

Park Forest Elementary kindergarten teacher Janette Ortiz was named a State College Magazine Teacher of the Year.

# The Year in Review



## Annual Report

## 2023-2024

STATE COLLEGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT

*We are the future!*

**To Prepare Students for Lifelong Success Through Excellence in Education**

# Our District

Situated in the heart of Pennsylvania, the State College Area School District serves a diverse community that combines a growing college town with suburban neighborhoods and working farms in the countryside. As the area's fourth largest employer, SCASD draws its students from a 150-square mile attendance area encompassing the Borough of State College and five surrounding townships.



State High received a 2024 Jostens Renaissance School of Distinction Platinum certification and its world languages department was honored with a Silver Globe Award from the Pennsylvania State Modern Languages Association.

Across eight elementary schools, two middle schools, a high school and the Delta Program for middle and high school levels, our district annually serves an enrollment of about 6,700. Each year, our faculty and staff dedicate themselves to providing the best possible academic experiences for students — from an innovative STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) program for grades K-5 to the middle school foreign language classes to the diverse array of high school courses that include AP, Advanced, International Baccalaureate and Career and Technical Center opportunities. Our art, library and music departments districtwide excel in their fields; in fact, over the past decade the district has perennially received the Best Communities for Music Education Award. At the high school alone, students can choose from 73 clubs and activities, including 22 musical ensembles and 31 athletic teams.

Within this dynamic environment, our teachers and students shine. SCASD routinely garners awards for teaching, and district schools annually are highly ranked in state and national lists for instruction and learning opportunities. Five State High students in the past decade have been named U.S. Presidential Scholars, a rare honor, and each class typically includes several National Merit Scholarship finalists.

Additionally, we take pride in our mental health and special education services, counseling department, intervention programs, learning enrichment, and individualized education plans to accommodate the needs of all students. Our district is fully committed to promoting responsive instruction, equity, inclusion and restorative practices so that all students, faculty and staff feel welcome and supported. In everything we do, we strive to meet the objectives spelled out by our Four Pillars and fulfill our core mission: To prepare students for lifelong success through excellence in education.

## Four Pillars

The district's instructional focus, or road map, is based on four pillars, its prime objectives:

- Data-informed, culturally-responsive teaching and learning
- Collaborative community built on trust
- Inclusive and supportive communities
- High-performing organization

## Demographics

| | |
|---|---|
| American Indian/Alaskan Native | 0.2% |
| Asian | 8.8% |
| Black | 2.7% |
| Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander | 0.2% |
| Hispanic | 4.6% |
| White | 76.3% |
| 2 or More Races | 7.4% |



# Year in Review

For the first time, seniors took a colorful approach to starting the school year. More than 200 students painted their designated parking spots (pictured), under a debut program aimed at boosting State High spirit. The positive feedback inspired the school to consider continuing the event.



In September, the district began transitioning to a new platform, ParentSquare, for all district communications. During the year, the district adopted PowerSchool as its new student information system.

Spring Creek Elementary ushered in November by unveiling a new alma mater written by Principal Paul Brigman and music teacher Melanie Komlenic. Students gave an inaugural performance at a schoolwide assembly.

Two elementary schools, Mount Nittany and Park Forest, piloted a new position: elementary dean of students. Kara Treweek at MNE and Becky Kabala at PFE reinforced positive behavioral interventions and support programs, provided student support, and assisted their principals and colleagues. In another first, Katy Ricker served as the special education dean of students at Easterly Parkway Elementary.

Throughout the year, State High debuted the Humanities Center and STEM Center, two classrooms designated for academic support from teachers during school. The centers registered more than 2,000 drop-in visits from students, surpassing interest in previous support centers. Also at State High, February saw the library department hold the SCASDReads Aloud K-12 Family Night, a festival to celebrate books and writing. More than 1,100 visitors enjoyed read-alouds and activities.

In January, driving instructor Dagmar Wilson celebrated her 1,000th successful road test since joining the driver education program in 2015.

In March, the Board of Directors approved the district's 2024-2027 Future Ready Comprehensive Plan that included new district mission, vision and stakeholder value statements. The same month brought two central administrative hires: Stephanie Beaver as director of student services and Michelle Simpson as human resources executive director and compliance/Title IX officer.

Throughout the spring, the Solar Power Purchase Agreement Working Group, composed of representatives from the district and 11 other local municipal entities, worked to finalize contracts for the PPA, a cooperative to purchase electricity from a solar developer at set prices over 15 years. The PPA is expected to lead to savings, as well as help reduce the district's carbon footprint.

Culminating discussions that started in the fall, the Board of Directors in May approved making the Delta Program two schools, for grades 6-8 and for grades 9-12, starting in the 2025-2026 school year. Later that month, Beth Solensky was hired as Mount Nittany Elementary's principal and Kara Treweek moved to be Ferguson Township Elementary's principal.

As the year concluded, SCASD finished creating a unified elementary positive behavioral interventions and support program called STAR for consistency and fidelity among schools.

## Quick Facts

- **2,006 Individuals employed**
- **6,712 Students**
- **583 Students in Class of 2024**
- **4th Largest county employer**
- **Average elementary class size: 20**
- **Average grades 6-8 class size: 23**
- **Teachers' average years: 15**
- **National Merit finalists: 12**
- **10th best district in Pennsylvania out of 496: Niche.com**
- **$194 million in total expenses**
- **98.3% 5-year cohort graduation rate**
- **675 Professional employees (teachers, nurses, counselors, psychologists)**
- **18 Professional employees with PhDs**

# Growing all Learners K-8

Classroom community is important to our elementary and middle school programs. Teachers work hard to sustain the positive communities they build with their students throughout the year. We know that social and emotional learning is key to supporting academic learning, which is why we prioritize promoting positive learning environments. We teach how to get along, share, deal with conflict, follow rules and be good citizens. All of our teachers and staff are trained in the Restorative Practices approach, which emphasizes repairing relationships when handling conflict.

At the elementary level, we emphasize differentiated instruction to meet individual student needs, as well as to create more effective learning environments. Students receive English language arts (ELA), mathematics, science, and social studies as core subjects. Language arts focuses on reading and writing, while mathematics uses structured investigation, exploration and games to master concepts. Adhering to Next Generation Science Standards, the science curriculum develops in-depth understanding through collaboration, inquiry and problem-solving. In addition, five weekly specials are art, library, music, physical education, and STEM.

During the 2023-2024 year, the district adopted updated writing standards in the K-5 English Language Arts Scope and Sequence, adding to the core reading resource approved during the previous year.

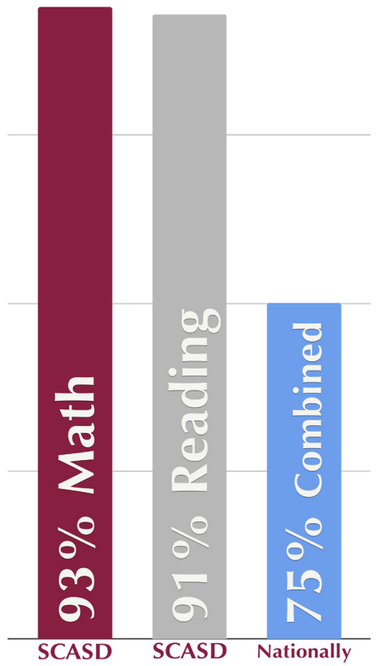
Middle level students start learning French, Spanish or German while taking English, mathematics, science, social studies, art and general music courses. Social studies provides civics and economics instruction. Academic Literacy courses help students build critical thinking skills to analyze texts, and develop reading and metacognitive conversations through inquiry-based learning.



The U.S. Dept. of Education named Radio Park Elementary a 2023 National Blue Ribbon School, one of 13 PA schools to receive the honor.

## District Learners

Special Education: 13%
Gifted: 7.6%
English Language Learners: 3.6%




## Measuring Success

We use multiple assessments to evaluate students' performance in order to continually adapt instruction. One example is our districtwide Measures of Academic Progress assessment results, which reflect our commitment to growth for all students.

In 2023-2024, each of our quartiles of elementary and middle school students demonstrated an average of a year or more worth of growth in math and reading.

**Right:** Overall, students in grades 2-8 performed at the 93rd percentile nationally for math and at the 91st percentile for reading, compared to the national average of the 75 percentile for both. Additionally, over 50% of our students performed in the top quartile in both reading and math, compared to only 25% nationally.



# Secondary Students 9-12

State College Area High School provides challenging academic courses, comprehensive career and technical education, and diverse extracurricular activities, contributing to it being ranked 41st out of 740 Pennsylvania public high schools by U.S. News and World Report and in the top 2 percent of Niche.com's equivalent rankings. Niche.com also ranked the faculty in the top 2 percent statewide for quality of instruction.

State High consistently places graduates in the nation's top universities and colleges. From the Class of 2023, Penn State accepted 255. SAT scores annually surpass state and national averages, and athletic teams, music ensembles and clubs consistently garner honors. The 2024 graduating class of 583 included 235 Faculty Scholars (GPA of 4.00 or 3.75 unweighted).

During 2023-2024, 68 percent of students took rigorous courses, compared to the statewide average of 56 percent. Learning also occurred outside classrooms. Dozens of students received off-campus enrichment opportunities beyond the scope of the traditional curriculum, including Learning Enrichment, Advanced Option, independent study, research, lab experiences, Penn State courses, mentorships and internships.

| SAT Scores | Reading and Writing | Math |
|---|---|---|
| State High | 607 | 575 |
| State Average | 543 | 529 |
| National Average | 527 | 509 |



State High had 12 National Merit Scholarship finalists.

## 583 Graduates

» **80%** Attended college



Valedictorian of the class of 2024, Lydia Shen, left, and salutatorian, Prithvi Narayanan.

## High School

- **2,349 Total students 9-12**
- **98.3% 5-year cohort graduation rate**
- **73 Activities and clubs**
- **22 Bands, orchestras, choirs, string ensembles and rock ensembles**
- **31 Athletic teams**
- **73 Advanced Placement and advanced courses**
- **16 International Baccalaureate World Campus courses**
- **13 Career and Technical Center programs**

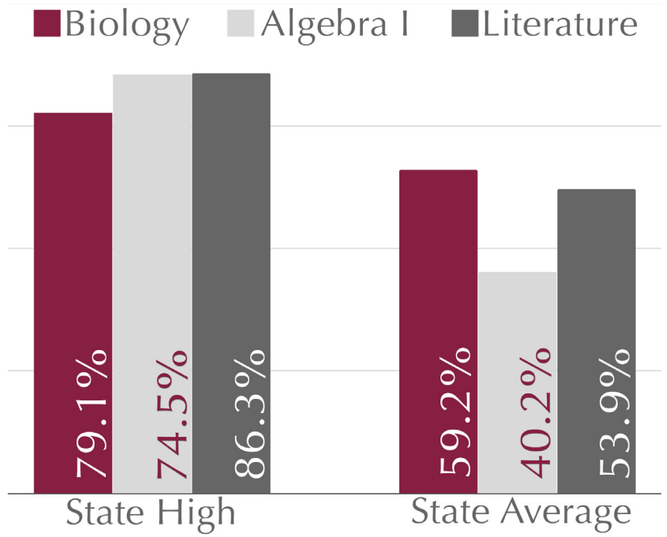
## Advanced Placement

1,339 AP tests were taken with a maximum score of 5

- 91% Scored a 3 or higher
- 285 AP Scholars with an average score of 4.24

## The Keystone Exams

State High students annually outperform the state average on the Keystone Exams. The chart below shows a comparison of State High students who achieved proficiency vs. the PA state average for Keystone test scores in 2023-2024.



# Finance

Historically, SCASD schools have benefited from strong community support for public education and consistent revenue streams from a stable economy centered around Penn State University. Total revenues for 2023-2024 were $195,235,000, which was primarily funded by local revenue totaling $155,792,000 (80 percent). Local revenues were derived primarily from levying taxes such as real estate tax, earned income tax and real estate transfer tax: $119,005,000, $22,403,000, and $2,556,000, respectively. For the 2023-2024 fiscal year, the district increased the real estate tax rate by 4.10 percent (equal to the Act I Index) or 1.9538 mills, resulting in a total of 49.6082 mills. In addition, the district earned $5,784,000 in interest on investments. The increases in earned income tax and interest on investments reflected the inflationary environment.

The district continued to offer the Supplemental Property Tax Rebate Program for its ninth year, issuing 212 rebates totaling $69,759. Additionally, each approved district homestead and farmstead received approximately $138 in property tax relief.

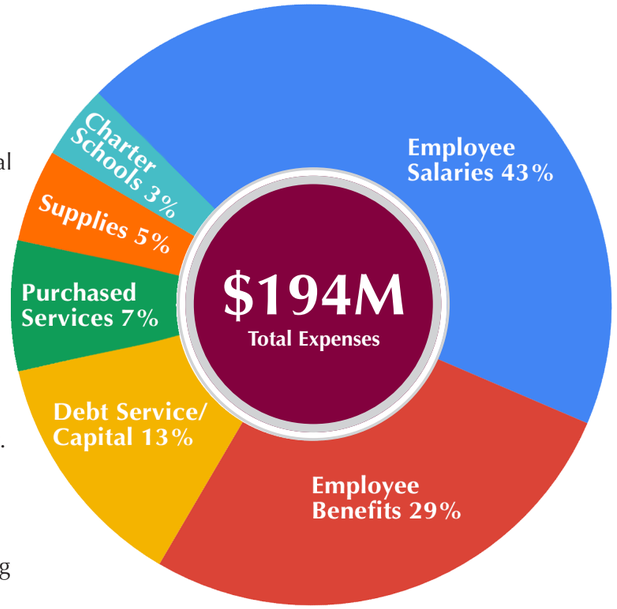
State revenues of $37,437,000 were derived primarily from state subsidies for basic education and special education and a 50 percent reimbursement for social security and retirement costs, which totaled approximately $32,883,000. Federal revenues decreased by $1,477,000 primarily because of less COVID-19 related grant funding.

### Revenue Sources

**Local:** $155,791,769: **80%**
**State:** $37,436,710: **19%**
**Federal:** $2,006,514: **1%**

Expenditures and other financing uses for the 2023-2024 fiscal year were $193,518,000 compared to the 2022-2023 fiscal year of $183,445,000 (a 5.5 percent increase). Salaries and benefits increased by $11,758,000, with salaries and health insurance growing by $5,657,000 and $4,329,000, respectively. Increases in retirement and other benefits were proportional to the increase in salaries. More professional services expenses primarily stemmed from the District-wide Facilities Master Plan project, greater spending on staff training, and engineering and legal services. The rise in supplies and property expenses was largely due to increases in physical plant, transportation, and information technology supplies, as well as electricity costs in 2024. Other fund-use changes included two transfers: to the Debt Service Fund to pay existing debt service obligations and to the Capital Reserve Fund.

**88%**
of the budget is used directly to support student learning.




The district's Pennsylvania State Employees Retirement System payments continued to rise because of an increase in salaries. Debt service included payments on the $85 million high school referendum borrowing and additional financing for the remainder of the high school project, Memorial Field renovation and three elementary school projects with new playgrounds. The district continued setting aside resources for funding future expenditures as part of a long-term capital plan.

## Charter School Expenses

The district's payment of $5.9 million to charter schools for 320 students represented three percent of the budget. The amount was based on a state formula calculated using the district's actual per capita costs. While the district funds charter schools as required, it maintains no financial, academic or operational supervision, nor does it have evaluative authority over them.




Payments to charter schools rose from $5 million in 2014 to $5.9 million in 2024 due to the increase in per capita cost, while enrollment over that span declined from 415 to 320.



# Facilities

A districtwide facilities master plan process began in October to assess building conditions, enrollment projects, and educational programs primarily at the middle level. The DWFMP also addressed sustainability, transportation operations, security, playground conditions, and athletic program needs.

As part of the DWFMP, after evaluating three district-owned sites for a new three-story, 200,000 square-foot Park Forest Middle School, the district and the architectural firm of Crabtree, Rohrbaugh & Associates chose a tract across Valley Vista Drive from the current school, next to Circleville Park. The district held four community forums — two in February and two in April — to provide updates on the design process and the project overall.

In April, the final floor plan design for the Mount Nittany Elementary expansion was approved. Starting in 2025, a third wing will be built over the course of 18 months, adding six core classrooms, one for each grade. The wing also will contain a STEM classroom, an instrumental music room, a cafeteria/kitchen, and spaces for autistic support and small group instruction.

Work continued on constructing a new 10,000-square foot Physical Plant building next to Community Field and on renovating the former North Building Career and Technical Center area to house the district's Information Technology department, RIT Program and Virtual Academy.




Artist's rendering of the Park Forest Middle School site plan.



Artist's rendering of the Mount Nittany Elementary School expansion.

## Centre County School Tax Comparison

| District | Mills | Median Assessed Value | Real Estate Tax | Earned Income Tax* | **Total Tax** |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **SCASD** | **49.6082** | **$73,745** | **$3,658** | **$691** | **$4,349** |
| **Bellefonte** | **52.5103** | **$47,945** | **$2,518** | **$764** | **$3,282** |
| **Bald Eagle** | **61.9800** | **$35,475** | **$2,199** | **$1,491** | **$3,690** |
| **Penns Valley** | **51.4177** | **$45,535** | **$2,341** | **$946** | **$3,287** |

*EIT Based on Centre County median income of $72,748.

# Awards & Recognitions

## Faculty & Staff



Park Forest Middle School teacher Andy Cunningham advanced to be a PA Teacher of the Year award semifinalist.

State High Librarian Cathi Fuhrman received the 2024 American Association of School Librarians' Intellectual Freedom Award.

Mount Nittany Middle School teacher Tim Dzurko was elected president of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year - PA Chapter.



Cindy Sergeon-Smith, the district home school visitor and homeless liaison, was named WTAJ's Woman of the Year in the station's "Remarkable Women" series.

Park Forest Middle School counselor Bethany Chamberlain was inducted into the Juniata College Sports Hall of Fame.



Delta Program teacher Amy Allison received the Judith's Award from the nonprofit literacy organization Judith's Reading Room for her Advocacy for Teens class.



Salutatorian Prithvi Narayanan was one of 161 seniors nationwide selected to be a 2024 U.S. Presidential Scholar. Lydia Shen was a semi-finalist. Narayanan also was a finalist for the U.S. Senate Youth Program.

## Academics

PFMS Technology Student Association students claimed two first places at the 46th National TSA Conference. Olivia Li and Purvi Narayanan won the children's stories category, and Benny Gulis, Riyaz Giri, and Westin Lenkey topped the field in mechanical engineering.



State High speech and debate team member Claire Fox won first place in the Congress category at the PA High School Speech League State Tournament. Teammates Alex Haskins and Lisa Wang won third in News Broadcasting.

State High students Dalia Eldawody and Morgan Snelick won gold medals in dental terminology and physical therapy, respectively, at the PA Health Occupations Students of America State Conference.

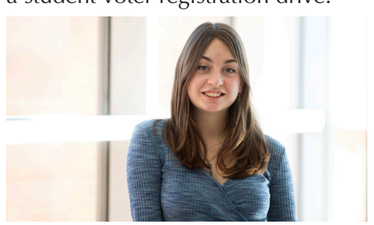
The MNMS Quiz Bowl 6th grade and 8th grade teams won championships at the Thinking Cap Quiz Bowl Fall 2023 competition.



Lydia Shen and Amy Liu won National Merit Scholarships, among the 7,140 recipients nationwide.

Claire Chi was named one of 150 Coca-Cola Scholars nationally.

Delta Program seniors Lorelai Radzanowski, Ana Helfen Wood and Eli Carey received the PA Governor's Civic Engagement Award for a student voter registration drive.



Maya Dombroskie was one of 25 students selected for the elite Bill of Rights Institute 2024 Student Fellowship program.





State High TSA members Natalie Branstetter (children's stories), Margo Wyckoff (future technology & engineering teacher) and Donna Tan (virtual reality visualization) won first places at the 46th PA TSA Conference. The teams won five other titles and Wyckoff was elected to serve on the National TSA Team as the reporter for the 2024-2025 year, the first State High student to be a national officer.



Senior Riley Kilbride won a gold medal in the automotive service technology competition at the State Leadership and Skills Conference and earned 6th place in the National SkillsUSA Competition.

State High FFA member Katherine Coopey earned a gold medal in the Junior Prepared Speaking category at the PA State FFA Convention. Jaylene Everhart won a first place award at the National Young Farmer Education Association Institute and Agriculture Communications competition. The State High FFA Chapter earned a silver team medal in the farm and agribusiness management career development event at the National FFA Convention and Expo.

## Athletics




Wrestler Asher Cunningham won the 160-pound state title. Teammates Pierson Manville and Nick Pavlechko won silver at 145 pounds and bronze at 285 pounds, respectively. Manville also won the National Wrestling Hall of Fame's 2024 Dave Schultz High School Excellence Award for PA.




Molly Workman won gold medals in the 50-yard freestyle and 100 freestyle, as well as a bronze in the 400 freestyle relay with Ditta Kowalik, Grace Carrington and Kelly Brownstead, at the PIAA Swimming and Diving Championships. For the boys' team, Sam Huggins won silver medals in the 200 and 500 freestyle events.

The State High boys cross country team finished third at the PIAA State Cross Country Championships.

Jacob Hohenshelt and Lorelai Radzanowski were State High's Snyder Award winners for excelling in academics, athletics and community service.

## Music



For the 20th time, and 11th straight year, the district received a Best Communities for Music Education in America designation from the National Association of Music Merchants.

The MNMS Symphonic Band, Jazz Band, Orchestra, and Clef Hangers Select Choir earned first places and either superior or excellent ratings at an adjudication festival. Other honors: Dean Sunderland with "Best Individual Soloist" award for jazz guitar and Jacob Heller with "Best Student Piano Accompaniment."

PFMS students competed at the 2024 Music in the Parks Festival where Symphonic Band took first place with a superior rating and first overall band. Orchestra also won first place with a superior rating and first overall orchestra. The Eighth Grade Choir received first place and superior rating.

State High students Bryson Christopher, Genavieve Clayton, Spencer Hardyk, Brooke Shellenberger, Nat Sliman, Grace Yang, Rishi Bhattacharyya, Abby Putnam, Luca Snyder, Abby Chen, Lauren Lee, Eva Wilf, Hannah Kifer, Max Clement, Anni Lopez, Arlo Nicholas, Joshua Carlson, Abby Jones, John Leskowicz, Peter Carlson, and Adam Hallacher were selected for PA Music Educators Association all-state choir or musical ensembles. Hallacher also was selected for the Music for All All-National Jazz ensemble.

## Arts

Four SCAHS Thespians members received recognitions at the 19th annual Isaac Awards for the spring musical "The Pirates of Penzance." Spencer Hardyk won Best Lead Actor in a Male Role, and Al Eburne received the Student Design award for costume design. Audrey Shaner and Bri Dzyak were named the runner-up in Student Choreography for their work with "With Catlike Tread, Upon Our Prey We Steal."



# Directory

www.scasd.org

## Elementary Schools (K-5)

**Corl Street Elementary**
235 Corl Street
State College, PA, 16801
Dr. Kelly Mark, principal
814-231-1185
Enrollment: 226

**Easterly Parkway Elementary**
234 Easterly Parkway
State College, PA, 16801
Meredith Henderson, principal
814-231-1170
Enrollment: 319

**Ferguson Township Elementary**
215 West Pine Grove Road
Pine Grove Mills, PA, 16868
Shelly Buckholtz, principal
814-231-4119
Enrollment: 290

**Gray's Woods Elementary**
160 Brackenbourne Drive
Port Matilda, PA, 16870
Dr. Kristen Dewitt, principal
814-235-6100
Enrollment: 358

**Mount Nittany Elementary**
700 Brandywine Drive
State College, PA, 16801
Mark Feldman, principal
814-272-5970
Enrollment: 426

**Park Forest Elementary**
2181 School Drive
State College, PA, 16803
Dr. Jessica Quinter, principal
814-231-5010
Enrollment: 414

**Radio Park Elementary**
800 West Cherry Lane
State College, PA, 16803
Alex Raup, principal
814-231-4115
Enrollment: 433

**Spring Creek Elementary**
217 Scholl Street
State College, PA, 16801
Paul Brigman, principal
814-231-5026
Enrollment: 381

## Middle Schools (6-8)

**Mount Nittany Middle School**
656 Brandywine Drive
State College, PA, 16801
Brian Ishler, principal
814-272-4050
Enrollment: 663

**Park Forest Middle School**
2180 School Drive
State College, PA, 16803
Dr. Karen Wiser, principal
814-237-5301
Enrollment: 723

## High School (9-12)

**State College Area High School**
650 Westerly Parkway
State College, PA, 16801
Laura Tobias, principal
814-231-1111
Enrollment: 2,165

## Programs

**Delta Middle Level (6-8)**
653 Westerly Parkway
State College, PA, 16801
Dr. Jon Downs, director
814-231-1000
Enrollment: 136

**Delta High School Level (9-12)**
653 Westerly Parkway
State College, PA, 16801
Dr. Jon Downs, director
814-231-1000
Enrollment: 178

**Virtual Academy**
653 Westerly Parkway
State College, PA, 16801
Rebecca Michaels, assistant principal
814-231-1011 x2864
Enrollment: 17 (K-5) and 139 (6-12)



As part of its democratic model, the Delta Program holds weekly all-school meetings to discuss current school issues and events.



# Board of Directors

**Dr. Aaron Miller**
**Dr. Anne Demo**
**Jackie Huff**
**Dr. Carline Crevecoeur**
**Dr. Amy Bader**, President
**Dr. Deborah Anderson**, Vice President
**Dr. Peter Buck**
**Dan Kolbe**
**Gretchen Brandt**
*Pictured left to right*

**Email**: all-board@scasd.org



Following the November election, a new era began for the Board with the reorganization meeting on Dec. 4, 2023 when new members Dr. Anne Demo, Dan Kolbe and Dr. Aaron Miller replaced Dr. Dan Duffy, Jim Leous and Laurel Zydney.

# Administration

**Curtis Johnson**
Superintendent of Schools
**Randy Brown**
Finance and Operations Officer and Open Records Officer
**Dr. Jonathan Bucher**
Assistant Superintendent of Secondary Education
**Christine Merritt**
Supervisor of Curriculum K-12
**Linda Pierce**
Human Resources Executive Director and Compliance Officer
**Danielle Yoder**
Assistant Superintendent of Elementary Education



Annually, students in grades K-12 present works of art to administrators and members of the Board of Directors. Each art teacher chooses one piece of art to donate, including this drawing for Superintendent Curtis Johnson.

# Directors

**Tonya Black,** Director of Equity, Inclusion & Belonging
**Mike Fisher**, Director of Physical Plant
**Justin Hetrick**, Director of Technology
**Dr. Jonathan Klingeman**, Director of MTSS and Intervention Support
**Jeanne Knouse**, Director of Student Services
**Dr. Ben Mordan**, Director of the CTC
**Dr. Heather Pringle**, Director of Special Education
**Chris Rosenblum**, Director of Communications
**Megan Schaper**, Director of Food Services
**Van Swauger**, Director of Transportation
**Chris Weakland**, Director of Athletics

# Registration

The district's registration office is open year-round to accept new students. Each spring, it hosts registration events for the next school year, including for kindergarten. For the latest information, please call 814-231-1017 or visit the registration website. The district looks forward to welcoming your child.

**www.scasd.org/Registration**



Nabil Mark, right, won first place for photography in the PA School Public Relations Association communications statewide contest and Chris Rosenblum was recognized for his writing.

The annual report is produced by Chris Rosenblum and Nabil Mark in the Communications Department.

Students and families make a tunnel and cheer as Radio Park Elementary fifth-graders exit the building on the last day of school.

**6,712**
Student Enrollment

**2,006**
People Employed

**4th**
Largest County Employer

**$194M**
Total Expenses







STATE COLLEGE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT
We are the future!

# 2023-2024 Annual Report

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State College, PA, 16801
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www.scasd.org