that has been shared by a teacher. A high school diploma is a milestone, not a finish line, and it must represent much more than the number of credits a student has earned. An SHS diploma must communicate to colleges, trade schools, the military, and employers that our graduates are capable of thinking critically and solving problems, teamwork, creativity, professional communication, and other competencies, all of which demonstrate their readiness for college or a career. Yes, you read that correctly. Whether students plan to attend college or enter a career, they need to demonstrate mastery of the SAME set of standards.

To that end, this year SHS has engaged the wisdom of a consultant to assist us in the critical work of ensuring that what we “say” we are in the Seneca Way is actually what we are doing each day. Hard at work since the year began, SHS teachers have pored over the questions on the PSAT/NMSQT/SAT (sometimes called the SAT Suite of Assessments) to analyze the content and level of thinking assessed, as well as our student performance. The purpose of this analysis is to identify gaps in our curriculum and instruction and to ascertain the present achievement level of our students in order to make appropriate changes and interventions that support student success.

This exercise is not about improving SAT test scores or making students better test takers; instead, it is about providing an educational program that best prepares our students for their futures. Because the SAT is based upon historically acceptable standards, we have focused our attention on trying to better understand how to incorporate those standards in our curriculum. To do so, our teachers have to truly grasp the types of thinking, vocabulary level, content mastery, and reading level required of the SAT Suite of Assessments.

If you have ever wondered what teachers do during those early dismissals each Wednesday, you now have your answer. They are working hard to improve teaching and learning so that all students have the best opportunity for future success. I applaud our teaching staff and their efforts to continue to do what is best for ALL of our students.

Finally, as we enter the holiday season, we do so with a heart of gratitude. We are thankful for the Seneca High School Community and the opportunities available to students, staff, and community members. On behalf of the SHS Board of Education, Administration, Faculty, and Staff, I thank you for all you do for students of Seneca High School and wish you a safe and happy holiday season.

Message from our CSBO, Dan Stecken

Each year, schools throughout Illinois present their annual tax levy at their December Board of Education meeting. Seneca High School District 160 is no different. Beginning in December 2013, SHS reached a seven-year agreement with Exelon on the valuation of LaSalle Station. The agreement runs from levy years 2013 to 2019. Within this agreement, the taxable value of LaSalle Station was agreed upon, as was the pledge to maintain a constant tax rate of \$1.79838.

In the 2017 levy tax year, the station was valued at \$430 million. In the 2018 levy tax year, the station value was \$435 million. Finally, in the 2019 levy tax year, the station will be valued at \$460 million. Per our agreement and in accordance with the Seneca High School Board of Education's decision, as the taxable value of the station changes, SHS must ensure that the tax rate remains at \$1.79838 for all taxpayers. To accomplish this goal, Seneca Township High School District 160 engages in a process of abatement.

The abatement process is nothing more than the reduction of our levy after the preliminary extension (the actual tax dollars the district is to receive) from the County Clerk. Because of the increase in the taxable value of LaSalle Station this year, we will be asking for more than 5% of the previous year's extension. In fact, the actual levy increase will be around 12%, necessitating a Truth-in-Taxation hearing, which was advertised in both the Ottawa and Morris newspapers. Fear not; before you receive your tax bill, we will abate our request down to the \$1.79838 as we have done each year in the seven-year agreement with Exelon.

As is our practice, we adopted a budget for the 2020-2021 school year, which corresponds with our levy request. At this time, the budget is a "big picture budget," and we will continue to tweak it until it is amended in September 2021. The good news is that the budget is a balanced one, and we have every reason to believe it will remain balanced through the September adoption as well.

From the Desk of SHS Principal, Marty Voiles

Seneca High School is extremely happy to announce that four new teachers and one guidance counselor have joined the SHS staff for the 2019-2020 school year. SHS continues its most recent trend of replacing retiring staff, which gives SHS a unique and exciting new look. Here are the newest additions to the SHS staff.

Mr Brian Holman, Math Department: Mr. Holman comes to SHS after spending the previous (11) school years teaching at Newark High school and then at Spring Valley Hall. Mr. Holman teaches Algebra IA and Algebra III at SHS, and he is currently an assistant girls' basketball coach and will be head girls' softball coach in the spring.

Mr. Jonathan Ruby – Science Department: Mr. Ruby arrives at SHS after spending his first year of teaching at Crete-Monee High School. Mr. Ruby, as a member of our Science Department, teaches Chemistry, Honors Chemistry I & II, and Physics.

Mr. Blake Slutz – Special Education: Mr. Slutz is an addition to our Special Education Department. Mr. Slutz comes to SHS after teaching at Bloomington Junior High School for the past two years, as well as spending the 2016-2017 school year teaching at LaSalle-Peru Township High School. Mr. Slutz is also an assistant coach for the Scholastic Bowl Team.

Mr. Jace Walsh – Social Studies Department: Mr. Walsh is a 2011 graduate of Seneca High School and comes back home to teach here after spending the last three years teaching and coaching at Coal City High School. Mr. Walsh teaches World Studies and U.S. History in the Social Studies Department. Mr. Walsh is also an assistant boys' basketball coach.

Mrs. Jessica Holman – Guidance Department: Mrs. Holman joins the SHS Guidance Department after spending five years as a counselor at Princeton High School. Mrs. Holman is familiar with SHS as she served as a college intern here during the 2013-2014 school year. Mrs. Holman is also involved with our Student Ambassadors program.

We are thrilled to have these folks join our staff, and we look for them to be strong leaders in our building for years to come. GO IRISH!

From the Desk of Assistant Principal, Mike Coughlin

Where does the time go? It's hard to believe that by the time you are reading this, we will have hopefully eaten or maybe tucked away all the Halloween candy; we will have celebrated Thanksgiving; and we soon will be approaching the winter holiday season.

First, I want to take this opportunity to remind everyone of one of the biggest factors in student success-- school attendance. Seneca High School students got off to a really nice start with attendance this first semester. During the 1st quarter, 42% of our students achieved perfect attendance. I can't stress enough how important high attendance factors into students reaching their full potential. Of the students who didn't achieve perfect attendance, one hundred and ninety-six students missed between ½ and 3 ½ days of school. Another positive stat for attendance the first quarter was that the Junior Class had the highest (96.8%) daily attendance rate. Congrats to the juniors!

Naturally, my concern heightens when a student misses four or more days of school during the first quarter. Once a student misses that much school, it results in a pattern of perceived acceptable behavior. I would be disappointed for any of our students to leave Seneca High School thinking they need only show up 80% of the time to their job. Don't get me wrong; I know that some absences can't be avoided. Yet, if we want our kids to reach their full potential and be ready for success, and I'm not sure why anyone wouldn't want that, attendance has to be a top priority.

To conclude, my opinion is that we have seen this positive trend of higher attendance so far because of final exam exemptions for the 2019-20 school year. We have used student attendance as one factor in determining which students can be exempt from their finals at the end of a semester. This has always been the case for the Senior Class, but we have extended the exemptions (on a limited basis) to the other three classes. Regardless of the reason for better attendance, it's an important trend to see, and I'm proud of the efforts of the SHS families and students in making school an everyday expectation.

From the Desk of School Psychologist, Jill Rockrohr

During the 2018-19 school year, Seneca High School began implementing co-taught sections of core courses. Co-taught classes consist of two teachers, one general education and one special education, teaching together in the same general education class. In this type of classroom, both teachers work with all students and are responsible for the learning of each student in the class. Last year, two sections of co-taught English III were offered. This year, we were able to expand our offerings to include Algebra 1A, Integrated Physical Science, English II, and two sections of English I.

There are many misconceptions regarding what co-teaching looks like, as well as who co-teaching benefits. First, in a co-taught setting, the special education co-teacher does not serve a supporting role in the classroom; both teachers share responsibility for the planning and delivery of classroom lessons. In addition, co-taught sections of a course are no less rigorous than traditional sections of the same course. Co-taught classes provide benefits for all students in the classroom, not only students with disabilities or students who are at-risk academically. However, it is important to note that co-taught classes may not be an appropriate setting for every student with a disability, depending on that student's individual needs.

There are numerous benefits of co-teaching for both students and teachers. One major benefit for all students is a reduced student-to-teacher ratio, which sets the tone for a positive climate for learning and reduced discipline problems. In addition, co-teaching allows for more student involvement and increased opportunities for both enrichment and re-teaching. For students who receive special education services, co-teaching provides access to the general education curriculum with a teacher who is highly qualified in the course content, while also providing greater access to accommodations and modifications in the general education setting. Inclusion of students with disabilities within the general education setting provides a natural environment for students to practice adaptive and social-emotional skills, while reducing stigma surrounding disabilities. Benefits for teachers include opportunities for shared planning, shared delivery of instruction, and shared reflection. Co-teaching allows special education teachers the opportunity to increase their content-area knowledge, while general education teachers strengthen their ability to adapt lessons, assignments, and assessments to meet the needs of all students.

I am pleased that our implementation of this initiative has been met with success, thanks to the hard work of our teachers and the careful scheduling of classes by our school counselors. In the short term, we will continue to be responsive to the changing needs of our student population in determining where co-taught classes would be most beneficial. Looking to the future, we hope to expand co-taught class options for students while maintaining best practices for student instruction. We will continue to cultivate a climate of Inclusivity in our school, in which all teachers share accountability for all students.

Message from SRO, Ken Sangston

This past summer I became a Certified School Resource Officer by the National Association of School Resource Officers. This course lasted a week and provided me with additional tools to be an effective SRO to the students at Seneca High School. In August, I met with Dr. Carlson to establish some goals for this school year. During this meeting, he informed me that in addition to being the School Resource Officer, he wanted me to take over Safety Services for the District. I knew this would bring on many welcomed challenges, and I was eager to get started. So, I have been busy the past several months updating emergency procedures, training staff, performing drills, changing past practices, and updating additional procedures.

For example, we performed and then objectively evaluated our building and bus evacuation drills in August, along with our lockdown, fire, and tornado drills. These evaluations brought about changes in the way we protect ourselves in the event of a tornado. Building plans were reviewed, and it was determined that the safest place in the building is the girl's locker room, which is a concrete structure within the building and over 6,000 square feet in size. We performed a tornado drill to evaluate this new plan, and we were able to fit over 300 students and staff comfortably inside the structure in a timely manner; another drill will be performed before spring.

In addition, in October, we were able to make big strides in how we respond to school safety. The school district sent me to instructor training last school year to become an ALICE instructor, which is an acronym for Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, and Evacuate. This is option-based training on how we, as a district, respond to an active emergency. I trained all SHS faculty, staff, and administration in a two-day period to become ALICE certified. In December, I will be training our police department to become ALICE certified. They will also be performing scenario-based drills to better respond to active emergencies at SHS. As the SRO, I will always be looking for additional ways to better Seneca High School through policy, procedures, and training in school safety.

In the last newsletter, I reported on the vaping trend among teens. I am sure you have seen the health risks and attention this issue has been getting in the media, which has highlighted the severe effects vaping has on our teens. The Illinois Department of Public Health has named vaping a health crisis in Illinois. I encourage you to speak with your teen about the dangers of vaping. We continue to be

proactive at SHS to educate our students about the dangers of vaping and have been working hard to prevent any vaping at school.

Lastly, if you have a teen who drives to school, please speak with him/her about safe driving habits, not only to and from school, but on campus too, especially as the winter approaches. The maintenance staff does an outstanding job of clearing the parking lots, but speed is a factor in stopping distance. We had several snow related traffic crashes on campus last winter, so we want to reduce this and prevent any unnecessary injuries.

Community Connections

FCCLA's community service focus has been in full swing already this year. Our goal is to help others all year! In October was a busy month, we started with a group trip to Six Flags Frightfest to kick off the year! We then made a donation for the Volley for a Cure event here at SHS. FCCLA members also sold Irish Strong hoodies to raise funds for the PINK HEALS Organization. Many in our community have been impacted by cancer and we want to do our part in supporting those battling this disease. This month we also took part in the SHS Music Department Truck or Treat event with many other organizations. The turnout was great and such a fun time! In November, many of the FCCLA members and NHS members helped at Milton Popes Concession stand. Members also created and ran the game stations at the Seneca Grade School Family Reading Night. December is a busy month, but Seneca Grade school asked us to bake dozens of cutout cookies for the SGS Family Christmas party, we were happy to help! We are looking forward to organizing many more events this spring!

HOSA

Do you know how important it is to donate blood? Our HOSA members do! Approximately 36,000 units of red blood cells are needed every day in the U.S and one donation can potentially save up to three lives. HOSA has partnered with Heartland Blood centers to host a spring and fall blood drive. HOSA members are responsible for the recruitment of students (16 yrs and older) and staff to register to give blood. At the drive Senior HOSA members are responsible for making sure the drive runs smoothly and that our donors stay hydrated and offer healthy snacks. At our last blood in October we were able to collect 67 units of blood, that adds up to 201 lives saved. Please consider donating blood at one of our drives or at a drive local to you.

Tri-County Leadership Conference 2019

The Tri-County Leadership Conference was held on Friday, October 18, at Celebrations in Utica, Illinois. Ted Wiese, the keynote speaker, presented a Dynamic Leadership & Team Building Program. The students who attended worked in small groups to discuss and share leadership topics with representatives from other conference schools.

2019 Dar Recipient:

Trevor Till was recently honored with the Daughters of the American Revolution (**DAR**) Good Citizen Award for Seneca High School. He is the son of Lisa Moore of Mazon and Bob Till of Seneca.

The Daughters of the American Revolution Good Citizen Award honors an outstanding senior who exhibits the qualities of dependability, leadership, service and patriotism. The selection was voted on by the faculty and staff. Trevor serves as the senior class president, Drama Club President, Vice President of TRUST (Teens Resisting Unhealthy Social Temptations), and Vice President of Spanish Club. He is in National Honor Society, Track, Cross Country, Conservation in Action, Student Ambassador, and the

Speech Team. Due to his leadership qualities, Trevor attended HOBY and Boy's State. Trevor is also very talented musically-he is in Band, Choir, Wind Ensemble, Chamber Choir, and participates in school musicals and plays.

Being the recipient of the DAR Good Citizen Award, Trevor has completed an essay that will have the opportunity to advance through state and national levels of judging. The DAR Good Citizens program and scholarship contest is sponsored by the Illini Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution.

HOBY – Hugh O'Brien Youth Leadership

Miranda Araujo and Emma Smith, Seneca High School sophomores, have been selected to represent Seneca Township High School at the 2020 HOBY Leadership Seminar.

The Leadership Seminar is designed for high school sophomores to recognize their leadership talents and apply them in becoming effective, ethical leaders in their home, schools, work-place and community. The students will participate in hands-on leadership activities and meet state leaders in such areas as business, government, education, media and the non-profit sector.

Each September, every accredited public, private and charter high school in the country is invited to select and register outstanding sophomores as representatives to their local state seminar. Currently, nearly 9,000 sophomores, representing as many high schools nationwide, attend HOBY Leadership Seminars annually.

Miranda Araujo is the daughter of Martin Garcia and Miriam Garibay of Marseilles, and Emma Smith is the daughter of David Smith of Sandwich and Lurelda Maier-Lorntz of Seneca. All Seneca High School sophomore students were invited to pick up applications and submit essays for the opportunity to attend this seminar. Congratulations to Miranda and Emma on their accomplishment!

Highlights from our Media Center & Maintenance Department:

Gale Research Database available to students 24/7

The students here at SHS are very fortunate to have unlimited access to a resource that can assist them with finding supporting documents for all of their class assignments. Seneca High School provides access to these valuable resources using funds that are budgeted for the school's library media program. Grants are also used to purchase e-reference materials to expand the Gale Virtual Reference Library each year. Parents can encourage their children to use this resource during homework sessions. The Gale Database App is accessible via any internet connection to the school's website, select the Media Center tab, and then scroll down to the Gale link. Students also have access to the Gale platform through the Student App on their school issued laptops. There are instructions on the Media Center page of the school's website on how to download the Gale App to most mobile devices. Students must use the password provided by the school librarian to access the databases outside of the school's network.

What are Gale Databases? Gale's In Context suite combines easily searchable, mobile-responsive functionality with authoritative and current digital content that spans core subjects and develops future-ready skills. Each subject-specific resource uses eye-catching topic overview pages to bring together curriculum-aligned nonfiction materials in a variety of digital formats. Users can search articles, videos, charts, images, infographics, and more to keep them engaged at school, at home, or on the go. (Gale 2019)

What are some of the built-in features?

Translation Tools: Accommodate diverse backgrounds with ReadSpeaker text-to-speech technology, allowing users to hear content read aloud. Content and tools can be translated into over 20 languages.
Citation Tools: Integrated directly into the user's workflow, MLA, APA, and Chicago-style citations are

supported. Formatted citations can be easily imported from single or multiple documents to services like **EasyBib** or **NoodleTools**.

Highlights and Notes: Organize, save, and share highlights and annotations within content. (Gale 2019)

Any parent or student interested in learning more about the Gale Database resources can contact the school's Library Director mediacenter@senecahs.org

Seneca High School is fortunate to have an outstanding Maintenance Department. Led by Maintenance Supervisor, Barry Buchanan, the maintenance crew is comprised of Grounds Keeper, Joe Kern; Building Technician, Bob Laycoax; and part-time Building Technician, Greg Anderson. These four talented individuals are charged with the responsibility of keeping the district's buildings, building systems, and grounds performing optimally, in compliance with Health-Life-Safety standards, and safe for students and staff.

Because of their considerable skills, the district has saved thousands of dollars annually by not having to outsource work. For example, in 2019, the district embarked on an energy savings project partially funded by ComEd's Energy Efficiency Program. To date, Seneca High School has received more than \$15,000 in funding from ComEd for indoor LED lighting fixtures and retrofits. While the funding helps significantly, even more important to the success of the project is that our staff expertly plans and performs the work.

At SHS, we take great pride in our buildings and grounds and realize how blessed we are to have such a great facility for our students, staff, and community. During this season of joy and thanksgiving, we are especially thankful to have a maintenance crew whose stewardship of the SHS campus is beyond exceptional. They are Irish Pride!

Special Award Winners

In the beginning of December Seneca High School received word that 8 students from the Class of 2020 were selected as **Illinois State Scholars** for the 2019 -2020 school year.

Standardized test scores and performance-based academic data reported by our high school are key factors in the formula used to determine if students are eligible. The following Information is used by the Illinois Student Assistance Commission as consideration for State Scholar eligibility:

1. A student must be a U.S. citizen or an eligible non-citizen.
2. A student must be a resident of Illinois and attend an approved high school.
3. A student must take the ACT or SAT between September 1 and June 30 (by the end of the third semester before high school graduation).
4. A student must perform in the top one-half of his/her high school class at the end of the third semester prior to graduation and/or score in the 95th percentile on the ACT or SAT assessment.

On behalf of the Board of Education, Administration, and Staff of Seneca High School, we would like to congratulate this year's recipients!

The Seneca High School Board of Education would like to wish you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy new Year!