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# A new focus

## *Elementary School has a new Assistant Principal*

STORY AND PHOTO  
BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

**B**eginning her career with Sullivan West Central School as a Special Education teacher in 2016, Bethany Adams stepped into the Interim Assistant Principal role last January, in 2023, shortly after completing her Admin Degree, earning a second Masters in Educational Leadership. Over the summer, Adams applied for, and was granted, the official Assistant Principal title.

"The title now has changed to Assistant Principal of Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) and Curriculum Coordination," Adams stated. "While last year I focused on discipline, this year my focus is more on the curriculum and interventions for students."

According to Adams, the position has always been present in some form, but this year they're working to hone it in and more deeply implement it with a heavy focus on data and what the data is telling them about the students, both as individuals and as a whole.

"Think of MTSS as a pyramid. On the bottom of the pyramid

is what we have for everybody - it's the core curriculum, it's how our teachers teach in the classroom, it's what everyone is given the moment they walk in," Adams explained. "Sometimes that's just not enough for students, so we go up in the pyramid to see what else we can provide them. Can we give them an intervention teacher every other day, can we provide them with small group instruction to work on certain skill sets, etc."

What's most important for Adams in this is to be thoughtful in the process; to not just identify when and where a student, or students, are struggling, but to understand why they're struggling. Understanding the root cause will help them better evaluate what and why they need intervention.

Interventions can look like a student being taken out of class for one-on-one instruction to work with a speech or occupational therapist, a Special Education teacher in resource rooms, or even a physical therapist. It can also look like teachers breaking students in their classrooms into smaller groups based on various skill sets that each group may need to work on, such as phonetic

awareness or letter naming.

"We have what's called our structural support team," Adams said, "so we meet with the teachers, interventionists, and the family members so that everyone is on the same page."

The structural support team has also talked heavily about having resources and materials readily available for teachers, so they're not having to create different activities or lessons based on the needs of their students, all on their own.

"That can be really time consuming and taxing," Adams said, "so moving forward we'd like to provide teachers with a bank of resources, and not just materials for the kids who are struggling, but also reach the kids who are above grade level too. Maybe we're giving them a chapter book rather than a decodable book."

Although a large part of Adams' duties as Assistant Principal require her to focus on assessments, data, trends, what's working, what needs improvement, and if as a whole the Elementary is hitting the key components in the curriculum, she also makes sure that she gets out of her office and into



Sullivan West Elementary's Assistant Principal of Multi-Tiered Support System (MTSS) and Curriculum Coordination, Bethany Adams.

the classrooms, creating connections with the teachers and the students, seeing the happenings in real time.

"That's a big part of my job is being able to support teachers who are supporting the students," she added, "because at the end of the day that's what we're all here for. At the end of the day it's about the students."

## School Scene

*"A look inside the Sullivan West School District"*

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# Electing to reach success

STORY AND PHOTO  
BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

**N**ow in its second year, the Athletic Training elective class, taught by Physical Education and Health Teacher Linnea Schumacher, is proving to be an interest for students across the board. Although most were athletes last year, many this year are taking the class for personal interest.

“Because it’s an elective, I’m typically getting more athletes in the class, and many of them have had injuries already that they’re curi-

ous about,” said Linnea. “While the majority of students last year were seniors, this year the group is more mixed, and I feel that a lot of the older students that are taking the class are in it because they may be interested in going into a medical field, or a field that focuses on the body and how it functions.”

With a certification herself in Athletic Training, Linnea breaks the class down into recognizing and evaluating injuries related to the skeletal and muscular body. The class occasionally touches on concussions and internal injuries

Physical Education and Health Teacher Linnea Schumacher provides examples in how to treat sports-related injuries in the class.





but its primary focus is on skeletal and muscular injuries, specifically in relation to athletics.

Linnea talks treatments and rehabilitation for specific injuries, demonstrates taping and bracing in order to get someone back out on the field, as well as preventative techniques helping student athletes better understand steps to prevent an injury from occurring.

"I go from unit to unit. We start with major body areas such as the ankle and then move up to the knee, and from there, the hip," Linnea explained. "We discuss common injuries that can occur in those areas whether they are acute [just happened because of a movement], chronic [because of something over time], or are predisposed to it for whatever reason. From there we talk about how to recognize why that area of the body is bothering them and what could be damaged. In order to

do that, we have to go over those structures first so they have a better understanding - the bones of that area, the muscles, the ligaments and tendons."

She also tries to make the class as real-life as possible, working students' own injuries into the lesson.

"Last year we had a student who had an ankle injury so a project I had them work on in class was creating a rehabilitation program for her," Linnea stated.

Although much of the class is modeled after other athletic training courses, Linnea adapts and caters to what her students are going through. Her hope is that the class is not only educational in terms of athletics, but that it shows the opportunities students could have as they get older and what profession they might want to get into themselves whether it's athletic training, a physical therapist, orthopedics, or even a nurse.



A major part of the course covers pain management and how to treat various types of injuries, such as chronic or acute.



The class is modeled after other athletic training courses, with special adaptations to ensure student's learn as much as they can in the field of sports medicine.



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# Improving school culture and behavior can be as simple as a choice

STORY AND PHOTOS  
BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

Sullivan West Elementary has always had a building leadership team composed of teachers, professional related services, and Administration, but this year they've decided to implement something new into what they do - the Positive Choice Incentive Program, or PCIP.

"We had noticed as a group," said School Counselor Maureen Casey-Bryant, "as well as heard from students, that it seemed like the kids who were getting a lot of attention were often getting attention due to negative choices, or

negative behaviors. So, we wanted to switch the culture of things here so that kids get recognized for doing the right thing."

Spearheading the movement with other staff alongside her, like Social Worker Kayla Odell, Maureen modeled PCIP off of the Positive Behavior Incentive System (PBIS), which is a school-based framework that uses rewards to encourage positive student behavior and to improve school culture. Based on research from universities across the country, PBIS focuses on proactive behavior correction by providing students with incentives for demonstrating positive behaviors.

Rewards can be tangible, like

stickers or small prizes, or intangible like extra privileges or recognition of individual students. There may also be reward systems for the whole class.

"The language we're using is similar to the language that was used in that," Maureen explained, "so our expectations are Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe. So it's very much modeled after that idea of supporting students

by showing positive rewards for kids that are



Sullivan West Elementary School Principal Rod McLaughlin speaks to students about positive behavior during a PCIP assembly.



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Students crafted themselves simple reminders to help stick to their mission in remaining kind to others.



making good choices, and that consequences happen when you make poor choices.”

Teachers in their classrooms have been encouraged to use whole class incentive systems to get the students to work towards something together. According to Maureen, some have done glow parties or bring a stuffed animal to class day, once their kids have filled their jar or have enough on their chart.

Individual students can achieve a reward once they've been successful at turning some negative behaviors around, have shown personal growth, or exceptional kindness towards others.

“A couple of years ago we started Triple B which is ‘Be Responsible, Be Respectful, Be Safe’ so each classroom teacher, once a month, picks a student who is showing all three of those qualities and they get a reward for that,” said Maureen. “It can be a brag-tag for their backpack, or a golden ticket for lunch. Last year we came up with a Bulldog Badge.”

“What’s neat about it is that they get this badge, or button, with their certificate,” explained Social Worker Kayla Odell, “but we also run an art contest for the students to create the design for it. Each month we pick a winner and that winner also gets a button.”

To better implement the Positive Choice Incentive Program, the building leadership team hosts assemblies with the kids once a month on different topics that school staff felt would be important, such as expectations, con-



Elementary students Jordan Ferber, Jenni Hewlett, Harlee Dirie, and Michael McKeen stand proud with their awards for Being Responsible, Being Respectful, and Being Safe.

sequences of actions, and most recently safety.

They open the assemblies with a cute and catchy song the music team created that focuses on expectations, and then they move into a presentation to reinforce learning of positive choices and positive behaviors.

Teachers also received a sheet with an entire list of examples of positive behavior for the kids such as keeping hands and feet to themselves and being kind to themselves and others.

“We pulled it all out from the code of conduct in simple terms so that the kids can understand,” said Kayla. “I think they’re get-

ting used to the routine and structure of it because they’re in their third month of doing the assemblies. They’re starting to know the song, they’re having conversations about it, and they’re excited. We’re planting the seed and watching it grow.”

As part of the program, on December 3 the Elementary is hosting a celebration with hot chocolate, a fire and activities at the outdoor classroom for all of the kids who are referral free for the first marking period. Kids with referrals won’t be participating, but that doesn’t mean they can’t participate in the next one.

“They get a chance to redeem

themselves by not getting a referral in the following marking period,” stated Maureen, “and it’s really just by working with them to understand that they made a negative choice the first time, but what choice can they make next time around that is a more positive one? To understand that everyone makes mistakes, but how can we get better and how can we move on from it?”

Most importantly, both Maureen and Kayla expressed that all of this is to get kids to understand that they do actually have control over what happens, and when they make good choices for themselves, good things happen.

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# FFA takes students far into the future

BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

**W**hen Agriculture and Science Teacher Padraic McCarthy took his first Ag teaching job in a small rural town in South Dakota, he had no idea what FFA (Future Farmers of America) was.

“It wasn’t something that I, myself, had in High School,” noted Paddy, “so I didn’t really know much about it.”

FFA was founded nearly 100 years ago by a group of young farmers, and is an organization that helps students develop their leadership, personal growth, and career skills through agricultural education.

As diversity and opportunities continued, and still continue, to grow in agriculture, the FFA organization officially changed their name to the National FFA Organization in 1988.



Sullivan West FFA members posing with a pallet of fencing supplies for victims of Hurricane Helene.

“I think there’s a big misconception around what agriculture actually encompasses and how can you participate in it,” said Paddy.

FFA is structured at the local, state, and national levels, participating in Career Development Events and Leadership Development Events that aim to evaluate students’ skills while im-

proving their speaking and leadership abilities, and it all starts in school.

As long as a student is enrolled in an Agriculture class in their school, they are a part of FFA, but in order for a school to have an FFA chapter there must be at least three Ag classes offered as electives for students to take.

Luckily, Sullivan West now has four. Students can choose to enroll in Animal Science, Natural Resources, Agribusiness, or an Agriscience class with Paddy.

“So the students I have enrolled in Ag classes are also a part of the FFA chapter we have here at the school,” explained Paddy, “which we established in 2021. FFA is the premiere youth leadership in the country and the kids are learning that it’s not just about traditional farming. Being a farmer doesn’t mean you’re out with the cows and plow all day anymore. It’s an organization of opportunity,” he noted.

One of the largest FFA chapters in New York State is located in Queens at the John Bowne High School. According to Paddy there are plenty of urban and suburban schools that now have Ag classes and FFA chapters.



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“You can be a business minded person and go into Ag finance working at a bank helping farmers finance their equipment,” stated Paddy. “You could be in Real Estate, a welder for John Deere, or be a mechanic fixing farmers equipment. At the Convention, we recently went to, there were over 300 vendors there of employment.”

Paddy, along with five students, traveled over 2,000 miles on a charter bus with eight other FFA chapters to the 96th National FFA Convention & Expo in Indiana last year. There were over 70,000 FFA members from all over the country gathering and celebrating the future of agriculture.

On the way, the Sullivan West FFA chapter had the opportunity, along with the other chapters on the bus, to do six educational tours.

“We went to the Corning Museum of Glass, went to an orchard near Erie, PA, toured the Lincoln Electric Welding School, went to a Christmas tree farm, an equine farm, and toured a robotic dairy farm facility,” Paddy said. “The tours, and the Convention gave the kids a sense of the scale of what they’re doing. They met kids from all kinds of chapters and saw the multitude of opportunities that there are in Agriculture.”

Paddy continued to explain that FFA is in the classroom as well as beyond the classroom. In lessons they’re learning different trades



Sullivan West and Livingston Manor FFA members posing with a member of the Midnight Sun FFA Chapter from Alaska at the 97th National FFA Convention & Expo.

like maple syrup, honey, leather working, and forestry. At contests and events they’re learning how to dress and prepare for job interviews, how to speak and delegate.

“And the community and the school have been extremely supportive of our FFA chapter and everything we’re doing,” Paddy noted. “I hope it just keeps growing and expanding, giving the kids more opportunities.”



Padraic McCarthy, FFA advisor

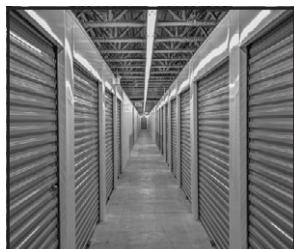
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# Addressing absenteeism

STORY AND PHOTO  
BY AUTUMN SCHANIL

Over the last three years, Sullivan West has done a complete overhaul of their attendance policy, according to Director of Student Services Sheri Parucki. After it was board approved last year, they received an invite to partner with three other school districts in Sullivan, Dutchess, and Orange County to look at chronic absenteeism rates and ways to improve them.

“There has been an increase in absenteeism, so we’re trying to get ahead of it,” stated Parucki. “We’re in a rural area, and because of that the schools tend to be the place where everything happens for a lot of students, so it has to be a place that kids want to be, and like to be. Which means we often have to look at our offerings and how we’re creating connections.”

The school created a district-wide committee with members from both the Elementary and the Secondary School. Each team is led separately by the Assistant Principals in each building, meeting to talk about different incentives, looking at data, at

specific students, putting interventions in place, educating families on missed seat time and what the impact of that is. They also meet to recognize improvements.

“Not just perfect attendance,” explained Parucki, “but the kids who may have been absent for whatever reason and through age-appropriate interventions are now making an improvement.”

Attendance may seem small compared to other tasks and issues schools and students face daily, but good attendance allows students to keep up with lessons, assignments and projects. They participate in class discussions to better understand a subject while also learning to interact with their peers, build relationships, and develop real-life social skills they’ll need once they graduate.

“We’re also working to change the narrative,” Parucki stated, “supportive versus punitive. Rather than ‘You missed school. You’re in trouble,’ changing it to ‘We’ve noticed you’ve been out. What can we do to help? How can we be supportive?’ It’s important to not just strengthen relationships between students, staff, and families, but to show the students that we see them, and we care.”



Director of Student Services, Sheri Parucki



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