

GOOD NEWS



SYRACUSE CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT



Gold Card System Creates Culture of Leadership at Syracuse STEM at Blodgett

They jump to the front of the entry search line as they enter school each morning. They skip to the front of the lunch line each day in the cafeteria.

They flash their gold card, attached to a lanyard around their neck or on their backpack, and suddenly they've achieved VIP status.

"All it costs us is character," **Syracuse STEM at Blodgett** 7th grader **Aubrielle Palmer** explained. "We just have to get good grades, have good attendance, and demonstrate good behavior!"

Last year, Syracuse STEM at Blodgett staff piloted a 'gold card system,' offering students an incentive program in which students earned rewards of increasing value as they attained more elite status levels. The program was so successful that this year, it has expanded to add an additional status level, even more desirable rewards, and – most importantly – increased schoolwide buy-in.

"It has genuinely transformed the feeling in the building," School



Psychologist **Kayla Gallagher** shared.

All students start the year as blue card holders. If they encounter discipline problems or other issues, their card can be revoked. Alternatively, every five weeks, they are able to apply for a gold card. To qualify, they must have at least 90% attendance, be passing at least 75% of their classes, and be following general rules and procedures of the school. Two teachers must also sign off on their application, vouching that they are gold card material.

If approved, gold card holders receive a gold card, a yellow lanyard, and are invited to be pulled out of class twice a month for their incentives, which may be watching movies, enjoying popcorn, playing outside or spending time in the school gym.

"Last year, I was struggling," 8th grader **Sam Pitts** said. "This year, I'm trying to get to class on time, be a leader, and be someone the 6th graders can look up to. The card system motivates me to go after it – to do more to get my education."

Beginning in November, gold card holders were eligible to apply for

platinum cards – if they are passing all of their classes with good grades and if they are on merit roll. They must also show that they have completed five hours of community service – which can include cleaning up the school cafeteria after lunch, helping teachers organize their room, distributing food bank donations to families, and more. The increased status comes with additional expectations, but also double the incentives – including monthly field trips to places like Wonder Works.

And come January, students with platinum status can apply for a black card – elite status! After completing ten hours of community service and meeting the academic and behavioral requirements, students must also sit for an interview with a committee of staff. This year's black card holders will be treated to an all-expenses paid trip to Niagara Falls at the end of the year, as well as a custom jacket with their name on it. Last year's group enjoyed a trip to SeaBreeze, dinner at Kitty Hoynes, and more.

"The trips are definitely the best part," 8th grader **Gio Thomas** said. "The card system benefits me because I'm able to do more than just be in class all day. At the same time, it keeps me in class, because I want to be able to participate in the special events! It helps me make better choices."

We're so proud of the Syracuse STEM at Blodgett students who are working hard to make the right choices – and the committed staff who are supporting them through these initiatives!

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A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT

Dear Families and Staff,

I hope your child – and your family – are having a positive start to the school year. First and foremost, I want to remind you that we are here to serve you. If there is anything we can do to help support your child, please contact us. Call your school's main office, reach out via Let's Talk (syracusecityschools.com/letstalk), or contact our Office of Family Engagement at (315) 435-6459 or our Office of Student Support Services at (315) 435-4131.

We are currently seeking your feedback right now in terms of communication. Where do you go when you're searching for information from the SCSD? How can we improve our efforts to reach you? Please take a moment to scan the QR code in this newsletter to share your thoughts and help us ensure that we're doing everything we can to communicate with your family effectively!

In this newsletter, you'll read about just some of the many programs and offerings available to our students this year. You'll learn about free athletic clinics, family engagement events, student-led mentoring programs at Grant and PSLA at Fowler, and even about student musicians who recorded an album with an Emmy Award-winning songwriter! It's always exciting to celebrate the achievements of our students and staff and the wonderful things they are accomplishing academically and beyond.

As always, if you have positive news to share about a SCSD student or staff member, please take a minute to let us know... you can email us at goodnews@scsd.us.

Thank you for being part of our SCSD community and for joining us in showing our #SCSDPride!

Sincerely,



IMPORTANT DATES

November 2024

- 13 Board of Education Meeting
- 18 Winter JV/Varsity Athletics Begin
- 25 Board of Education Work Session
- 26 BOE Policy Committee Meeting
- 27-29 **Thanksgiving Holiday**
- 28 Thanksgiving

December 2024

- 6 BOE Audit Committee Meeting
- 6 **Half Day for All Schools**
- 9 High School Interim Report Card Distribution
- 11 Board of Education Meeting
- 13 Elementary and Middle School Interim Report Card Distribution
- 21 First Day of Winter
- 21 Elementary and Middle School Interim Report Card Distribution
- 23-31 **Holiday Recess**

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Student & Staff Spotlights

SCSD Celebrates First Adult HSE Graduate of the Year

We're so proud of all of our SCSD graduates – including those who have worked with our Adult Education team to earn their High School Equivalency!

Kenya Hale has become the first adult to earn her GED with the Syracuse City School District in 2024. As a proud

parent of four SCSD students, Kenya's journey exemplifies resilience and determination. Battling health issues and overcoming the devastation of a house fire that left her family with nothing, she never wavered from her commitment to education. Her unwavering spirit and infectious positivity inspired classmates and teachers alike. Kenya's story is a testament to the transformative power of perseverance and the unwavering pursuit of one's goals. Congratulations!



Meachem Students Learn About Fire Prevention Month



SCSD students are used to participating in regular fire drills to ensure that they are informed of what to do in case of an emergency.

At **Meachem Elementary** this fall, students weren't prepared to see their principal, **Mr. Dow**, "rescued" from the school via a fire truck's bucket! To promote Fire Prevention

Month and encourage students to check that they have working smoke detectors in their home, the Syracuse Fire Department arranged to "rescue" the principal and speak about fire safety.

#SCSDGivesThanks to Mr. Dow for being a good sport – and especially to all of the firefighters who risk their lives every day to keep us safe!



Students Show their #SCSDSpirit through Athletics

This fall, SCSD students faced off against their Syracuse counterparts in football, girls volleyball, boys soccer, and more.

In addition to our normal fall sports seasons, we were also pleased to offer additional free athletics offerings to our students. Thanks to a partnership with Valley Lacrosse, SCSD students in kindergarten through grade 12 were invited to participate in free lacrosse clinics with college athletes from Le Moyne College and Syracuse University.



SCSD and Jubilee Homes Launch Pre-Employment Program



The Syracuse City School District and Jubilee Homes have partnered to start a pre-employment

program aimed at empowering high school equivalency (HSE) students and recent graduates. This program seeks to equip students with the essential skills and knowledge to navigate the workforce while exploring their career aspirations.

The program offers support in crafting resumes, cover letters, and professional emails. Participants will also receive assistance in obtaining identification, developing essential soft skills, and securing necessary work permits. The program's long-term vision includes enriching opportunities such as job fair visits, apprenticeship site tours, and paid or incentivized job shadowing experiences – with the goal of helping students gain workforce readiness skills and make informed career choices.

Thank you to Central New York's Employment One Stop, CNY Works, Jubilee Homes, and local businesses for your partnership in helping our adult education students receive the supports they need to help them succeed!

YOUR VOICE MATTERS: Take Our Family Communication Survey!



We want to improve our communication with you, our Syracuse City School District families! Please take a moment to share your thoughts and suggestions with us. All responses will

be anonymous and will be used to shape our future messaging. **THANK YOU!**

WELCOME TO



ParentSquare

Do you have questions about the district's new communications platform, ParentSquare? We're here to help! Check out the frequently asked questions below, and feel free to contact the Office of Communications if you have specific questions or issues.

How can I access ParentSquare?

- Download the ParentSquare app.
- Log in through a web browser.
- You will also receive messages automatically from ParentSquare.

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AUTUMN 2024



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PREVIOUS PAGE

What should I do if I can't access my ParentSquare account?

Make sure you're signing in using your SchoolTool login details. If you're using the correct information and still can't log in, please contact the Communications Office at 315-435-4675.

How can I update my contact information for ParentSquare?

To update your contact information, please call your school's main office. Once your information is updated in SchoolTool, ParentSquare will reflect the changes the following day.

How can I learn more about navigating the platform?

You can view a recording of the ParentSquare video chat on the district's website: syracusecityschools.com/parentsquare.

What if I can't see all of my children in ParentSquare?

If you can't see all your children in ParentSquare, please contact the Communications Office at 315-435-4675.

Should I still use Talking Points?

Yes! Please continue using Talking Points to communicate with teachers and school staff as usual.

In Our Schools

WEB Leaders Create Culture of Friendship at Grant Middle School

"Have a great day, Jaxson!"

Grant 8th grader **Lillieanna Knarr** shouted down the hall to 6th grader **Jaxson Worrell** as he walked off toward class.

Lillieanna serves as one of about two dozen school WEB (Where Everyone Belongs) leaders this year. In that role, she helped lead Grant 6th graders in a summer orientation, assists them around school as needed, and makes monthly or bimonthly visits to 6th grade classrooms to lead team-building activities.

"I want to set a good example like the past 8th graders did for me," she shared. "I want them to know that they have their own futures to worry about – they don't need to be peer pressured."

Fellow WEB leader **Gradis Kalala** never had the opportunity to experience having an older mentor in the building to look up to. When he entered Grant last year as a 7th grader, he was new to the country – having just arrived from Zambia.

"I didn't have anyone besides teachers to help me," he shared. "I see the 6th graders and I just want to help them. I like helping people, and I want to help them grow. I remember how hard it was for me being in a new school and a new country. On the



first day of school, they were all so quiet. Now, they are opening up as they feel more welcomed. I'm so excited to see that! I feel so good being able to help them."

To become a WEB leader, students must attend a two-day summer orientation. There, they must also sign a contract, agreeing to maintain good grades, attendance, and behavior. Grant Middle School Music teacher and WEB Advisor **Marshella Mason** said that in her 4th year leading the WEB program, this year's group of students is especially dedicated.

"Their level of responsibility, their willingness in wanting to help... it's so impressive," Ms. Mason shared. "It's unlike any group of WEB leaders I've worked with before. They are so driven. They ask questions. They want to do good; they want to help. It's so nice to hear them chatting with the 6th graders in the hallways. Middle school is tough in the first place. There's a hierarchy based on grade – but their goal in WEB is to break down those barriers and show that the 8th graders aren't these scary big kids – they're your friends who are here to help."

We're so proud of the WEB leaders who are working hard to build a positive and supportive community in their schools!

ITC Students Share Mental Health Support through Suicide Awareness Month Event



Just keep going!

It's the message that ITC senior **Lamyya Kithcart** wrote on a downtown sidewalk in the Everson Plaza, part of Onondaga

County's "Chalk the Walk" Suicide Awareness Month event.

"Mental health is super important," she shared. "I'm writing a message that reminds people to just keep going and push through."

Lamyya and several of her classmates walked to the event to represent the Syracuse City School District at County Executive Ryan McMahon's event.

ITC senior **Schinaed Smith** added her own message to the sidewalk, writing 'self love is the best love.'

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CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE “A lot of my classmates have struggled with mental health,” she said. “I thought this would be a nice way to show support. Events like this help destigmatize mental health so it becomes easier for people to reach out for help if they’re struggling. It becomes easier to talk about mental health when people know there are others who care.”

Dozens of local representatives, including from Contact Community Services and the Onondaga County Suicide Prevention Coalition – as well as students from West Genesee and East Syracuse Minoa schools, came together to show that they care. They took turns sharing stories of how mental health struggles impact individuals, how they can be overcome, and what we can each do to make a difference.

EMBRACING DIVERSITY: SCSD Celebrates Hispanic Heritage Month



In the SCSD, we believe that the diversity of our students and families is a strength! We aim to create environments where all students feel welcomed and celebrated throughout the year. During Hispanic Heritage Month (September 15 – October 15), schools took extra effort to celebrate the rich culture, history, and contributions of Hispanic Americans.

Schools created hallway displays, made special announcements in Spanish, hosted schoolwide celebrations, and more. At **HW Smith**, students who identify as Hispanic wrote about themselves and what being Hispanic means to

them, sharing those stories on the morning announcements. Students in kindergarten through 5th grade colored flags representing Hispanic nations, which were hung throughout the building.

“Our intention is to celebrate the culture by bringing awareness to the many contributions of our Hispanic brothers and sisters,” HW Smith Case Manager **Candace Hamilton** explained. “We accomplished this by educating through music, food, personal stories, and visuals... fun facts, historical information, and cultural images!”

“One of my friends is from Cuba and said it made her feel happy that we’re celebrating where she’s from,” HW Smith 5th grader **Ja’Veah Smith** shared.

“I’m from Puerto Rico,” 5th grader **Luis Colon** added. “It feels good to celebrate this at school. My favorite thing about Puerto Rico is the arroz con pollo... yellow rice with chicken! Our school celebration has made some of my friends ask more about where I’m from.”

Falcon Ambassadors Strengthen the Sense of Community at PSLA at Fowler

Once a week during last period, a group of 15-20 seniors gathers with the school deans at **PSLA at Fowler**. They talk about upcoming events and how they can help.

New this August, the Falcon Ambassadors, as the students are named, have volunteered to get involved with all schoolwide events. They gave tours and talked about their Career and Technical Education (CTE) programs at the Freshman Orientation in August; they volunteered at the Back to School BBQ in September; and they guided parents to classrooms and answered questions at October’s Curriculum Night.

“As staff, we understand that sometimes students don’t feel comfortable coming to staff with concerns,” Dean

of Students **Quentin Scott** said. “Our Ambassadors help bridge that gap between students and staff.”

Staff sought out good students who can sometimes fall under the radar, who are athletes, or who are heavily involved in their CTE programs. They also requested teacher recommendations.

“For me, it’s about making a difference in the community,” senior **Abdulahi Omar**, a Law Enforcement student, shared. “I get to be that helping hand. Everyone needs friends to lift them up in high school, instead of drag them down. Plus, it looks good on my college resume!”

“When I was a freshman, I needed something like this to guide me,” senior **Badr Aly**, a Fire Rescue student, explained. “It can be so helpful to hear from someone who’s not a teacher. In the lunch room, we invite the freshmen to join us. The freshmen see the teachers shouting us out in the hallway...

they look up to us. I like being able to show them that even if you had a rough start to the year, you can still turn things around.”

“The children are our future,” Dean of Students **Nastassia Clarke** added. “This group is a great representation of what our future will hold. This experience has given them great leadership skills.”

We’re proud of the students who are serving as the first group of Falcon Ambassadors and can’t wait to see their positive impact continue as the program expands!



SCSD Student Musicians Partner with Emmy-Winning Song Writer



"Jivana sundara cha."

Henninger sophomore **Babisha Gurung** spoke her native language, Nepali, into a microphone in her school's chorus classroom.

Life is beautiful.

Babisha and her fellow chorus members – including students in the **PSLA at Fowler** chorus – were participating in a recording session with Emmy Award-winning song writer Hughie Stone Fish. Mr. Stone Fish, producing a project called 'Sounds of Unity,' worked with local artists of different languages, backgrounds, and sounds to create a first of its kind music festival. He explained to students that he had already recorded musicians on the fiddle, performing jazz, rap, a Native American flute player, and more.

The chorus sang various lines for several different pieces on the album. For most, it was their first time participating in a recording session.

"It was fun," Henninger sophomore **Jason McAuley** shared. "If I want to become a future Beyonce, I have to get used to this! This will be great to add to my resume and show my experience. I never expected when I came to school on a random Wednesday that I'd be singing on an album!"

PSLA at Fowler junior **Naome Kato** sang 'life is beautiful' in Swahili, her native language.

"I came to Syracuse from Uganda when I was eight," she shared. "My language is my culture. The fact that I get to show my culture is so important to me. The people in my village will be so proud of me. It's inspiring that people can hear us sing in different languages. I try my best not to forget my language – it's part of me and it means a lot to me to be able to share it."

In addition to inviting students to participate in the recording of an album, Mr. Stone Fish also hosted a Music Creation Festival at the CNY Arts Atrium, inviting anyone in the community to record a small part for the album and watch the record creation process in real time. All proceeds from the album and festival will benefit Mr. Stone Fish's non-profit, The Arts Project Syracuse. We're so proud of our students for sharing their #SCSDArts talents in this way! To learn more about The Arts Project Syracuse, please visit <https://tapsny.com>.



SCSD Hosts Exciting Family Engagement Events

In the Syracuse City School District, one of our core values is that families and communities are valuable partners in education. We are proud to host regular events throughout the community to engage our students and families!

This fall, our Math Department hosted an Everybody Counts Fall Harvest Festival targeted at students in Pre-K through 5th grade. Students were invited to enjoy hands-on, engaging activities like finger painting, scarecrow races, a scavenger hunt, guest readers, and more.

Then, to celebrate Hispanic Heritage Month, our Office of Family Engagement hosted a celebration called 'Latinos On the Rise: Celebrating Diversity and Empowerment through Language and Culture!' We celebrated with cultural activities, music, food, and an art and humanities contest and exhibition.

Thank you for joining us for these special events throughout the school year. Don't miss our upcoming events! Visit www.syracusecityschools.com/OFE for more details.



Nottingham Student Named National Merit Scholarship Semifinalist

We're proud of our #SCSDCollegeReady scholars! **Nottingham** senior **Henry Zhe-Heimerman** has been named a National Merit Scholarship Semifinalist, recognizing him for his top PSAT scores. If Henry is selected as a Finalist, he will be eligible to potentially receive a college scholarship.

Henry has committed to run Division III track at Johns Hopkins University next year, where he will study Biomedical Engineering on a Pre-Med track.

"Ultimately, I hope to become a physician and return to the Syracuse area to serve the community," Henry shared. "A lot of people here are underestimated and underserved, and I want to help change that. I was super excited to be named a Merit Scholarship Semifinalist; but I'd say what I'm most proud of is being a Nottingham student. That in itself encapsulates my achievements, and my classmates' achievements. There are so many of us here at Nottingham who are working hard, and I'm proud to call myself one of them."

CTE Corner

Career & Technical Education Students Gain Hands-On Experiences



We love seeing the ways our CTE programs are helping students become **#SCSDCareerReady!**

This fall, students representing **Corcoran's** Welding & Manufacturing program, **PSLA's** Electrical Trades program, and

Nottingham's Construction Technology program attended the Central New York Construction Career Day, organized by The Builder's Exchange. There, they were invited to network with dozens of construction industry employers and participate in hands-on activities including welding, drilling, hammering, and more. Students were even guided through the operation of heavy machinery including cranes, front loaders, evacuators, and more!

"I'm interested in construction because I've always wanted to build my dream home one day and be able to help the community," **Nottingham** junior **Maung Sa** shared.

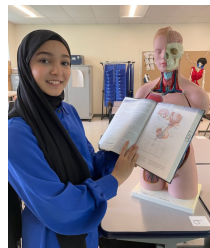
"This was great because they taught us the skills we'll need to succeed not only in our program but also in our career," classmate **Omar Mohamed** added.

CTE Spotlights:



Yaniel Santos PSLA – Fire Rescue

"The Fire Rescue program has been helpful to allow me to feel like I'm helping out and I have a purpose. It's taught me the basics of crawling and carrying techniques, tools, and basic medical training. If you don't know what to do with your future, a CTE program can help!"



Raghad Alkasabra Henninger – Health Professions

"The atmosphere in Health Professions is like a family. That makes me want to learn even more! I hope to become a surgeon, so the hands-on experiences we have through this program inspire me to think further into my future."



Check out our YouTube page, where families can view videos of some of our CTE programs and hear directly from the students participating in them!

Alumni Spotlight: Ruell Branch



Learn more about Ruell in our YouTube series: "Difference Makers."

SCSD Schools Attended: Huntington K-8, Henninger (2020)

College and Major(s): Syracuse University (Physics and Economics)

Career Path: I'm an Educator at the Museum of Science and Technology. In college, I was introduced to teaching science education. I helped start a project called SURPh - the Syracuse University Research in Physics internship. It helps SCSD students and recent graduates participate in a six-week paid science internship in SU science labs over the summer.

The coolest thing about my job is... is seeing all the young kids get excited about science.

The most valuable thing I learned in school... how to value my time. I've learned that you have to create balance in life.

I'm proud to be a SCSD graduate because... I'm proud to be born and raised in Syracuse. I feel it's important to give back to where you are and I really do love this city.

One piece of advice I'd give to SCSD students is... just keep going. I'm a testament to say if I could do it, anybody can do it!



Did you graduate from the Syracuse City School District? We'd love to hear from you! Please email us: goodnews@scsd.us with your name, graduation year (and high school), and your current job. We may follow up with you to potentially highlight you as a future Alumni Spotlight!



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MISSION

To build, support and sustain school communities that provide all students with a high-quality education that prepares them to graduate as responsible, active citizens ready for success in college and careers and prepared to compete in a global economy.

VISION

To prepare and inspire all of our students to innovate locally and contribute globally.

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The Syracuse City School District hereby advises students, parents, employees and the general public that it is committed to providing equal access to all categories of employment, programs and educational opportunities, including career and technical education opportunities, regardless of actual or perceived race, color, national origin, Native American ancestry/ethnicity, creed or religion, marital status, sex, sexual orientation, age, gender identity or expression, disability or any other legally protected category under federal, state or local law.

Inquiries regarding the District's non-discrimination policies should be directed to:

Civil Rights Compliance Officer
Syracuse City School District
725 Harrison Street • Syracuse, NY 13210
(315) 435-4131
Email: CivilRightsCompliance@scsd.us



>> Share your questions, comments or concerns 24/7 using the Let's Talk tool at www.syracusecityschools.com



SAY YES STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Madison Reynolds –
Corcoran High School
Class of 2021

What college are you going to & what is your major(s)/minor(s)?

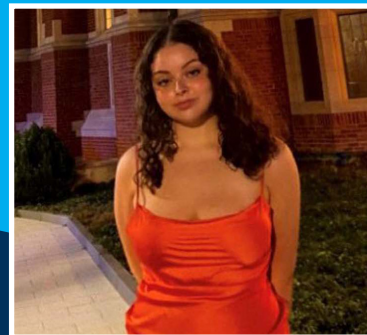
Now, I am matriculating at Yale University. I major in Political Science with a certificate in Education Studies.

What are your goals after college (career, future plans, etc.)?

After college, I hope to attend law school and possibly do a joint PhD program as well. I hope to study international law and do research on cultural heritage preservation and human rights work.

How did you learn about Say Yes to Education Syracuse?

I learned about Say Yes Syracuse through my older sisters. I was able to see the positive impact the program had on their education and wanted to utilize the program as well. Additionally, Upward Bound at Le Moyne College and Corcoran High School supported me in the process of navigating the application.



What does Say Yes mean to you?

Say Yes means accessibility to me. For many students, higher education seems unattainable due to financial barriers, however, Say Yes continuously helps SCSD students financially on pursuing higher education.

Important Say Yes Reminders for Seniors:

- Say Yes Syracuse Application Deadline: July 1, 2025
- FAFSA Application Deadline: August 1, 2025

Text SAYYES to 1-315-562-7154 to receive announcements, reminders and Say Yes newsletters.

Learn more and sign up for the Say Yes newsletter at SayYesSyracuse.org