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SCENE

A look at activities
in The Liberty
Central School
District



New Mandarin program expands horizons



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Paul Turner, a Mandarin Chinese teacher, instructs both middle school and high school students in the language.

STORY AND PHOTOS BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

Liberty Central School District recently welcomed a brand new program into its educational offerings — Mandarin Chinese.

Teacher Paul Turner, who is a recent addition to the district, has been introducing Mandarin to both middle school and high school students.

Turner pointed out that Mandarin is a growing language across the nation and aligns with the trend of offering a more comprehensive language curriculum. The focus isn't solely on linguistic diversity but also on preparing students to become globalized citizens.

Aaron Salvadge, the department head for World Languages at Liberty Central School District, said one of the driving factors behind the introduction of Mandarin was the challenge of finding certified teachers. Salvadge explained that while it can be hard to find teachers in various subjects, the demand is exceptionally high for world language teachers.

For several years, the school struggled to secure a Spanish language teacher. Additionally, a survey conducted among students revealed a

genuine interest in Mandarin. Thus, the stars aligned, presenting an opportunity to add Mandarin to the curriculum.

Turner recognizes that learning Mandarin can be challenging, especially for students with no prior exposure to the language. Turner's approach to teaching Mandarin focuses on project-based learning and interaction, allowing students to delve into their interests and express themselves.

Turner shared, "Right now, we're learning about introducing ourselves and introducing people. He believes that by connecting the language to topics that interest students, they can better engage with the learning process."

Interestingly, Turner has found that students interested in Japanese anime tend to be drawn to Chinese culture as well, creating a synergy of curiosity for different aspects of Asian culture.

As for his teaching philosophy, Turner emphasizes the importance of pushing students out of their comfort zones and instilling a sense of ownership over their learning process. While repetition is vital for language acquisition, he encourages students to participate in interactive projects and presentations to express their under-

standing and passions.

Turner's own journey with Mandarin began when he developed a passion for learning languages during his teenage years. The unique sound and complexity of the Chinese language drew him in, leading to years of study. He eventually pursued Chinese and Japanese studies during his undergraduate years and spent five months studying in China.

His goals for students are, "I really want them to be able to walk away with a globalized citizen perspective... having that understanding of another culture and, yes, being able to go out in society and use it in real life."

Salvadge added, "I think the purpose, and I would say this for any subject, really not just language, but is to know yourself better. You study, you educate yourself. It's not just to learn the material in and of itself; it's to reflect, engage the material, and look inside yourself. Who am I? What is my place in the world? And I think education helps us with that by allowing us to reflect upon our own existence, in our own place in the world."

The program is in its initial stages, categorized as an exploratory program, according to Salvadge. The school aims to expand it over three years, creating a three-level track.



Paul Turner, a Mandarin Chinese teacher, aims to change the perception of Mandarin as a fun and enriching language to learn, one that unlocks access to a vibrant and multifaceted culture.



Aaron Salvadge, the department head for World Languages at Liberty Central School District, asserts that language education assists students in understanding their position in the world.

Students begin with Mandarin Level 1 in middle school and will have the opportunity to continue with Level 2 and Level 3 at the high school. Although the Mandarin program has taken its first steps, it shares common goals with the already established Spanish program, which offers levels up to five, allowing students to earn college credit.

Turner hopes that Mandarin will be seen as a fun and rewarding language to learn, one that opens doors to a rich and diverse culture. He encourages students to embrace the challenges and rewards of this unique linguistic journey and to broaden their horizons as globalized citizens.



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Liberty School District Capital Project Plan



The current state of the cafeteria will undergo enhancements with the upcoming capital project. The goal is to create a brighter atmosphere.

STORY AND PHOTO
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

Dr. Patrick Sullivan, the Superintendent of Liberty Central School District, recently shared details of an extensive capital project to revitalize and enhance the district's educational facilities and community spaces. In a comprehensive interview, he laid out the project's key components and overall impact on the local community.

The last capital project undertaken by the district was in the 2016-2017 school year, which saw the additional wing of classrooms adjacent to the athletic fields. However, the time has come for Liberty Central School District to embark on a new venture to address its evolving needs.

One of the driving forces behind this project is the increase in enrollment since 2015 which has stabilized at around 1,800 students. This led to an essential question: Should they expand

or better utilize the current space?

To answer this question, the Liberty Board of Education's Buildings and Grounds Committee conducted extensive studies in collaboration with various stakeholders. These included a capacity study to assess the safe occupancy limits of existing buildings and a long-term demographic study to forecast future enrollment trends.

"The decision was let's better utilize our space," said Dr. Sullivan.

Dr. Sullivan explained that several data points guided the project. The district conducted a building condition survey alongside the capacity studies to ensure compliance with health, safety and accessibility regulations.

Furthermore, the community's input is highly valued, with plans to engage residents in decision-making through informational sessions, potentially including site visits.

Assistant Superintendent for Business Laurene McKenna, who has been an essential part of the planning process, expressed her enthusiasm for the project.

She mentioned that the high school's long-anticipated transformation is finally on the horizon, following years of planning and discussions. She also highlighted the safety updates slated for the middle and elementary schools.

The proposed project encompasses several crucial aspects including:

1. High School Renovation: A significant part of the project focuses on modernizing Liberty High School. The district aims to create a more welcoming and flexible student environment including expanding classroom space and updating the guidance suite. The changes are designed to provide enhanced counseling support and college and career exploration opportunities.

2. Cafeteria and Senior Lounge: Acknowledging the evolving preferences of students, the district plans to revamp the cafeteria. This includes updates such as a more secure cafeteria, designed to seal off in case of a lockdown situation providing an added layer of protection for students.

The Senior Lounge will be created to

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cater to different seating preferences ensuring a more accommodating and adaptable space.

The changes may not be as flashy as a new athletic field, but they are equally crucial in creating a safe learning environment according to McKenna.

3. Innovation Space: Liberty School District intends to create an innovation lab, moving away from traditional maintenance and woodshop facilities. This space will emphasize 21st-century skills like coding, data analysis, and technology exploration, fostering a more comprehensive learning experience.

4. Athletic Facilities: The project also entails resurfacing the track, relocating event spaces for improved track functionality, and adding turf and lights to the sports field. These enhancements will benefit school teams and provide opportunities for community events.

One significant change is the inclusion of a maintenance storage facility, intended initially as a separate project but now incorporated into the capital project to improve efficiency and control costs. This adjustment aligns with the district's aim to be fiscally responsible and avoid any additional financial burden on taxpayers.

In the middle school project, we will

be undertaking several renovations and upgrades, including:

- Replacing a total of 41 interior doors.
- Upgrading HVAC controls from pneumatic to Direct Digital Control.
- Enhancing the site's electrical systems to address water infiltration issues into the building.
- Replacing the 2000A main electrical distribution panel.
- Upgrading emergency lighting.
- Installing a new emergency generator.
- Implementing a hardwired carbon monoxide alarm system.
- The upcoming updates for the Elementary School will encompass the following improvements:
 - Roofing repairs and upgrades.
 - Abatement of hazardous materials, specifically VAT floor tile.
 - Replacement of wood flooring.
 - Installation of compliant railings at interior bleachers.
 - Replacement of classroom unit vents.
 - Conversion of boilers from steam to hot water.
 - Upgrades to the gymnasium ventilation system.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

If the capital project is approved, the cafeteria will have a more open and spacious design with enhanced security features for the students.

- Enhancements to HVAC controls.
- Implementation of hardwired carbon monoxide alarm systems.

The District Office project will involve the installation of a new emergency generator and the implementation of hardwired carbon monoxide alarm systems.

The proposed project's total cost is approximately \$42.7 million, with the majority covered through the district's capital reserve and a bond.

Importantly, this project is expected to have a 0 percent tax impact, thanks to careful financial planning, responsible allocation of resources, and state aid assistance.

"We definitely want to be cognizant of our taxpayers, but we also want to make sure that we're providing the best experi-

ence for our students," said Dr. Sullivan.

McKenna explained that the school district had been preparing for the project for quite some time, with a series of discussions and changes in plans. The long-awaited vote to approve the project is scheduled for mid-January, offering an exciting prospect for the district and community.

Dr. Sullivan reiterated that the district's goal is to serve its community effectively and efficiently while providing a bright future for the students and residents of Liberty.

The project proposal now awaits approval from the voters in the district, who will ultimately decide its fate.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO BELOW

This is what the guidance suite will look like once the capital project is completed, with a more open and spacious design.



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Liberty's new mascot



CONTRIBUTED GRAPHIC

The new mascot for Liberty Central School District is the RedHawk.

STORY AND PHOTO
BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

The Liberty Central School District unveiled its new mascot, the Redhawk, at the Liberty Fall Festival and the Liberty Central School District's All Things Liberty event on October 14th.

This change comes as a response to the New York State Education Department's mandate, which prohibits the use of indigenous people imagery as mascots, logos, or other symbols by public schools. The decision is a result of a comprehensive process that includes community input and discussions with local tribes.

The state also announced that it would withhold state aid if school districts with Native American mascots failed to make the required changes by the deadline.

"We would have lost \$25 million in state aid that would really impact our taxpayer," said Dr. Patrick Sullivan, the Superintendent of Liberty Central School District.

The transformation of Liberty's mascot, previously known as the Liberty Indians, has been a challenging journey that required careful consideration and community engagement. In November of the previous year, the district received a notification that the state would propose regulations against the use of indigenous people imagery.

After hearing the concerns of the local tribes, the community, and students, according to Sullivan, the district initiated a process to change the mascot.

Community forums were held to explain the reasons behind the change and gather input from various stakeholders. The challenge was not only to respect those who found the mascot offensive but also to understand the emotional attachment many had to the previous symbol.

The Liberty Central School District organized student forums and meetings with different grade levels to ensure that the student body understood the decision and felt included in the process.

"I personally went to each social studies class, met with each student if they're in school that day, and completed the presentation and gathered their input and explained why the change," said Sullivan.

The result was the selection of the Redhawks as the new mascot, a choice that was supported by the majority of the community. The new mascot represents a fresh start and an opportunity for unity.

"I have to give credit to one of our teachers, Jennifer Bull; she's the one that helped with the concept," said Dr. Sullivan.

However, the transition to the new mascot is not without financial challenges. The school district has allocated approximately half a million

dollars in its budget for this transition. This includes changing signage, uniforms, and other items to reflect the new mascot, the Redhawks.

Although there is no financial support from the New York State Department of Education for this change, the district believes it can manage the economic impact.

Sullivan emphasized the importance of embracing change and ensuring that the district serves all its students effectively. He acknowledged that the transition is a significant undertaking but expressed the district's commitment to doing what is best for

its students and the community.

"The next step of the process to change things over, which will be tedious, but we have the items that we need to address and make sure that we start transitioning to Liberty Redhawks," added Sullivan.

The Liberty Central School District's transition to the Redhawks as their new mascot is a response to the changing cultural landscape and state regulations. It reflects the district's commitment to inclusivity and respect for all community members.



The decision to change the old mascot and logo was made following a decision from the NYS Department of Education's Board of Regents to ban Native American Mascots & imagery.



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Sullivan 180 and Liberty collaborate to foster student wellness



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Liberty students are learning about the process of food cultivation and understanding why it is a healthier choice for their well-being.

BY PATRICIO ROBAYO

In a pursuit to revolutionize the health of students in the Liberty Central School District, Sullivan 180 has partnered with schools to create a culture of wellness that fosters lasting positive changes. The mission, aptly represented by the organization's turtle logo, reminds us that slow and steady progress is critical to winning the race toward healthier living.

At the heart of this effort is the Liberty Middle School, where teachers Jill Parks and Rachel McLean are leading the charge to transform the health of their students.

Sullivan 180's mission is to improve the health of Sullivan County, which has seen its health ranking drop to 60 out of 62 in New York State. The aim is to enhance youth education regarding the importance of health and wellness. At Liberty Middle School, their primary goal was to establish a culture of wellness throughout the institution.

This culture of wellness focuses on making gradual yet significant changes to students' lives. The turtle emblem, symbolizing slow and steady progress, aligns perfectly with their approach, says Parks and McLean.

The school has adopted various strat-

egies and initiatives to instill this culture, impacting not only the students but also the community at large.

The school launched a Healthy Habits Club. The club meets once or twice a month, providing students with opportunities for physical activities.

Parks said what started as a walking club soon evolved to include a broader range of activities, encouraging students to stay active. The sessions conclude with a healthy snack, reinforcing the importance of balanced nutrition.

Tara Kratz, who teaches fifth grade, says in her class, "We talk about healthy foods, we talk about getting exercise, we do movement breaks."

In addition to these activities, Liberty Middle School has also welcomed guest speakers. One such speaker focused on mindfulness and the benefits of breathing techniques in reducing stress.

When we're talking about health, it's not just nutrition, it's full body, full person health and how they can move their body to eliminate stress," said McLean.

Furthermore, McLean said that students still have lingering effects of COVID stress.

"That stress is still here. For kids, especially, there are lingering effects of that self-regulation; we give them a really tangible way to get themselves centered," added McLean.

To promote healthier alternatives for

celebrating birthdays, the school introduced a blender bike. Instead of sugary treats, students can now bring in ingredients for smoothies. They blend the smoothies and enjoy a nutritious birthday celebration.

Liberty's commitment to wellness extends beyond the classroom. The school's eighth-grade students embark on wellness trips, with this initiative continuing each year. These trips offer students a chance to connect with nature, learn about the impact of technology, and develop their critical thinking skills. This year's focus is on the documentary "The Social Dilemma," which investigates the psychological and societal effects of social media.

The school's wellness initiatives also extend to the outdoors. With the guidance of Sullivan 180, the school has planted trees around the building, aim-



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Eighth graders are on a hiking trail in Hurleyville, working towards improving their health.

ing to create a comfortable outdoor space with natural shade. Future plans include addressing issues such as mud erosion and establishing an outdoor classroom to promote experiential learning.

Collaboration with community partners is essential in the effort to improve student health. The partnership with the Boys and Girls club, for instance, has allowed students to access programs that teach healthy habits. Sullivan 180's expertise in sustainability is also invaluable, guiding the school in making environmentally responsible choices.

Parks and McLean say they are dedicated to fostering a culture of wellness at Liberty Middle School. They seek to expand these initiatives to ensure that the entire school district embraces a holistic approach to health, from improved nutrition to mental wellness. Ultimately, the goal is to prepare students for a lifetime of well-being by inculcating healthy habits and the ability to adapt to life's challenges.

Through gradual changes, community engagement, and innovative initiatives, the school district is on a journey to improve the health and well-being of its students and create a lasting culture of wellness. It's a reminder that, like the turtle in Sullivan 180's logo, slow and steady progress can indeed win the race toward better health.

The Elementary School has embarked on several initiatives to promote health and wellness within its community. The

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School Scene

'A Look Inside the Liberty Central School District'

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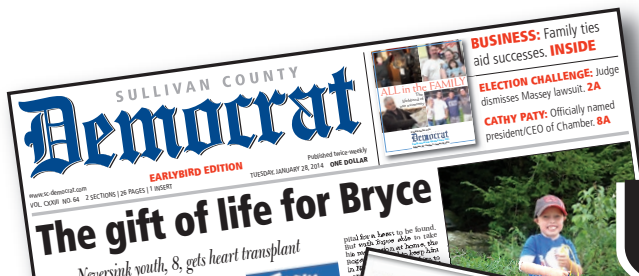
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180: Sullivan 180 and Liberty collaborate to foster student wellness

FROM PAGE 9L



Teachers Tara Kratz, Rachel McLean, and Jill Parks, with support from Sullivan 180, are fully committed to enhancing the health of Liberty.

“Walking Classroom” program is one of these endeavors, emphasizing the importance of physical activity and education.

By incorporating learning with exercise, students have the opportunity to enhance their knowledge while enjoying the benefits of regular walking, promoting both physical and intellectual well-being.

In an effort to encourage healthier celebrations, the middle school is also implementing the use of a “Blender Bike.” This innovative approach introduces a fun and interactive way for students to create nutritious smoothies while learning about the importance of making healthy dietary choices.

The “Catskill Edible Garden Project”

and the hosting of “SNAP-Ed programs” highlight the district’s commitment to fostering healthy eating habits.

These initiatives provide students with opportunities to learn about sustainable food choices and the nutritional value of fresh produce.

For the High School, one of the innovative approaches they’ve adopted is the purchase of snowshoes for gym class, staff, and community use. This initiative not only encourages physical activity during the winter months but also fosters a sense of inclusivity by making snowshoes available to both students and the broader community.

In addition to promoting physical fitness, the high school is also making efforts to enhance its food offerings. The

introduction of a salad bar and other food preparation equipment represents a commitment to healthier dining options for students and staff.

It encourages the consumption of fresh, nutritious foods and allows individuals to create balanced meals. The availability of these resources can contribute to improved dietary choices and overall well-being for all members of the school community.

Furthermore, the Catskill Edible Garden Project’s garden beds and indoor grow tower signify a dedication to teaching students about sustainable food production and the importance of knowing where their food comes from.

These initiatives allow students to actively participate in the cultivation of fresh produce, promoting a deeper understanding of nutrition and healthy eating.

At right: Disc golf targets have been installed at the school to provide students with additional recreational opportunities while promoting their health and well-being at the same time.



CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

Students engage in various physical activities throughout the year to promote their overall health and keep them active.





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