

2023 Fall Newsletter

Message From Superintendent, Dan Stecken:

Each year in our Fall newsletter, we have written to you about our tax levy process. The process can be confusing and we always want to be as transparent as possible with our community members. Every year, schools throughout the state of Illinois, including Seneca High School, present their annual **TAX LEVY** at the December Board of Education meeting, as required by law. Here at Seneca High School, our Board of Education begins this discussion in October at our first Finance Committee meeting, and then discusses the tax levy openly in October, November, and our December public meetings. If you have kept your property tax bill records over the past decade, you can see that Seneca Township High School District 160's property tax rate has been reduced the past decade from roughly \$1.80 to \$1.70, representing a significant decrease. Additionally, we carry **ZERO** taxable bonds or interest (which would raise your tax rate) for debt.

A tax **LEVY** is a request for tax dollars. The levy is determined by the simple equation: Tax Rate x EAV (Equalized Assessed Valuation of your property) = Tax Dollars Requested. Within your levy, there are multiple taxing districts that comprise the total tax dollars requested for all taxing bodies. For example, Seneca HS District 160 taxing body represented \$1.72838 of total \$7.129 in last year's total taxable rate.

Arriving at the \$1.70838 tax rate listed above can be a bit confusing, so I would like to remind you of one of the extra steps Seneca High School takes in the levy process called **ABATEMENT**. Annually, in December, featured in The Ottawa Times, you may read that the district's tax dollar request is over 5% higher than last year's property tax levy **EXTENSION**, or the amount of actual dollars received. We call this advertisement the "Black Box" due to its black border in the newspaper. This is also called a **TRUTH IN TAXATION** hearing. Please remember that although the district is requesting this amount, we will always reduce the levy or "**ABATE**" down to the agreed upon final tax rate of \$1.72838. Currently, the district has a 5-year tax agreement with Constellation Energy to keep our maximum tax rate at \$1.72838 through 2026. Seneca High School does not control the assessed value of your home, that lies with your local township assessor and the LaSalle County Assessor's Office, however we do control our property **TAX RATE** requested. Your property tax rate has again been lowered by Seneca

High School, representing a pattern over the last ten years, as featured in the chart above.

This abatement process occurs in the spring after the district receives its first draft of the anticipated property tax extension from the LaSalle and Grundy County Clerks. By levying an amount greater than what we are seeking, we can ensure that the “**DRAFT**” tax rate requested in December’s levy, that we receive in the spring, is greater than the intended target. This allows the district to fully capture maximum capped funds in areas like special education and transportation, and then abate to the precise rate for all taxpayers in the district. This process has been used by our District for the past 10+ years as part of the agreement with Constellation Energy’s LaSalle Station (as shown in the table above) and rest assured, by the time you receive your tax bill in the mail in June, your property **TAX RATE** will be **LOWER** than last year (from \$1.72838 to \$1.70838). In early June, I will again remind you that the tax rate has decreased, but the assessor’s office valuation of your property has increased.

Significantly, Seneca High School’s property tax rate is substantially lower than every high school district, not only in the county, but also in the greater area. We are proud of the quality educational programming offered to our students and community, while keeping our tax rate for the citizens of Seneca, one of the lowest around, with no taxable debt. As an avid daily reader of The Times, I have noted the many “**BLACK BOX**” Truth in Taxation advertisements I have seen over the past few weeks in the local newspaper. Again, any time a property taxing body requests 5% more than last year’s received extension, a Truth in Taxation hearing must be held and an advertisement in the newspaper must be displayed. The increase in property tax assessments has led most taxing bodies, as required by law, including school districts, fire departments, townships, etc. to list these advertisements in the local newspaper. What is different about Seneca High School District 160 from most of these bodies, is that we will abate our real rate down to \$1.70838 in the Spring.

I encourage anyone who cares about Seneca High School, at any time, to stop in and have a cup of coffee with the Superintendent, strike up a conversation at a game, or to pick up the phone and call 815-357-5000 if you have any questions about anything at Seneca High School. You will be met with a smile, and I will gladly fill in any gaps you may have. We are all proud of the **SUCCESS AT SHS**

and look forward to hearing from you. Thank you for your time.

Seneca High School families and friends! Let's take a moment to reflect on the incredible collaborations and achievements that filled our November with warmth and community spirit.

Our Ag. students set the stage by attending the National Conference in Indianapolis, where they not only gained knowledge but also formed bonds that will last a lifetime. Their passion for agriculture is unmatched!

Inclusivity and professional growth took center stage as our special education teachers attended the Council for Exceptional Children conference in Naperville. Their commitment to enhancing their skills ensures that every student receives the support they need at Seneca High School.

Mr. Witte and his Vocational Math students were hard at work, bringing joy to Milton Pope Middle School by constructing a Gaga ball pit. Their dedication not only enriched the lives of others but also showcased the power of practical skills and teamwork.

On November 11th, we gathered as a school community to honor the heroes among us during our Veterans Day assembly. It was an important moment to express gratitude and learn from those who have served our country selflessly. Mr. Jon Deering was our keynote speaker. He encouraged us to be thankful in our thoughts and actions to recognize all our local veterans.

And as we approached the Thanksgiving season, our school spirit reached new heights with the launch of our 1st Annual Thanksgiving Basket Program. Together, we came together to provide nourishment and warmth to families in need within our local community.

Each example represents a unique story of collaboration, growth, and compassion. As we carry these memories, and many more, into the winter months, let's continue to foster a spirit of collaboration and support. Thank you for being a supportive part of our Seneca High School family.

This school year our gymnasium addition project has been rapidly progressing and

is getting closer and closer to opening for the 24-25 school year.

During safety week, SHS shows gratitude to our favorite SRO, Mr. Ken Sangston! Seneca High School is blessed to have a SRO as dedicated to keeping our school safe as Officer Sangston does. Mr. Sangston continues to create positive relationships with the students and staff, as well as being a great coach for the Fighting Irish Football team. Seneca High School would like to take this opportunity to thank him for his service and dedication to our school.

NEW Employees for the 2023-24 School Year

Bryna Coop Special Needs Paraprofessional, Luri Maier-Lorntz Main Office Secretary, Matt Houchin Full-time Substitute, Josie Lauth Special Needs Paraprofessional Jennifer Leo, Special Needs Paraprofessional Janet Thompson, and Laura Zomboraz Science Teacher.

Cactus Program – Newly Created this year!

Community Activity Center To Unite Seneca

This is open to all Seneca Community Members on Friday mornings at our West Campus facility from 9:00am to Noon. Typically, there are snacks, games, and open gym (includes pickleball).

New Addition to SHS:

We are excited to introduce you to a new member of our staff who will be joining us this spring. We will be welcoming Lucky to our team as a Certified Therapy Dog in training. Lucky is a hypoallergenic English Doodle who is completing her certification through Precision K9 Training.

Numerous research studies have shown many benefits of therapy dogs in schools, including cognitive, social, emotional, physical, and academic benefits. We are fortunate to have the opportunity to integrate Lucky into our school community.

We would like to thank the United Way of LaSalle County for their guidance and support in bringing Lucky to Seneca High School.

A day in Sports for the Fall of 2023:

Golf: The Boys and Girls golf teams had a great season highlighted by Piper Stenzel qualifying for State and placing 33rd overall. The girls team won the first ever Regional Championship for a girls golf team at Seneca High School.

Volleyball: The Volleyball team had another solid season and finished 24-11.

Football: The football team had a great season and finished 11-1 as a state quarterfinalist. It was a proud moment of Irish Pride to see the whole community come together to decorate Main & Scott streets and to see our stands full every Friday Night. Coach Maxwell was honored as an Illinois Coach of the Year and Chris Peura was a 1st Team All-State honoree.

Our winter seasons are off to another great start as we hosted the final Thanksgiving Turkey Tournament. We are incredibly excited to host the first Seneca Christmas Tournament in our new gymnasium in 2024.

August Students of the Month:

Andrew Danek, Role Model; Kate Biro, Student of the Month; Taylor Mino, Irish Pride; and Tori Skelton, Rookie.

September Students of the Month:

Faith Baker, Student of the Month; Chris Peura, Irish Pride; Aurora Weber, Rookie; and Gabbie Maxwell, Role Model.

October Students of the Month:

Kenneth Daggett, Role Model; Jeremy Gagnon, Irish Pride; Emmelyn Blakley, Rookie; Gracie Steffes, Student of the Month.

November Students of the Month:

William Milton, Student of the Month; Gracie Smith, Rookie; Michelle Govea, Role Model; and Lainie Olson, Irish Pride.

2023 Illinois State Scholars:

Congratulations to the following Seneca High School seniors for being named Illinois State Scholars: Kenneth Daggett, Chase Buis, Faith Baker, Peyton

Enerson, Jolena Odum, William Milton, Carter Thomas, Kate Biros, and Julia Hogan.

The Illinois Student Assistance Commission selects Illinois State Scholars based on class rank and ACT/SAT scores.

The Illinois State Scholar program is an honorary recognition without any monetary award. To be named an Illinois State Scholar is an outstanding accomplishment that will be a highlight of the recipient's academic record.

DAR Good Citizen Award Student Honored:

Kate Biros was recently honored with the Daughters of the American Revolution (DAR) Good Citizen Award for Seneca High School. She is the daughter of Tiffany and Scott Biros of Seneca, IL.

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.

Kate is head of the leadership officers in FFA, she is captain of the scholastic bowl team, and an officer of Teens Resisting Unhealthy Social Temptations (TRUST). She is involved in Student Council, Student Advisory Council, Student Ambassadors, Fellowship of Christian Athletes, National Honors Society, Spanish Club, Academic Challenge in Engineering and Science (ACES), Drama Club, multiple school plays and musicals, Speech Team, Math Team, FCCLA. Kate has been nominated as Rookie of the Month, Role Model of the Month, and Student of the Month through her years at SHS.

Being the recipient of the DAR Good Citizen Award, Kate will complete 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.

Tri County Leadership Conference:

The Tri County Leadership Conference was held on Monday, October 16th at St Bede High School. Ted Wiese was the keynote speaker who presented a Dynamic

Leadership & Team Building Program. The students worked in small groups to learn leadership qualities through activities and games with the other school representatives.

The students who represented Seneca High School: Peyton Enerson, Chase Buis, Gunner Varland, Alex Gagnon, Memphis Echeverria, Hailey Culbertson, Addysen Applebee, Tori Skelton.

Hugh O'Brian Youth Leadership Seminar 2024:

Shan Balandang and Jaxson Finch, Seneca High School sophomores, have been selected to represent Seneca Township High School at the 2024 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.

Shan Balandang is the daughter of Thomas and Maybelle Mack of Seneca, Jaxson Finch is the son of Jeanette and Jeffrey Finch of Verona. All Seneca High School sophomore students were invited to pick up applications and submit essays for the opportunity to attend this seminar. Congratulations to Shan and Jaxson on their accomplishments.

2023 Reality Store:

This year Seneca High School hosted an event called the Reality Store. All sophomore students participate in the Reality Store to learn about the costs of living. Students get a "paycheck" with fake money in it, and using the money, the students have the chance to spend one month's salary on the necessities of life including housing, utilities, transportation, insurance, groceries, entertainment,

clothing, etc. Besides Seneca High School, the event is made possible by Old National Bank of Seneca and Caldwell Banker Real Estate Group of Morris. The Old National Bank and Caldwell Banker had representatives to work at the Reality Store, they both brought prizes to be given away through a random drawing.

This event really helps students to understand the importance of getting a good paying job for their adult life. It also hopefully gives them the insight of what their parents are going through monthly to try to make ends meet. Here is a list of the expenses students will incur throughout their "Reality Store" experience: Housing, Recreation, Groceries/Clothing, Child Care, Bank, Wheel of Fortune, Utilities, Insurance, and Transportation.

Strength & Conditioning Newsletter:

Coach Baker puts together his IRISH POWER Strength & Conditioning Newsletter each month. If you are reading this newsletter via the School's website under Announcements you will find the complete Strength & Conditioning December Edition Newsletter.

Life Skills and Transition Program:

We welcomed several freshmen into our Life Skills and Transition program this year. They have had a busy start to the year, with a focus on core academics and adaptive skills. The program has incorporated several community experiential education trips, including to see a performance of A Christmas Carol at Drury Lane Theatre.

New Video Newsletter:

For many years the Seneca High School Administration has created a twice-a-year newsletter to share with our community about the many highlights happening in the Land of the Irish.

For the past few years, we have been sharing with you on social media channels about our work to develop our mission, what we call The Seneca Way. While our traditional paper newsletter is still available, this video newsletter will show you a different look at the many great events this Fall that align with the Seneca Way.

You will find the video newsletter on our website at www.senecahs.org under District and then Newsletter.

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

