

Meet the Syracuse City School District

Independent Evaluators



The Syracuse City School District, the Syracuse Teachers Association (STA), and the Syracuse Association of Administrators and Supervisors (SAAS) believe that providing teachers opportunities for feedback from a content-focused observer supports their professional practice and enhances the administrative evaluation process. In support of this, SCSD has hired a team of Independent Evaluators with experience in art, business/technology/CTE, English Language Arts, elementary education, ENL, math, music, physical education, science, social studies, and special education.

Independent Evaluators were selected via a rigorous process that considered teaching effectiveness, ability to provide honest and objective written and oral feedback, content area expertise and experience, and commitment to improving the overall effectiveness of the SCSD teaching force. Independent Evaluators were trained in a number of specific areas:

- Danielson's Framework for Teaching
- Classroom observation – collecting objective evidence
- Cognitive Coaching – providing constructive feedback
- True North Logic Platform
- Writing high-quality observation reports
- Ongoing observation and calibration

Under the SCSD APPR agreement, all SCSD teachers will receive observations conducted by Independent Evaluators. Probationary teachers will be observed twice each year in announced visits, and tenured teachers will be observed once in an unannounced visit. What follows are brief biographies of the SCSD's Independent Evaluators.

Content Expertise: Lead/Elementary Education



Kim Huhtala

Kim Huhtala looks forward to supporting and developing her teachers. Her experience as a SCSD evaluator has allowed her to provide feedback in the areas of Elementary Education, ENL, Special Education, and Foreign Language. She has facilitated several professional development sessions on various components of the Danielson Framework, and has served as a mentor to other evaluators. She enjoys networking teachers across the district, engaging teachers in reflective conversations, and sharing best practices to enhance student performance. Prior to this role, she was a dedicated teacher at a middle school in East New York, Brooklyn.

Kim was selected by the New York City Department of Education as a Lead Teacher after receiving her certificate from the Teacher Facilitative Leadership Institute at the United Federation of Teachers. She received her bachelor's degree from SUNY Oneonta in Childhood Education (1-6), and earned a dual master's degree in General and Special Education (1-6) from Touro College in 2008.

Content Expertise: Elementary Education



Sandra Nucifora

Sandra Nucifora spent the last 31 years working in the field of elementary education where she taught at every academic level from Pre-K to 6th grade. She has worked as an independent evaluator in the district for the past 6 years.

Sandra started her teaching career in the Catholic school system in Syracuse where she taught 4th grade. She then transitioned into a site supervisor job for the second-largest head start program in Syracuse. Sandra joined the Syracuse City School District in 2003 as the coordinator of the Even Start program. Under her guidance, the Even Start program evolved from a program in need of improvement to one of the top 10 performing programs in the state. Sandra won an outstanding service award from the Syracuse City School District for her efforts with the Even Start program.

Sandra then migrated back to the classroom with the skills she acquired as a site supervisor and program coordinator. She taught 3rd and 4th grade students at Blodgett School, where she was a member of the SLT committee and a 3rd grade team leader. While teaching 3rd grade at Blodgett every student received a passing grade on the New York State Math Assessment. Sandra spent the last two years teaching 4th grade at Delaware Academy, where she has gained invaluable experience in project-based learning.



Lisa Malley Dillman

Content Expertise: Elementary Education

Lisa Malley Dillman has been an educator for 31 years. She began her career with the Syracuse City School District. During the last 13 years, she served The Shelby County School District in Memphis, Tennessee, as a 5-8 grade teacher, Title 1 TCAP Coach, APEX manager, and Data Analyst. She obtained a Master's Degree in Education and a Master's Degree as an Educational Specialist in Administration from Germantown, Tennessee.



Jamie Higgins

Content Expertise: Elementary Education

Jamie Higgins has been an elementary independent evaluator since 2016. She began her career as a Special Education Teacher in the Syracuse City School District in 2006. During that time, she served as a self-contained teacher, integrated co-teacher and consultant teacher. Jamie served on the PBIS committee for several years where she helped to create and implement behavior plans for students with various needs. From 2013-2015, she served as the No-Nonsense Nurturing Coach at Van Duyn Elementary. She has also provided professional development on No-Nonsense Nurturing as well promoting Accountable Talk strategies in the classroom.

Jamie received her Bachelor's Degree from Le Moyne College in 2002 and a Master's Degree from Le Moyne College in 2006. She is certified in both General Education (1-6 and 5-9) and Special Education (1-6 and 5-9).



Jim Hart

Content Expertise: Math

Jim Hart is returning as the math Independent Evaluator. It continues to be an incredible learning experience for him each year. Being from outside the district, he has been pleased to see the wealth of good teaching happening within the math classrooms. It is a goal of his to help share that knowledge with each of you during your time together. At the end of the first year, Jim compiled a list of “best” practices/activities/ strategies that he saw and emailed it to each building for future planning/support.

Mr. Hart is actively teaching first year math students at OCC. His experience ranges from working with students from grade 7 through 1st year college students. He received his bachelor’s degree from SUNY Plattsburgh and earned his master’s degree from Le Moyne College. His teaching experiences include pre-calculus, statistics, algebra 2, math 7, course II (geometry) as well as math lab reinforcement for course I & III. Jim also assisted with restructuring the 7th-8th grade curriculum to better suit the needs of the diverse academic background entering Bishop Ludden. He spent 4 years working in Alternative Education at OCM BOCES. Jim taught math 8 and Integrated Algebra.

After leaving BOCES, He was hired as an adjunct instructor at OCC teaching remedial math courses to first year students. Mr. Hart also participated in the summer bridging course to allow Say Yes students to transition into college classes. Jim has also redesigned a summer tutor program for the Guardian Angel Society.



Areli Schermerhorn

Content Expertise: English as a New Language and Bilingual Education

Areli Schermerhorn has supported the development of students and teachers in the Syracuse City School District for over twenty-five years. Ms. Schermerhorn is a national trainer on English Learners for the American Federation of Teachers, an ELT New York State United Teachers Instructor, and an adjunct professor at SUNY Oswego. She has provided professional development in an array of settings including the district, state and national levels. She presented at TESOL International Conventions in Seattle, WA (2017), and Chicago, IL (2018), and looks forward to presenting at the TESOL Convention in Atlanta, GA in 2019. Ms. Schermerhorn earned a Certificate of Advanced Study in Urban Teacher Leadership from LeMoyne College in 2012.



Myriam Ibarra

Content Expertise: Science/ Technology

Myriam Ibarra has been the Science Observer since 2015. She has taught at Nottingham High School from 2000-2014, offering courses in Chemistry, Earth Science and SUNY-ESF Global Environment. She previously has taught Fisheries Science courses at SUNY Morrisville, and primary and secondary school in Quito, Ecuador. She was a volunteer scientist at the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago, IL, did postdoctoral research at SUNY-ESF, worked as a Forester in the USDA Forest Service in Syracuse, and also worked as an Environmental Consultant for private industry. At Nottingham High School, Myriam was a member of the Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) committee and the School Leadership Team (SLT), a co-leader of the Math Science and Technology Academy, and leader in the Learning Team for Physical Science.

Myriam believes that it is an essential but challenging task to provide equal access for all children to an education that ensures their full and positive participation in society. Because she is optimistic about the synergistic power of groups of educators to meet that challenge, she is eager to do collaborative work with her fellow science teachers.

Myriam holds a Bachelor's degree in Science Education and a Doctoral degree in Biology from The Central University in Ecuador. She also has a Master's of Science in Zoology from the University of Wisconsin, and a Certificate of Advanced Studies in Educational Leadership at Syracuse University.

Content Expertise: Social Studies



Stephanie Walters-Rowe

Stephanie Walters-Rowe earned a B.A. in History and Education and a MSEd. from SUNY Cortland. During her nearly 15 years as a social studies educator in the Syracuse City School District she has worked at both the middle and high school level, most recently at Nottingham High School. Stephanie has taught U.S. History, as well as Global Studies, AVID, Economics, Participation in Government, and a Career Guidance elective. She has also served as a master teacher for student teachers from SUNY Oswego and Syracuse University.

Stephanie has served on numerous committees such as School Leadership Team, textbook adoption team, middle level curriculum mapping, U.S. History 11 curriculum writing, city-wide assessment writing and the Teach American History grant writing team.

She has also participated in extensive professional development at both the district and national level. Stephanie has attended several National Endowment for the Humanities and Gilder Lehrman summer workshops in U.S. History, working with historians such as Ira Berlin, Jim Horton, Lois Horton and David Blight.

Stephanie completed her C.A.S. in Educational Leadership at Syracuse University in the Spring of 2016



Thérèse Como

Content Expertise: English Language Arts

Thérèse Como looks forward to continue to serve in her role as an independent observer. Previously, Ms. Como has taught English Language Arts, was appointed the ELA content specialist and completed an internship at Nottingham High School. Serving in each role, she has provided an array of professional development and has served as a mentor to teachers entering the teaching profession. In addition, Ms. Como has received a Certificate of Advanced Study in Educational Leadership from Le Moyne College.



Shaena Brasz

Content Expertise: Special Education

Shaena Brasz is looking forward to another year as a special education independent evaluator. Her strengths include working with teachers to modify instruction to meet the needs of students with disabilities within the classroom and small group setting as well as helping teachers find engaging ways to help students be successful in all settings. She uses her experience as a classroom teacher and special education teacher to understand the demands placed on the educator and how to implement best practices.

She has worked with students as a classroom teacher and special education teacher, mentored new teachers and worked with a wide range of students with varying needs. Shaena has worked as a special education consultant for the OCM BOCES program for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing working with teachers at all grade levels from kindergarten through high school. Having observed lessons in many schools within the district has given her a unique perspective regarding how teachers can improve their practice and enjoys recommending interactive approaches to learning that will move lessons from teacher centered to student centered. Her hope is that she can understand the uniqueness of your classroom setting and the students that you work with to find ways in which the rubric applies to your setting.



Cincereru Read

Content Expertise: Special Education

Cincereru Read is a NYS certified teacher, with over eighteen years of experience in the field of special education and has taught at every level of primary and secondary education (pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade). Prior to accepting the position of Independent Evaluator, Mrs. Read spent five years working for Syracuse City School District at McCarthy at Beard Alternative School. At McCarthy at Beard, she tirelessly devoted herself to working closely with students with only one firm goal in mind, preparing them for graduation and the ability to engage constructively and ethically in our diverse, changing world. She provided group and one-on-one planning sessions with students, organized monthly workshops and facilitated job placement opportunities within the Syracuse community. Prior to moving to Central New York, Mrs. Read was a resource, self-contained and collaborative educator for the Clayton County Public Schools in Jonesboro, Georgia.

Mrs. Read's dedication and passion for education has led to her serving on numerous committees throughout her career, including the Student Support Team, the School Leadership Team and the CDOS Planning Committee. She has also participated in professional development related to creating a vibrant classroom climate and culture, explicit instruction and specially designed lessons, New York State Career Development and Occupational Studies (CDOS) teacher training and Nonviolent Crisis Intervention training. Mrs. Read earned her bachelor's degree from Georgia State University and her master's degree from Grand Canyon University. She is committed to supporting the students, parents and staff of the Syracuse City School District as students strive to reach their full potential academically and socially.



Elisabeth Hartnett

Content Expertise: Special Education

Elisabeth Hartnett is thoroughly excited to begin her new journey as one of the district's Independent Evaluators for Special Education. Ms. Hartnett has been an educator in the Syracuse City School District for the past twelve years and has taught in a variety of service delivery models during her time with our district. She has worked as a Consultant/Resource Teacher in grades 3, 4, and 5 and most recently as a Self-Contained teacher of the KLASS program. Ms. Hartnett has served on various committees including the School Based Intervention Team, Parent Outreach Committee, and the School Discipline Committee.

Elisabeth is dually certified in Elementary and Special Education and attended SUNY Potsdam for her Masters of Science in Teaching Childhood Ed. She received her Special Education Certification in 2006 from LeMoyne College. Ms. Hartnett received her Bachelor of Arts from SUNY Potsdam in Sociology and Communications in 2002. Elizabeth's knowledge and experience with our district's special education population will be an asset as she joins our team of Independent Evaluators. She is looking forward to collaborating with teachers to support them through their observations, by providing feedback and multiple resources to promote best teaching practices which will increase student achievement with our district's students.

Content Expertise: Physical Education and Health



Frederick S. Wheeler

Frederick S. Wheeler has worked for the Syracuse City School District for 25 years as a physical education teacher and coach. He was born and raised in Syracuse, New York. He attended SCSD schools such as Ed Smith, Levy and graduated from Nottingham H.S. Fred holds degrees from St. Lawrence University, B.S. and Oswego MS Ed in Educational Administration. Fred is a dedicated physical education teacher with certifications in American Red Cross Life Guarding, Project Adventure Course Manager for SCSD, Cross Fit and Scuba/Nitrox deep water scuba certifications. Last year, Fred created a swimming program at Dr. King for 120 students in 4th and 5th grade. He also is head of the Project Adventure ropes course program at MMRC Field and Corcoran which is now available to all SCSD students and free school field trips. Ropes Course also has partnerships with Oswego College, OCC and Syracuse Police Department. Fred has facilitated Saturday Academy & Spring/Summer 100 hrs. of professional development for physical education teachers. Fred is very excited about the opportunity to work with fellow teachers to foster a greater physical education program for all students in SCSD. Push yourself to do more!



Toni Orlando

Content Expertise: Fine Arts

Tonette (Toni) Orlando is in her 5th year as the Independent Evaluator for Fine Arts and values the opportunity to support teachers by sharing resources and engaging in collaborative conversations on the most effective instructional practices for students. She observes every art and music classroom and is able to share the great instructional strategies that she sees throughout the district. She also gives professional development in the district on the components of the Danielson Rubric. She has experience teaching Music from Pre-K through High School and has experience in curriculum development, having created courses accredited by the AP College Board and the NYS Dept. of Education. She currently is an online teacher for BOCES, where she has taught a variety of classes, including Music Theory, AP Music Theory, Music Appreciation, and Sound Engineering. She is also the Music Director for a local church where she works with several choirs and instrumentalists. She received her Bachelors and Masters Degrees from Syracuse University, where she was a Graduate Assistant, and is currently enrolled in their CAS Program for Educational Leadership.



Janice Hammerle

Content Expertise: CTE/Technology/Business

Janice Hammerle is pleased to join the Independent Evaluator team in the SCSD. She is looking forward to supporting teachers through observation, targeted feedback, and providing resources to help teachers improve their practice to ultimately improve student achievement.

Janice has been teaching in the SCSD for 18 years and in fact attended and graduated from SCSD schools. She began her career as a Technology Teacher at Nottingham HS. While there she also served as an Internship Program Coordinator for four years. In addition, she served as the Technology/Art Department Chair, participated on the Community of Caring and PBIS committees, developed new Technology Course curriculum, participated in numerous professional development opportunities, and led a group of dedicated students in producing the yearbook for three years.

In 2012 Janice started as a middle school Technology Teacher at Huntington K8 in the Project Lead the Way pre-engineering program. There she enjoyed working with 6th and 7th grade students as they engaged in classes that promote critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Janice has a degree in Architectural Technology, and received her bachelor's degree from SUNY Oswego in Technology Education. She earned a dual master's degree in General and Vocational Technology Education from SUNY Oswego.