

SCHOOL

A Special Supplement to the Sullivan County Democrat



SCENE

A look at activities at
SUNY Sullivan
Community College



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Normalcy this fall?

Here's hoping as college welcomes back students

This September students will dominate the landscape at SUNY Sullivan for the first time in a year and a half.

"The goal," says Chris DePew, Dean of Student Development Services and Director of Athletics, "is to be as in-person as possible for the fall season – as in-person and kind of back to normal as much as we can."

The fluidity of Covid and its guidelines for schools and colleges have become almost the norm. "We adjust and pivot every single day," said DePew.

So here's what will happen.

Other years, college classrooms welcomed 20-to-30 students. Now, with social distancing, there will be eight to 10 permitted in a

classroom, spurring the need for two other classrooms. (The college has turned office suites and the college theater into classrooms).

At presstime, the college was awaiting news on whether they would be restricted to the six foot distancing rule or to the three foot rule now permitted for kindergarten to 12th grade schools.

Should colleges be permitted the three-foot-rule, some math is still required. "The problem will be, for example, when an English classroom is supposed to hold 10 students, what do we do about the 11th person?", said DePew. "Maybe we can get to 12 or 14, but if 20 signed up, we open another section."

Dorms will reopen in the fall

with protocol and guidelines.

The Lazarus I. Levine Residence Hall and the EcoGreen townhouse residences cater to students from as far away as Canada but mostly from the New York metropolitan area.

Both facilities closed in March 2020 when all colleges shut down. Together, the dorms can house 375 students. "We're hoping for 280," said DePew.

Each year, colleges place a good deal of time and attention on building a strong incoming class. Now it's particularly dicey because many potential students are suffering financially. "People have to weigh 'do I take a math course or pay the electric bill?'" DePew said.

By now, colleges like SUNY Sullivan would be giving tours of bus-loads of people from the New York City area. Now everything is largely virtual, although in-person visitors in groups of 10 are acceptable according to regulations.

Meanwhile, SUNY Sullivan athletic coaches are traveling to recruit in Connecticut, New York City and Albany. The basketball coach recently spoke on Long Island in front of a gathering of 100 students, socially distanced.

In general now, the mantra when seeking out new students is, "We have to be flexible to be successful."

"We want to meet the needs of students," said DePew. "We ask 'what do you need from us,



As Dean of Student Development Services and athletic director, Chris DePew interacts with hundreds of students daily. In 2007, he led the men's basketball team to the NJCAA National Championship with an undefeated record of 32-0.

schedule-wise? Do you need a course on Tuesday at 8 p.m., or on 5:30 pm on Fridays? We can make it happen."

The college's facebook page also touts virtual open houses every Wednesday at 4 p.m.

The fact that the college earned a huge shout-out can only help. Recently, SUNY Sullivan was named 2021's Best Community College in New York by Intelligent.com, a website that provides unbiased research to help students make decisions about higher education.

The college's raft of courses from English and math to programs in clean energy, nursing, culinary arts, criminal justice and more continue to be a draw. Should a student want to teach math someday, he or she can take liberal arts with a math concentration and go on to finishing at a four-year college, saving money.

Then there are the intangibles. "It's a cool place to be," said DePew. With the student population hovering around 1,100, the ratio of students to teachers is an attractive 16 to one. "Here everyone knows your name. It's intimate. Everybody is working together."



For the fall semester, the Lazarus I. Levine Residence Hall will reopen for students. The dormitory is named for the Sullivan County lawyer who served as director of the Sullivan County National Bank for 35 years and Board of Education member of the Fallsburg school district for 25 years.



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'Early college high school' opens in Hurleyville this fall

A decade ago, SUNY Sullivan President Jay Quaintance served as a key player in the Schenectady start-up of what was then a relatively new phenomenon: an Early College high school.

Schenectady County Community College, where Quaintance taught, received a \$447,500 grant from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation to start the program that allows high school students traditionally underrepresented in colleges to earn free college credits at their own high school while simultaneously fulfilling their high school requirements.

At the time, Schenectady was one of 11 institutions in the state to receive money for such a project. Now some 300 Early College high schools operate across the nation. In New York State, Bard College alone has launched five of the special high schools and has



In Hurleyville, the Center for Discovery's THINC Technology Hub and Incubator will morph into the Collaborative College High School this fall.

expanded into programs in New Jersey, New Orleans, Cleveland, Baltimore and Washington D.C.

"We think an Early College high school is needed in Sullivan

County," Quaintance said.

That conviction has linked SUNY Sullivan with the 43-year-old Homestead School in Glen Spey, which is a pre-kindergarten

through ninth grade Montessori school. Fortuitously, Homestead was seeking a way to extend its own program to older students.

"They wanted a high school Montessori program. We wanted an Early College high school in the county," said Quaintance.

Most Sullivan County high schools do offer their juniors and seniors some in-school college courses taught by the school districts' teachers. By contrast, Early College programs start in ninth grade and often can compress the time it takes to complete a high school diploma and the first two years of college.

Homestead and the college are joined in the project by the Center for Discovery, the Harris-based organization that educates and provides residential services for children and adults with complex disabilities, medical frailties and autism spectrum disorders.

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12,740- square foot Technology Hub and Incubator building (THINC) in Hurleyville's Main Street as the setting for the new school. The school will be called the Collaborative College High School. The building already contains a 3D print lab, a digital media lab, an audio visual lab, a ceramics studio and a wood-working shop.

Quaintance, whose own children attended Montessori schools, said the new school will open this fall. It may serve as the only Montessori-based Early College high school, he said.

Montessori schools emphasize independence in learning, viewing children as naturally eager for knowledge and capable of initiating their own learning.

"(The Montessori method) is hands-on, inquiry-driven" rather than the teacher telling students what they need to know, said Quaintance.

Students are encouraged to explore, ask questions and

share ideas. "It's high rigor," he added.

This fall, enrollment will start with incoming ninth graders. Some of the students will hail from Homestead. Others will not. So far, the class numbers about 15.

The students will be co-enrolled at both Homestead and SUNY Sullivan. Scholarships are being set up, and Homestead is hiring high school staff to teach in Hurleyville.

"The program will build cohorts year by year," explained Quaintance. "First, ninth graders, next year adding tenth graders" and so on.

Ultimately, as students progress through the program, they will take classes on the college campus as well.

For SUNY Sullivan, the new endeavor represents more than a boost in enrollment. "We are very, very excited to be moving forward," Quaintance said.



College president Jay Quaintance is working on an Early College high school in Sullivan County with partners, The Center for Discovery in Harris and the Homestead (Montessori) School in Glen Spey. Designed to encourage learning through creativity and inquiry, the program will allow students to get a jump-start on their college careers while they are in high school.

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The art of improvisation: Using your teddy bear as a patient



Culinary student Ada Lara of Goshen works with professor Mark Sanok in the Culinary Arts kitchen at SUNY Sullivan.

Some courses just couldn't go completely online. One needed an industrial-size oven. Another required dummies and hospital beds.

When Covid closed colleges across the U.S. over a year ago, almost all college students had to segue into learning by laptop rather than face-to-face. At SUNY Sullivan and elsewhere, professors and students found amazing ways to continue teaching and learning.

"We did our very best in the virtual world," said Nursing instructional assistant Robert Bertholf.

Stuck in their homes, Nursing students used their phones, laptops and the video conferencing tool Zoom to do "lab work" while

connected with their class. For example, one student had her complacent dog lie on the bed while she completed a head-to-toe assessment that reviewed the health of all major body systems.

Another student employed her five-foot-high stuffed teddy bear as a patient in need of an artificial airway, which is the mechanical device used when a patient is not able to maintain a clear passage.

Seeing as how students didn't keep an arsenal of professional equipment at home, they improvised with, for instance, a water bottle and a straw to simulate a catheter.

"It took ingenuity and creativity," said Bertholf.

Eventually, the SUNY system did

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In the nursing lab at the college, student Marisol Serapio, who is from Liberty, practices her skills on a full-body manikin.

allow for some leeway: courses that required “special equipment” could welcome students for limited days.

“We are here once a week now,” says Nursing student Marisol Serapio, who is from Liberty. “The rest of the time we are learning (on-line) from home.”

The other programs that are permitted to be on campus with limitations include the Respiratory Care program, Culinary Arts and Theater.

The other day, Culinary Arts professor Mark Sanok taught a small clutch of students how to professionally cut apart a baked chicken while at tableside. The students were interested and glad

to be there.

“At first the college was in lockdown,” recalled student Emily Pazuello of Cohecton. “We went remote. Then for the fall semester (of 2020), we could attend class but our class has been very small.”

That's because culinary students from the New York City area have nowhere to stay since the dormitories closed in March 2020, said Sanok, a SUNY Sullivan teacher for nearly 25 years.

Come fall 2021, the programs will likely revert back to normalcy, with dorms populated and socially distanced students enjoying the lively exchange of ideas, right from their seats at the college.

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Who's watching the kids? SUNY Sullivan readies a daycare center

Even before the coronavirus, SUNY Sullivan wanted a childcare center. Then came the pandemic that shuttered childcare facilities, often forcing parents to stay home from work or college in order to watch the kids.

Enter the college's soon-to-be daycare program. Tentatively, the plans are to open in June, offering services for SUNY Sullivan faculty, staff and students.

"If there are spots remaining they may become available to the community," said Maura Mullally-Caycho, Director of



Point person for the college's daycare plans, Maura Mullally-Caycho, is a longtime resident of Sullivan County. She grew up in Jeffersonville, graduated from Sullivan West High School in 2004 and graduated from SUNY Sullivan two years later. Her college degree is from SUNY Binghamton.



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Executive Operations at the college.

Housed in what was once the SUNY Sullivan bookstore, the program will be run by the educationally-based Healthy Kids Childcare Program. Based in Poughkeepsie, the organization operates in Brooklyn, Dutchess, Orange and Westchester counties. The New York State Office of Children and Family Services (OCFS) licenses and oversees their programs.

Daycare at SUNY Sullivan will welcome children from two years and nine months old to four years old, at least at first.

"Other SUNY schools have daycare programs," explained Mullally-Caycho, noting that the college did offer daycare years ago. "It's well-known that an on-site daycare can boost a college's enrollment and increase retention. And our Early Childhood Education students will benefit from being able to do their mandatory observations on campus.

'We also believe that exposing children to a college environment at an early age allows them to see that college could be an attainable goal of their own.'

Maura Mullally-Caycho
Director of Executive
Operations |

"We also believe that exposing children to a college environment at an early age allows them to see that college could be an attainable goal of their own," she said.

The program will accommodate 30 children with the hope of

expanding eventually to infants and toddlers. The college will seek funding for further renovations in order to serve the younger children and to meet state standards.

As it stands now, hours will be 6:30 a.m. to 6:30 p.m. Monday through Friday with limited hours taking place on Saturdays.

"Healthy Kids is creating a schedule that will meet the needs of both our students and employees," said Mullally-Caycho, "and there will be the option of enrolling children part time or full time. Healthy Kids will handle registration, staffing and all other aspects of the daycare. All staff will be employed by Healthy Kids."

The daycare will operate according to the college calendar.

Excitement abounds around the program.

"We have employees who are in need of childcare and have expressed interest in enrolling their children," said Mullally-Caycho. "And we have many potential students who are interested in

returning to school but can't because of childcare issues. There's a severe childcare shortage in Sullivan County. We see this not only as a perk to faculty, staff (and students) but as a way to alleviate the stress associated with finding quality child care."

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How food, funds, volunteerism – and dancing - boost spirits

Lakesha Washington works in a nursing home, studies full-time at SUNY Sullivan and plans to get her RN as soon as possible.

"Everyone here is helpful, very supportive," said Washington as she finished her class. "This year Covid has been stressful – the nursing instructor even gave us her own personal cellphone number."

"The college sent out letters that people with financial hardships could get some Covid relief," recalled Washington, who commutes to the college from Middletown. "And they've helped me with the on-line work we have to do. I'm not a computer expert."

Washington and nearly 80 other students gladly accepted the financial boost during the pandemic.

Dr. Keith Pomakoy, Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs, says stories like Washington's are not unusual: "Most of our students have jobs and children" further compounding the isolation and mental health issues that have accompanied this past year.

Then there was the shut-down of college campuses in March 2020, which particularly upended the 30 percent of SUNY Sullivan's students who lived in the campus dorms. In effect, they had to leave where they were living and seek beds and meals from somewhere. Lucky students found couches to sleep on with friends or relatives.

Food was another issue.

"We have students who are not eating regularly or at all," says Chris DePew, Dean of Student Development Services.

College President Jay Quaintance worked with the college's foundation to free up \$15,000, some of which came in private donations, to help provide students with food. The college has operated food drives for students during the Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons, as well as during the recent Passover-Easter time. Shop Rite is offering the college a discount on \$100 gift cards for food and they are given to students who need them.

Students sometimes wept over the unexpected but sorely needed help.

Then there were the heart-wrenching encounters with Covid's worse reality. One staff member was told "My dad passed away from Covid and I'm taking care of my siblings."

DePew, who also serves as the Athletic Director, said a student came to him and said, "Coach, my mom passed. I don't know what to do."

Assuaging the sadness and fears are SUNY Sullivan social workers Jennifer King and Lynn Leibowitz-Whitehead. They counsel students on line and seek out helping agencies in the neighborhoods where students live.

The college set up three "pods" for staff members and students



Headed towards becoming a registered nurse, Lakesha Washington is one of 70 students enrolled in SUNY Sullivan's nursing program. In her third semester, she focuses on topics such as human anatomy, physiology and pharmacology.



Vice President for Academic and Student Affairs Dr. Keith Pomakoy notes that nursing students routinely volunteer at Sullivan County's vaccination clinic at the college's Paul Gerry Fieldhouse.

who together worked on issues of food security, technology and counseling.

Early on in the pandemic, nursing and respiratory care students volunteered in local nursing homes. Now nursing students continue to volunteer at the college's Fieldhouse, a site for Covid vaccinations in Sullivan County.

And the college is boosting morale by offering Zoomed dancing complete with deejays, a noisy and welcome relief for more than 350 participants. On-line comedies and a SUNY Sullivan chat room are additional draws.

Pomakoy puts it simply. "Teachers and students," he said, "are adapting and persevering."

School Scene

'A look inside SUNY Sullivan'

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