

SWEET HOME SOURCE

THE OFFICIAL MAGAZINE



SPRING 2025/BUDGET
ISSUE 05

STUDENTS DESIGN OUR NEW PANTHER

Students from across the district have been hard at work creating their vision of our new Panther. See the final ten inside and learn more about public voting to choose our official logo.

LEADERSHIP DAY

Leader In Me brings students together at the Middle School to focus on the Habits and work collaboratively.

DISTRICT BUDGET

Learn about the 2025-26 proposed District budget and Board of Education candidates.

THE 2025-26 BUDGET ISSUE

EVERY STUDENT, ONE COMMUNITY, READY FOR THE FUTURE.

A MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT



On behalf of all of us at Sweet Home, we are proud to present to you our budget for the 2025-2026 school year. This budget was built with the promise of “Every Student, One Community, Ready for the Future” at its forefront. We are excited to report that in building this budget, we focused on our students and what they need to be successful. This budget continues to implement our strategic plan, and support our shared portrait of a Sweet Home graduate. Our students will be equipped to compete on the global stage, as Sweet Home provides a world-class education, in and out of our classrooms.

Our Board of Education guides our work in terms of the budget process. Their input and perspective is critical in building a spending plan that is focused on the student and their development. At the same time, they are the voice of the taxpayer, and they understand that our community faces challenging times. They demanded that this budget maintain and enhance programming and remain fiscally responsible. We believe we did just that.

The budget adopted by the Board of Education and being presented for your approval on May 20 totals \$105,576,012, a 5.1 percent increase from the 2024-2025 school year. A continually increasing enrollment, along with inflationary pressures in transportation, special programs, health care benefits, and mandated charter tuitions have resulted in an increase in spending. However, additional revenues in Foundation Aid from New York State, a fully-funded UPK special education program, and additional sales-tax revenue have offset this increase. Combine that with a slight .4 percent increase in the tax levy and managed staffing through attrition, and we have closed any budget gap these inflationary burdens have caused the District.

While the budget may have had its challenges in terms of increased costs, our focus remains on providing students with a world-class 21st century education. In order to do this, our facilities must be positioned to handle our growth and the needs of our students. By the end of this school year, we will announce plans for our next major capital project. Through the ThoughtExchange and stakeholder focus groups, you told us that extra space at our elementary buildings, as well as them being updated for today’s learner, are must haves. This project will deliver just that. Through additions at up to three of our elementary buildings and renovations at all of our elementary buildings, we will meet your demands and the needs of our students. The plan will also address our athletic facilities at the High School, allowing for updated playing surfaces and better usage of our fields. Finally, each building will receive maintenance updates they need to operate in a full and efficient manner.

Leading up to our annual district vote on May 20, we invite all members of our school community to our annual budget hearing and meet the candidate night on May 6 at 6:30 p.m. in the Vergils Community Center at District Office. The Board will also conduct a study session that evening. On May 13 at 6:30 p.m. the Board will hold a voting session where the public can also provide input and feedback on the budget. If between now and then you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the District Office. And don’t forget, anyone in our school community can vote on their favorite Panther to become our official logo of Sweet Home. Check out this edition of the Sweet Home Source to review the top 10 finalists and help make your selection on May 20 at the Vergils Community Center.

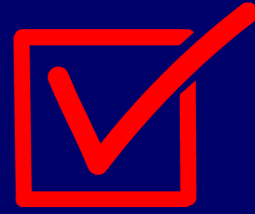
We are truly excited for what our future holds, despite the challenges that lie ahead. We will not stop in providing a fair and equitable education for ALL students. We are proudly diverse, and our efforts in promoting all students have lifted every group at Sweet Home. Our work will continue in this area as we believe that all means all. We will strive to be a role model for other Districts and communities as they witness what an incredible, world-class learning experience our students receive by working together as One Community. We are better together.

All of us at Sweet Home thank each and every stakeholder of our District for their continued support. Our community loves our schools, recognizes the power they have to transform our society, and is empowered to put student needs first. We are looking to build on our successes and have a wonderful 2025-2026 school year. And as always...GO PANTHERS!

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael V. Ginestre

2025-26 BUDGET VOTE

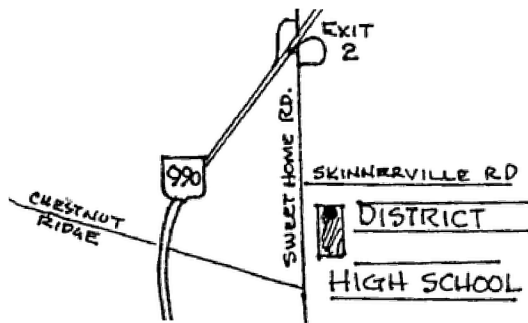


SWEET HOME HIGH SCHOOL, MAY 20, 2025 7AM-9PM

WHEN & WHERE?

Voting on the 2025-26 budget will take place between the hours of 7 AM - 9 PM on Tuesday, May 20, 2025, in the Norman C. Vergils Community Center of Sweet Home High School, 1901 Sweet Home Road in Amherst. The Vergils Center is on the north end of the building located adjacent to the District Offices and on the corner of Sweet Home and Skinnerville Roads.

**NORMAN C. VERGILS
COMMUNITY CENTER
1901 SWEET HOME ROAD
CORNER OF SWEET HOME &
SKINNERSVILLE ROADS
ENTER DOOR #6**



WHAT WILL YOU NEED?

TO VOTE, YOU MUST:

- Provide proof of residency
- Be a resident of the district for at least 30 days
- Be at least 18 years old
- Be a U.S. citizen

YOU NEED NOT:

- Be a registered voter
- Be a homeowner

PROOF OF RESIDENCY REQUIRED TO VOTE:

All eligible voters will need to provide proof of residency in order to cast their ballots at the Budget Vote on Tuesday, May 20, 2025. According to Chapter 775 of the Laws of New York, voters must present one form of proof which testifies to their legal address.

- Board of Elections card
- Post-marked mail
- Driver's license
- Rental/lease receipt
- Non-driver Identification card
- Utility bill

ABSENTEE BALLOTS

The Sweet Home Central School District allows for the use of Absentee Ballots at all district votes and elections.

1) Request an absentee ballot application by calling (716) 250-1402 or emailing District Clerk Sherry McNamara at smcnamara@sweethomeschools.org. The ballot will be included with the application.

If returning the application and ballot by mail, make your request no later than 4:00 PM on Tuesday, May 13, 2025. If returning the application and ballot in person, make your request on or before May 19, 2025.

2) Completed applications and absentee ballots will not be accepted after 5:00 PM on Tuesday, May 20, 2025, to the District Clerk's Office.

Any questions regarding voting policy should be directed to the District Clerk's Office at 250-1402 between 8:00 AM and 4:00 PM.

A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD OF EDUCATION

President Amy Battaglia, Vice President Peter Bellanti, Danyelle Anthon, Marianne Jasen, Scott Johnson, Brian Laible, and Dirk Rabenold.



The Sweet Home Board of Education is proud to present to our great community the school budget for the 2025-2026 school year. With any budget, it is critical to maintain and enhance programming for our students, while remaining fiscally responsible to the taxpayers of our District. Your support each and every year empowers us to stay tight to our mission of “Every Student, One Community, Ready for the Future.”

The 2025-2026 Sweet Home Central School Budget totals \$105,576,012, a 5.1 percent increase from the previous year. This increase is a result of our rising enrollment, along with escalating costs in the areas of transportation, special education, increased health care costs, and mandated charter school tuitions. Fortunately, an increase in Foundation Aid from New York State, a fully aided UPK program that addresses the needs of students with special needs, minor attrition of staff through retirements, and a projected increase in sales tax revenue covers the increase in spending next school year. Also, we are able to close any gaps with the use of reserves and a slight .4 percent increase in the tax levy for next year.

This budget season presented itself with challenges. While we are proud of our enrollment growth, that, along with inflationary pressures, continues to place burdens on our budget. We are watching our spending closely and will continue to do so as we enter a time of increasing funding uncertainty. Our Board will monitor our staffing levels closely to ensure we are properly staffed to meet the needs of our diverse student population.

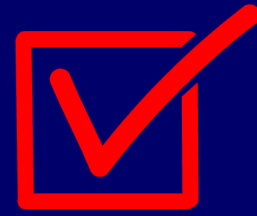
The upcoming school year is a big year for our next major capital project. We know our increasing enrollment levels and well-maintained, but outdated elementary facilities have led to a spacing crunch. We are happy the New York State Education Department has recognized that as well, allowing us to apply for our maximum state aid to provide additions to possibly three of our elementary schools, as well as renovations to all of our elementary schools that align with 21st Century Learning. With your input through a ThoughtExchange survey and stakeholder focus groups, we are on track to meet the demands of our community and update our elementary schools, while making repairs to all buildings to keep them properly maintained. The community also asked for a plan to upgrade our athletic facilities at the High School. All plans for our next major capital improvement project will be unveiled toward the end of this school year. This will give our community sufficient time to review, analyze, and comment on those plans before a vote takes place in December 2025.

Next year marks year three of implementation of our Sweet Home Strategic Plan. We have asked the administration to move forward in achieving our goals in the areas of teaching and learning, future focused, and supporting the whole child. In teaching and learning, we continue to implement new math and English language arts curriculum to ensure our students can thrive in an ever-changing landscape. For our future focused goal, we are offering additional programming in areas of STEM and inquiry-based learning. And in supporting the whole child, our Multi-Tiered Systems and Supports through Intervention (MTSSi) program will be in year two of full implementation. Our staff is now fully trained in this program to ensure each student at Sweet Home is receiving the support they need to be successful.

While we witness changes happening at the federal level, the Board remains committed to ensuring each and every child at Sweet Home receives a world-class education. Our diversity provides so many rich learning opportunities for our students. We will continue to capitalize on our diversity and make our students' experiences at Sweet Home the envy of other districts across the state. Our students receive a world-class education each and every day through shared experiences, cultures and backgrounds. We will continue our plans to promote all groups at Sweet Home and ensure our District is a role model in terms of what students from so many backgrounds can accomplish together.

Finally, we know there are challenging times ahead for our District and all public school districts across New York. Our Board of Education lives by the promise of “One Community.” We will continue to promote and listen to all voices, use your input to guide our decisions, and work with you to ensure our great District grows and learns together. We are committed to “One Community” and because of that, we are stronger. This budget supports that promise. Please vote on May 20 anytime between the hours of 7 A.M. - 9 P.M. in the Vergils Community Center next to the District Office. Thank you again for your support as we achieve our mission of “Every Student, One Community, Ready for the Future.”

2025-26 BUDGET VOTE



SWEET HOME HIGH SCHOOL, MAY 20, 2025 7AM-9PM

During its voting meeting on Tuesday, April 22, the Board of Education of the Sweet Home School District approved the adoption of the proposed budget for the 2025-26 school year.

The proposed \$105,576,012 budget, includes the spending of \$1,077,000 for four (4) 70-passenger electric buses, one (1) 70 passenger diesel bus and one (1) 30 passenger diesel bus. The District has been awarded \$800,000 in grant funding to aid in the purchase of the electric buses.

The total budget will see a 5.1% increase over last year. The proposed budget represents a 0.4% tax levy increase which falls within the New York State imposed tax cap for the District. Because the budget stays within the property tax levy limit, it needs only a simple majority to pass.

The District used 2024 assessed values from the Town of Tonawanda and Amherst Town Clerk to estimate tax rates. While tax rates and tax bills will be officially established in August, estimated homestead tax rates for the 2025-26 District budget are \$9.70 per thousand for the Town of Amherst and \$42.39 per thousand for the Town of Tonawanda. On a home in Amherst assessed at \$250,000, residents can expect a tax bill of \$2,425. On a similar home in the Town of Tonawanda, residents can expect a tax bill of \$2,437. Basic STAR savings are not included in the figures. Basic STAR savings for the Town of Amherst is \$336 and \$331 for the Town of Tonawanda. Once again, please note that these are estimates based on current year assessments for the Town of Tonawanda and the Town of Amherst.

In the school board election, Brian Laible, Dirk Rabenold, Alan Plath, and Jonathan Makeley will seek election to the Board's two open seats. The two top vote-getters will be elected to five-year terms expiring on June 30, 2030. The terms of Dirk Rabenold and Brian Laible expire on June 30, 2025. The Annual District Budget Vote & School Board Election will be held Tuesday, May 20 from 7 AM to 9 PM in the Vergils Community Center of Sweet Home High School, 1901 Sweet Home Road in Amherst.

OTHER DISTRICT EVENTS ON MAY 20

Along with the Annual Budget Vote/Board of Education Election, we will host our annual **Elementary Track Meet** at the High School track beginning at 9:45 AM. We will also have a **district-wide art show** happening near Vergils Community Center, highlighting the talent of student-artists of all ages.

Sweet Home community members of all ages will also be welcome to **vote on their choice for our new official Panther logo!**

READ MORE ABOUT THE PANTHER VOTE IN THIS ISSUE!

2025-26 PROPOSED BUDGET

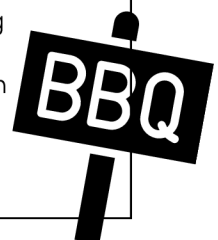
\$105,576,012

- **Election of two Board of Education members** - The terms of Dirk Rabenold and Brian Laible expire on June 30, 2025. Four candidates seek election to the two open board seats: Brian Laible, Dirk Rabenold, Alan Plath, and Jonathan Makeley. The top two vote-getters will be elected to five year terms expiring on June 30, 2030.
- **Within the Property Tax Levy Cap** - The proposed budget seeks an increase in the overall tax levy of 0.4%, falling at the State imposed Tax Cap for the District and well below the rate of inflation.
- **Maintains Current Program and New Buses** - Proposed budget maintains current programming and authorizes the spending of \$1,077,000 for a total of six (6) new buses.

DOLLARS FOR SCHOLARS CHICKEN BBQ

Tuesday, May 20 from 4-7 PM

- BW's BBQ chicken dinner with two salads, a roll, & butter
- Tickets are \$12
- Pre-sale tickets available by calling 250-1406
- Take-out only, walk-ups welcome
- All proceeds will be used for scholarships for graduating seniors
- The Sweet Home Education Foundation (SHEF) will be on-site selling desserts

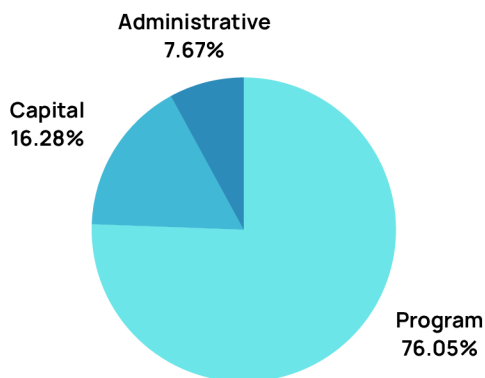


SUMMARY OF REVENUES

Description	Budgeted 2024-25	Budgeted 2025-26
REAL PROPERTY TAXES	\$54,268,072	\$54,486,662
APPROPRIATED FUND BALANCE	\$2,420,000	\$2,420,000
USE OF RETIREMENT CONTRIBUTION RESERVE	\$50,000	\$50,000
USE OF UNEMPLOYMENT RESERVE	\$0	\$0
USE OF EMPLOYEE BENEFITS LIAB. RESERVE	\$220,350	\$220,350
USE OF WORKERS COMP. RESERVE	\$75,000	\$75,000
USE OF TAX CERTIORARI RESERVE	\$0	\$0
USE OF DEBT SERVICE RESERVE	\$515,000	\$300,000
PAYMENT IN LIEU OF TAXES	\$505,000	\$557,000
NON-PROP TAXES-SALES TAX	\$5,100,000	\$5,450,000
COMM ED TUITION & FEES	\$95,000	\$75,000
TUITION-OTH DIST-FOSTER	\$100,000	\$50,000
TUITION-OTHER DISTRICTS	\$300,000	\$300,000
INTEREST	\$165,000	\$505,000
RENT REAL PROPERTY-BOCES	\$490,000	\$520,000
STATE AID-BASIC FORMULA	\$23,530,000	\$26,250,000
STATE AID-BUILDING AID	\$3,400,000	\$3,600,000
ST AID-EXCESS COST	\$5,700,000	\$6,450,000
BOCES AID	\$1,650,000	\$1,720,000
STATE AID-CHAPTER STUDENTS	\$50,000	\$50,000
TEXTBOOK AID	\$222,000	\$225,000
COMPUTER HARDWARE AID	\$53,000	\$54,000
COMPUTER SOFTWARE AID	\$62,000	\$65,000
LIBRARY AID	\$25,000	\$28,000
STATE AID-OTHER	\$540,000	\$1,200,000
Other Receipts	\$875,000	\$925,000
DISTRICT TOTALS	\$100,410,422	\$105,576,012

2025-26 PROPOSED SCHOOL BUDGET

The following budget information has been modified to comply with the Budget Reform Legislation of 1997. Under this legislation, the budget must be presented in three (3) parts: **ADMINISTRATIVE, PROGRAM, AND CAPITAL.**



PROGRAM

2024-25 Budget: \$75,882,180
2025-26 Budget: \$80,293,511

The instructional component accounts for the instruction and educational support for the district's 3700+ students. Salaries of teachers, guidance counselors, psychologists, social workers, coaches, therapists, teachers aides, computer technicians, and related clerical/support staff are included, as are their fringe benefits. Transportation (including contracted transportation), instructional computers, supplies, and textbooks, special education services, and expenses for summer school are included in this component.

SUMMARY OF EXPENDITURES

Summary of Expenditures	2024-25 Budget	2025-26 Budget
Administrative		
Superintendent & Board of Education	\$353,356	\$334,900
Business Administration	\$570,174	\$710,955
Legal Services	\$307,180	\$313,000
Human Resources	\$538,280	\$328,880
Education/Community Services	\$8,900	\$8,900
Central Services & Other	\$1,675,204	\$1,922,339
Instructional Administration	\$2,912,405	\$2,916,622
Employee Benefits	\$1,610,263	\$1,560,131
Total Administrative	\$7,975,762	\$8,095,727
Program		
Legal Services	\$10,000	\$0
Teaching-Regular Schools	\$33,161,639	\$34,054,004
Special Education	\$10,269,131	\$11,704,322
Occupational Education	\$1,135,581	\$1,162,740
Teaching Special Schools	\$202,820	\$202,820
School Library & AV	\$30,898	\$30,898
Computer Instruction Services	\$1,882,977	\$2,018,718
Attendance & Support Services	\$3,073,067	\$3,117,578
Extracurricular Activities	\$850,252	\$911,040
Transportation	\$6,408,455	\$7,290,480
Employee Benefits	\$18,697,360	\$19,640,911
Interfund Transfers	\$160,000	\$160,000
Total Program	\$75,882,180	\$80,293,511
Capital		
Operations & Maintenance	\$6,054,611	\$6,353,091
Refund of Real Property Tax	\$75,000	\$85,000
Transportation-Bus Purchase	\$929,278	\$1,077,000
Civic Activities	\$47,500	\$47,500
Employee Benefits	\$1,610,172	\$1,727,204
Debt Service	\$7,735,918	\$7,796,979
Interfund Transfers	\$100,000	\$100,000
Total Capital	\$16,552,479	\$17,186,774
TOTAL BUDGET	\$100,410,422	\$105,576,012

ADMINISTRATIVE

2024-25 Budget: \$7,975,762
2025-26 Budget: \$8,095,727

The administrative component of the budget provides for the overall general support and management activities including the Board of Education, superintendent's office, curriculum and staff development, printing and publishing, and supervision and support in each of the six schools. Also included are expenses for legal services, liability and property insurance, and salaries and benefits for the administrative staff.

CAPITAL

2024-25 Budget: \$16,552,479
2025-26 Budget: \$17,186,774

Includes buildings and grounds salaries, equipment, vehicles, repairs, rentals, contracts, and supplies for all the custodial, grounds, and maintenance of all district buildings. Includes judgments and claims and refund of prior year property taxes due to reassessments and/or town clerical errors. Includes debt service principal and interest and interfund transfers for existing capital projects. Includes all fringe benefits for above employees.

TAX BILLS WITH EQUALIZATION RATES

Based on Average Assessed Value Using 2024-25 Assessed Values for the Town of Tonawanda and the Town of Amherst.

The Sweet Home School District and its residents benefit from a strong commercial and residential tax base. Sweet Home homeowners realize further tax reductions through a lower tax rate called a homestead tax rate. Sweet Home's application of this concept, known as homesteading, serves as the model for successful tax differentiation programs across the state. These factors, combined with strong fiscal management by the Board of Education, allow the district to provide a first rate education for one of the lowest costs in Western New York. The impact on an average home is displayed below.

School Tax on an Average Assessed Value Home				
	Amherst		Tonawanda	
	2024-25	2025-26	2024-25	2025-26
Equalization Rate	100.0%	100.0%	23.0%	23.0%
Assessed Value	\$250,000	\$250,000	\$57,500	\$57,500
Tax Rate	\$9.67	\$9.70	\$42.22	\$42.39
Calculated Tax Bill	\$2,418	\$2,425	\$2,428	\$2,437
Estimated Increase		\$7		\$9

Basic STAR savings for the Town of Amherst is \$363 and \$353 for the Town of Tonawanda.

Equalization rates used for this application: Town of Amherst is 100% and 23% for the Town of Tonawanda.

PROPERTY TAX CAP - HOW IS IT FIGURED?

Chapter 97 of the Laws of 2011 (Part A - Property Tax Cap) established a tax levy limit ("property tax cap") that affects all local governments, most school districts in New York State, except New York City, and a host of other independent taxing entities such as library, fire, and water districts.

Under this law, the growth in the property tax levy begins at the lesser of 2% or the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The CPI for this year is 2.95%. However, this rate can be increased by several local factors including:

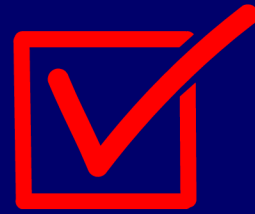
- Local tax base growth factor
- Pension costs above a 2% increase
- Court orders/judgments above 5% of levy in prior year
- Capital expenditures related to construction or local expenses
- Changes in payments in lieu of taxes (PILOT)

The 2025-26 Sweet Home Tax Cap after consideration of all local factors is \$54,486,662 or a 0.4% increase from 2024-25.

The proposed tax levy for the 2025-26 budget of \$54,486,662 falls within the state imposed property tax cap of 0.4% for Sweet Home Central School District requiring only a simple majority of voters to pass. The 2025-26 tax levy increase in the proposed budget is 0.4%.

2025-26 DISTRICT BUDGET VOTE
SWEET HOME HIGH SCHOOL, MAY 20, 2025 7AM-9PM

MEET THE CANDIDATES



FOR THE SWEET HOME BOARD OF EDUCATION

District residents will elect two (2) members to the Board of Education on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at the annual District Budget Vote. The terms of Dirk Rabenold and Brian Laible expire on June 30, 2025. Four candidates seek election to the two open board seats: Brian Laible, Dirk Rabenold, Alan Plath, and Jonathan Makeley. The top two vote-getters will be elected to five year terms expiring on June 30, 2030.

District residents can vote between the hours of 7AM - 9 PM on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 in the Norman C. Vergils Community Center of Sweet Home High School.

BRIAN LAIBLE

It is with dedication and enthusiasm that I ask for your vote for the Sweet Home Board of Education.

John F. Kennedy once said, "Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other." These words ring especially true when it comes to the education of our youth. I am confident that my leadership can help Sweet Home continue its tradition as an outstanding school district.

My wife, Jen, and I are raising four children—Grace (11), Jack (10), Jane (8), and Anna (4). As a young family, we have a personal stake in the success of our schools. That's why I'm committed to working for the best outcomes for our students, teachers, and staff.

Over the past five years serving on the school board, we've faced many challenges together—and I'm proud of the progress we've made:

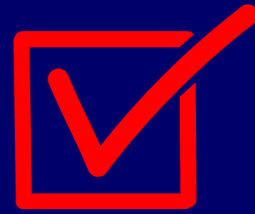
1. We provided both in-person and remote learning options during the pandemic.
2. We kept taxes below the cap to ease the burden on families.
3. We launched Universal Pre-K to give every child a strong start.
4. We opened a brand-new high school auditorium.
5. We approved new contracts for all staff.

Of course, there's still more to do. The solutions aren't always perfect—but we can't let the pursuit of perfection stand in the way of meaningful progress.

Professionally, I bring over 30 years of business experience. I hold a degree from Canisius University and an MBA from Notre Dame. I'm an entrepreneur, CPA, and founding partner of an investment company. But above all, I'm a dad wanting the best for our kids. My only intent is to serve the public and support our families, students, and educators. Ultimately, we're all in this together—every student, one community, ready for the future.



MEET THE CANDIDATES



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DIRK RABENOLD

Last year you humbled me with your vote and elected me to the School Board. I'm asking again for your consideration and hopefully your vote to continue representing you.

Being a School Board member is not for the faint of heart. We get involved because we care about how our children are educated and how they are prepared for their future.

In the past year, we've faced some challenges, but I stood up for our kids- especially on the proposal to have our students walk to school. Along with the strong community outcry no students will have to walk to school. We will provide transportation, ensuring our children's safety.

This year we held the line on YOUR school taxes. And maintained all the programs.

I consider myself an advocate for senior citizens, of which I am one. It's difficult for many seniors on fixed income to make ends meet. Higher taxes impact Senior's abilities to stay in their homes. It's becoming harder for our younger families to purchase their first homes - and begin raising their families.

I've lived in this community for 40 years. My wife, Robin and I are the proud parents of 3 children who were educated in the Sweet Home Schools. We have 6 beautiful grandchildren; we are focused on their future.

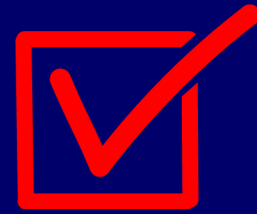
I'm a Certified Financial Planner professional who owns and operates a Financial Services company here in Amherst. I have a Business Management Degree from Canisius University. I will always fight to control spending and not burden our taxpayers with increasingly high tax rates.

It is with deep gratitude that you allowed me to represent your interests this past year. I promise to work diligently on your behalf and focus my efforts on ensuring our children receive the best education possible.

After all, it's about – Families-Students First!



MEET THE CANDIDATES



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ALAN PLATH

My goal in serving on the Sweet Home BOE is to enhance our students' experiences. In these times of uncertainty, we must continue to foster our students' development to achieve their academic, athletic, and performing arts goals while enabling them to thrive educationally, socially, and emotionally.

My wife Kristan and I have lived in the Sweet Home District since 2003, with our sons Brayden (10th grade) and Carson (7th grade), who have attended Sweet Home since UPK. This provides us with first-hand insight into the challenges and opportunities facing students and parents throughout the entire Sweet Home experience.

Over the past year, to gain a thorough understanding of what our district faces, I've attended multiple board meetings and engaged with parents to identify their primary concerns. I'm not afraid to ask hard questions and challenge the status quo to drive positive change.

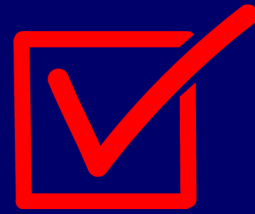
In the past, I've served on the Glendale Principal Hiring Committee and Sweet Home Workforce Diversity Subcommittee. I've also been Vice President for the Parkview Community Board for 10+ years. Professionally, I've managed teams of 100+ and multimillion-dollar budgets for major organizations. Currently, I operate a successful resume-writing business and have been a strategic partner to global executives for 16 years, helping them achieve their professional goals.

Additionally, coaching youth baseball has taught me the importance of building confidence and teamwork in children.

I'm committed to providing level-headed leadership balanced with strategic vision that addresses critical district matters, always keeping the best interests of our residents, students, and teachers at the forefront. My goal is to bring transparency to parents, students, teachers, and the community as we navigate potential changes and challenges. I look forward to collaborating with the school and community stakeholders to continue evolving Sweet Home into a district we can all be proud of.



MEET THE CANDIDATES



FOR THE SWEET HOME BOARD OF EDUCATION

District residents will elect two (2) members to the Board of Education on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 at the annual District Budget Vote. The terms of Dirk Rabenold and Brian Laible expire on June 30, 2025. Four candidates seek election to the two open board seats: Brian Laible, Dirk Rabenold, Alan Plath, and Jonathan Makeley. The top two vote-getters will be elected to five year terms expiring on June 30, 2030.

District residents can vote between the hours of 7AM - 9 PM on Tuesday, May 20, 2025 in the Norman C. Vergils Community Center of Sweet Home High School.

JONATHAN MAKELEY

Greetings, my name is Jonathan Makeley. It is an honor to run for the Sweet Home School Board.

I have lived in the district for the past 8 years. I have regularly attended school board meetings for years. I currently serve as a community member on our district's DEI committee. I have seen many great things from the people in our community, and I wish to contribute to the future success of our students.

I am a historian, with a focus on American reform movements. I have a Masters in History and a Masters in Library and Information Science. In my work, I have been involved with several historical and academic organizations; from which I have had experience serving on organizational boards, working with others on projects, planning events, creating publications, designing policies, and planning budgets.

I grew up as a disabled student in the small town of Angelica, NY. Education and the support I received in school played a major role in shaping my life. In fostering my personal growth, setting the foundation for my career as a historian, and inspiring my belief in the importance of civic involvement and working to make the world a better place.

I believe strongly that all students should have access to a good quality education, which supports their needs and helps them to grow and flourish. I believe in public service, collaborative leadership, and the importance of listening to members of the community.

If elected, my goal would be to work with the other board members, staff, parents, and teachers to navigate the challenges we face, improve the quality of education, support our teachers, and make sure that the children of this district develop the knowledge and skills that will benefit them throughout their lives.



2025-26 DISTRICT BUDGET VOTE
SWEET HOME HIGH SCHOOL, MAY 20, 2025 7AM-9PM

THE SEARCH FOR A NEW PANTHER LOGO

STUDENTS CREATE THEIR VISION OF THE PANTHER, OUR SCHOOL COMMUNITY DECIDES

If you've spent any time walking around campus, attending sporting events, or even just driving past our school, you've probably seen many different versions of a panther logo. Over the years, no single specific panther has been used consistently. We wanted to change that to provide Sweet Home a clear identity, and we knew our talented students were the best way to make it happen!

Under the guidance of our art teachers, students of all ages were welcomed to submit their artwork for a panther logo. Along the way, they researched, learned about logo design, and utilized both digital and traditional media to make their vision come to life. We were thrilled to receive over 300 submissions!

The next task: narrow these down to 10 finalists! Our students voted in each building for their favorites. Our finalists include one from each Elementary school, and three from both the Middle and High Schools. The overall winning student will also receive a \$500 scholarship when they graduate, provided by Dollars for Scholars.

To render those student designs into professional logos, we turned to our partners at 26 Shirts, a unique local company who design and sell Buffalo-themed t-shirts and merchandise. Proceeds from the limited-edition designs benefit local families and organizations in need. To date, 26 Shirts has raised over 2 million dollars to help the local community.

When working through the evolution of our student artwork, the goal was to keep the integrity of the student designs as much as possible, while ensuring the final logos are reproducible in all formats.

Keeping students involved, 26 Shirts plans to welcome our finalists and their teachers to their showroom and studio for an in-depth look into the process. Even though there will only be one winner, this insight will surely be a lot of fun for all of our finalists!

The next page features our final designs after rendered by the designers at 26 Shirts. We can't wait to see which design our community chooses!



STUDENT FINALISTS:



Grace Laible (MS), Grace Lysek (HS), Anyla Maxwell (MS), Tyliq Moss (HS), Jia Patel (GL), Maxwell Patterson (WR), Westley Pentheros (HH), Raifah Rana (MM), Savannah Richter (MS), & Parisa Woryakhail (HS).

THE FINAL 10



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



9



10

VOTE MAY 20

VERGILS COMMUNITY CENTER • 7AM-9PM
OPEN TO ALL RESIDENTS/STAFF/STUDENTS



STUDENT ADVISORY COUNCIL CONTINUES TO EXAMINE IMPORTANT ISSUES

Last year, Superintendent Dr. Ginestre began hosting lunch meetings for groups of students of all ages, in every building, to examine key issues and talk through solutions from the students' perspectives.

Topics vary, but an important discussion took place recently with our High School students regarding the proposed cell phone ban set to take place in all New York public schools next school year. Students shared their current experiences with cell phones and potential considerations for next year. This feedback will be used directly in our Cell Phone Task Force, a committee examining these issues which is comprised of students, faculty, staff, parents, administrators, and a Board of Education member.

SABAH PROGRAM INVITES OUR PANTHERS ON THE ICE

Every year Sweet Home students participate in SABAH, Inc. programs. SABAH stands for Spirited Athletes Bold at Heart. This wonderful local organization provides individuals of all skill levels education and therapeutic recreation. They promote fitness and develop social and communication skills. It was an incredible day on the ice for our exceptional classroom student athletes.

Thank you to our special education teachers and staff for continuing to make this event a memorable day for our Panthers!



BOCES STUDENTS WIN BIG AT SKILLS USA COMPETITION



Two Sweet Home Seniors attending Erie 1 BOCES recently received 1st place medals during the Skills USA Regional Competition at Alfred University! Shu Yao Yang and Zehra Muhsini (pictured middle), both in the Health & Careers program, participated in the 34th annual competition that hosts over 900 high school students and their advisors.

Zehra said, "After we were announced as the winners, a team of Juniors from another school came up to us to tell us how great we did. That felt so good to have another team notice how well we did." Shu Yao said, "We are good friends and we always have so much fun when we are together."

Congratulations to these outstanding Seniors and their advisors on all their hard work!



STUDENT-ARTISTS FEATURED AT KENAN ART SHOW

Eight talented art students were selected to participate in the prestigious All High Art Show at the Kenan Center in Lockport: Bella Beal, Noah Nowocien, Lily Adams, Mikaela Klumpp, Carlo Gonzalez, Zach Nieman, Ava Veneziano, and Aria Brieschke. Two students received special recognition for their outstanding photography work—Bella Beal earned an Honorable Mention, and Noah Nowocien was awarded Most Creative Photo. Congratulations to our students and their teacher Kristen Piurek on this impressive achievement.



“Taylor” by Bella Beal (Grade 10)

Awarded Honorable Mention



“Low Battery” by Noah Nowocien (Grade 10)

Awarded Most Creative Photo

MIDDLE SCHOOL LEADER IN ME WORK IN ACTION ON LEADERSHIP DAYS

Leadership Days look different at each of our buildings, but their foundation is rooted in focusing on the Leader In Me Habits to help students work collaboratively and see the values in action. The Middle School’s most recent Leadership Day featured Habits 4 and 6: “Think Win-Win” and “Synergize” and included activities that helped to showcase what happens when those Habits are employed in students’ day-to-day work.

Thank you to our Middle School Lighthouse Team for their careful planning of this fun and engaging event!





WINTER SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

CONGRATS TO ALL OUR STUDENT-ATHLETES AND COACHES FOR THEIR HARD WORK THIS WINTER SEASON



Girls Basketball:

- Team was led by Sophomore Lauren Webb who accumulated 153 points on the season, followed by Senior Ciara Stoudemire who scored 123 points.
- Camryn Smith recorded 81 rebounds on the season and Layla McDuffie secured 10 steals.



Boys Basketball:

- Finished the season 12-10.
- Team was led by Shaun McGrath who scored 249 points and Dondre' Walker who scored 230 points.
- Mekaih Patterson had 115 points and 42 assists. Sophomore Isaiah Guerrero led the team with 113 rebounds and 30 steals.



Boys' Swimming:

- Final record 10-5.
- Matt Spence set a new school record in the 500 free (4:49.51).
- 200 free relay of Finn Crowther, Matt Spence, Nate Mackiewicz, & Danny Hayter went 1:31.41, second fastest in school history, 400 free relay went 3:29.42, fifth fastest in school history.
- 200 medley relay of Luke Benjamin, Danny Hayter, Matt Spence, & Nate Mackiewicz went 1:50.19, fastest since 2018.
- Matt Spence qualified for States in the 200 and 500 free.
- Seven different swimmers earned Class A qualifying times, and 4 earned Section VI qualifying times.

Boys' Indoor Track & Field:

- Winner of the Medium Division at Section VI Team Championships.
- Brenton Baker 1st in the Long Jump with a PR of 23-2. He cleared 6-5 in HJ securing 1st place and the 4x200 relay came in first at team championships.
- Cole Cammarata placed 1st in Shot with a PR of 49-10 at team champ.
- Da'Mari Yancey (12th) placed 1st in the 55m with a top time of 6.50; also anchored the 1st place 4x200 relay
- The 4x200 boys relay finished first with a PR time of 1:31.23 at team championships and third at NYSPHSAA Championships (Yancey, Patterson, Vega, Baker).

Girls' Indoor Track & Field:

- Placed 3rd in the Medium Division at Section VI Qualifying Championships.
- Taylor Nugent (12th) placed 1st in Race Walk with a time of 7:05.47 in qualifying Championships. Taylor finished second at NYSPHSAA Championships.
- The girls 4x200 relay finished 4th earning a patch at qualifiers with a time of 1:51.74 (Michelle Baker, Kimaya Hall, Ellana Hall and anchored by Sheridyn Atuick).

Cheerleading:

- Abigail Waite (MVP) and Chloe Bandelian earned the two ECIC All-Star awards at ECICs.
- Carly Battaglia was recognized as an All-WNY Scholar-Athlete candidate.
- Waite and Battaglia served as two-season captains alongside Angelina O'Dierno and Aaliyah Wolf, who also stepped up as strong and inspiring leaders.



Unified Bowling:

- 17 student-athletes participated in Unified Bowling.
- Placed 3rd in Section VI tournament. Laurel Adams earned the Character Athlete Award and Malachi Hendricks earned the Sportsmanship Award.

WINTER SPORTS HIGHLIGHTS

CONGRATS TO ALL OUR STUDENT-ATHLETES AND COACHES FOR THEIR HARD WORK THIS WINTER SEASON

Boys' Wrestling:

- Overall team record 3-12.
- Sectional Place Finishers : Abduali Mukumov 4th (junior), Liam Andrews 6th (senior) Ramzan Godirov 6th (7th grade).

Girls' Wrestling:

- Captain of the team Junior Sofia Guadagna took 5th place in the NYS Girls' Freestyle State Tournament. She also took first place at the Linda Knuutila Invitational and was awarded most outstanding wrestler
- Junior Georgia Zorich had an impressive season with a finishing record of 23-4
- Upcoming 8th grader Kaitlyn Mieczkowski finished the season with a record of 27-10, placed 3rd in section VI, and was awarded the rising star award at the end of the season
- The girls ended the season ranked 9th in section VI.

Girls Ice Hockey:

- Finished the season 7-5-3.
- Team led by Haylie Yourston and Alexandria Reed.

Boys' Ice Hockey:

- Finished the season 6-12-2. Highlight: defeated Clarence 5-4.
- Sweet Home's leading goal scorer was Freshman Noah Clendenen with 7.
- Sweet Home's leading point scorer was Sophomore Guiseppe Surdi with 17 points.

Boys' Bowling:

- Team was led by Carsen Cramer who rolled a 234 high game, 635 high series and an average of 184.97.
- Dylan Lomas and Skylar Mazur also had high games of 215 and 191 respectively.

Girls Bowling:

- Team was led by Gianna Papero, 196.5 average, 255 high game and 658 high series.
- The girls bowling team was also led by Jamie Mitsopoulos with a 169.25 average and Erika Mitsopoulos with a 163.81 average.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THIS YEAR'S SCHOLAR ATHLETES

At the end of each sports season, the NYS Public High School Athletic Association honors those teams and individuals that excel in the classroom. Those student-athletes, teams, and schools work very hard throughout the year and deserve to be recognized for their academic success. Our scholar athletes have averaged 90 or above in their prior 6 semesters. We are incredibly proud of the students' academic and athletic accomplishments from the Fall 2024 season.

WNY SCHOLAR ATHLETE

Frankie Bellanti - Boys Volleyball

WNY SCHOLAR ATHLETE HONORABLE MENTIONS

Maya Atallah - Tennis
Carly Battaglia - Cheerleading
Adina Bluestein - Girls Golf
Cole Cammarata - Football
Dominic Croce - Boys Cross Country
Nathan Darling - Boys Golf
McKenna Flatau - Girls Soccer
Gracie Fuqua - Girls Volleyball
Kimaya Hall - Girls Soccer
Ella Hubert - Girls Volleyball
Kendra Kapuszcak - Girls Cross Country
Tamaya Kelley - Cheerleading
Taylor Nugent - Girls Cross Country
Margaret Paluch - Girls Volleyball
Rocco Panepinto - Football
Emily Phillips - Girls Golf
Rydell Reif - Girls Swimming
Camryn Smith - Girls Volleyball





STUDENTS EXPERIENCE IMMERSIVE HOLOCAUST EXHIBIT ON CAMPUS

Sweet Home High School students recently experienced the Mobile Museums of Tolerance (MMOT) right on our campus, engaging with powerful Holocaust exhibits and learning the importance of standing against hate. MMOT inspires people to combat antisemitism, bullying, racism, and intolerance.

Their accessible model has reached over 40,000 visitors since 2021. The museum also visited our Middle School campus. Special thanks to the Buffalo Jewish Federation and Director of Holocaust Education Resource Organization Lauren Bloomberg for facilitating this visit.

HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS RECOGNIZED FOR LEADER IN ME VALUES

Leader In Me is alive and well in all of our buildings at Sweet Home. The High School has recently been focused on highlighting each Habit and calling out great leadership amongst our students.

Congratulations to this group of High School student leaders who were recently recognized for demonstrating Leader In Me Habit 3: "Putting First Things First." These students are committed to prioritizing what matters most and staying focused on their goals. Thanks to Mrs. Bruce and Mrs. Utzig for their work to recognize these students!



THREE NEW ELECTRIC BUSES JOIN SWEET HOME FLEET



Last year, our voters approved a proposition to authorize the purchase of six new buses to replace end-of-life machines in our fleet. Three of these replacements included electric models, reflecting Sweet Home's commitment to go green by 2035, as required by New York State.

To coincide with the arrival of our electric buses, Sweet Home also hosted a safety training for first responders and staff. We thank our partners at Matthews Buses for leading the training.

By applying early for grant funding, we were able to replace three end-of-life diesel buses with electric for the same cost. The chargers installed at our facility were also fully funded by grants.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL MUSICALS HIGHLIGHT TALENT ON AND OFF THE STAGE

The Sweet Home tradition of excellent musical productions continued this year at our Middle School with 'Frozen, Jr.' and at our High School with 'Once Upon A Mattress'.

Primary cast, crew, & pit orchestra members for 'Once Upon A Mattress':

Masarra Faek, Brianna Blue, Hailey Fisk, Julia Elmedawar, Alexander Bacon, Drew McNelis, Gracie Fuqua, Lily Fisher, Georgia Zorich, Mariah Robbins, Reagan Mullen, Cristina Farotto, Tyler Adams, Alex Schiefer, Micah Brookshire, & Lukas Grupp.

Primary cast & crew for 'Frozen, Jr.':

Sophie Vaughan, Molly Russ, Mia Rogers, Siena Coughlin, Grace Petrie, Natalie Mikos, Teddy Mason, Joseph Leshinskie III, Jaxon Leshinskie, Lynn Andrews, Caleb Melson, Madison Miller, Carson Ziccardi, David Foster III, Penelope Perez, Wesley Greaves, Matthew Rickert, Alicia Simmons,

Lovell Sauter, Abbey Canfield, Brandt Martin, Evan Ferguson, Kendall Barczykowski, Grace Laible, Ethan Kropczynski, Zachary Krygier, Nolan Farr, Addison Dziemski, Lila Silsby, Greashee Rai, Ana Washington, Hayden Fromm, Liam Kropczynski, Emmitt Zorich, Eli Silsby, Amber Dole, & Londyn Carrier.

Special thanks to Choreographer and Stage Director of 'Once Upon a Mattress' Bobby Cooke, & Producer and Music Director Kimberly Harrison, as well as 'Frozen, Jr.' Directors Sarah Pechulis Petrie and Jacquie Stablewski. We also thank our Music Director Cory Morrow and the many music, crew, set, lighting, costume, and dance professionals who work diligently to make these productions come to life.

'Once Upon A Mattress' is a semi-finalist for the 2025 Shea's Wonder Awards, which will take place Saturday, May 17. For more information, visit their website at sheas.org/wonder-awards.

CONGRATULATIONS TO THE FOLLOWING ALL-COUNTY MUSICIANS

SENIOR HIGH ALL COUNTY

Keagan Brookshire - Tuba, Matthew Arrasjid - Bb Clarinet, Alexander Bacon - Bass II, Drew McNelis - Tenor II, Brianna Brown - Alto II, Delanie Fleming - Alto I, Julia Elmedawar - Alto II, Gracie Fuqua - Soprano II, Talli Perry - Alto II, Ian Feldmann - Jazz Guitar, Genevieve Miceli - Bass Clarinet Alternate, Delaney O'Brocta - Violin Alternate, Matthew Samulski - Double Bass Alternate, Gabriella Pecoraro - Double Bass Alternate

JUNIOR HIGH ALL COUNTY

Thomas Hall - Alto Sax, Eric Riley - Bb Clarinet, Lila Steinberg - Trombone, Caleb Riley - Trumpet, Charlotte Kern-Potter - Chorus, Grace Lysek - Chorus, Landon Reed - Chorus, Natalie Annesi - Chorus, Sarah Aseri - Chorus, Aniya Beaufort - Chorus, Addison Dziemski - Chorus, Sophie Vaughan - Chorus, Sophie Pagliano - Chorus, Greyson Imerese - Chorus, Alicia Simmons - Chorus, Anna Sung - Chorus, Amelia Annesi - Chorus, Mia Rogers - Chorus, Elena Schnell - Chorus, Seamus McIntyre - Chorus, Havailah Nazario-Rodriguez - Chorus, Sommer Thomas - Chorus, Morgan Brand - Chorus, Hayden Fromm - Chorus, Penelope Perez - Chorus, Molly Russ - Chorus, Madison Miller - Chorus, James Biddlecombe - Chorus, Iris Brieschke - Chorus, Caleb Melson - Chorus, Siena Coughlin - Chorus, Piper Hein - Viola Alternate, Cora Stephens - Cello Alternate, Nico Zielinski - Trumpet Alternate, Leo Grupp - Viola Alternate

ELEMENTARY ALL COUNTY

Sally Stephens - Viola, Rei Fujiyama - Viola (46), Ethan Kornacki - Double Bass, Caroline McMillan - Flute, Matthew Rickert - Bb Clarinet, Nicholas Hartman - Chorus, Treasure Land - Chorus, Declan Sitch - Chorus, Charlotte Olson - Chorus, Bella Iraci - Chorus, Mason Smith - Chorus, Emily Rellinger - Chorus



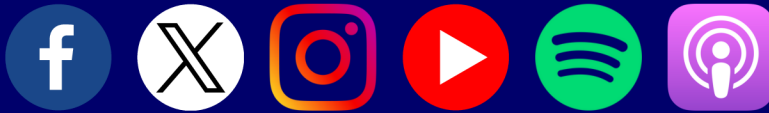
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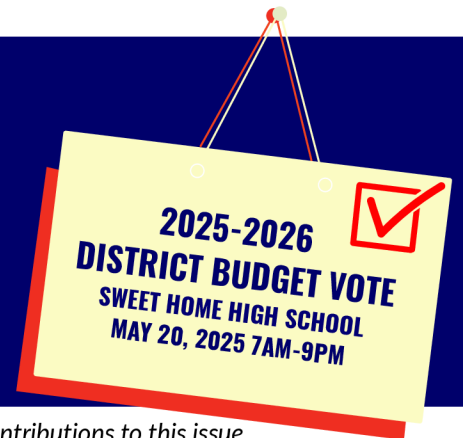


#WEARESWEETHOME

Stay connected!



sweethomeschools.org



Thank you Senior Julia Elmedawar, student Athletic Communications & Media Intern, for photography contributions to this issue.

DISTRICT PHONE NUMBERS

District Office	(716) 250-1400
Central Registration	(716) 250-1600
Family Support Center	(716) 250-1228
Transportation	(716) 250-1434
Athletic Director	(716) 250-1207
High School	(716) 250-1203
Middle School	(716) 250-1452
Glendale Elementary	(716) 250-1500
Heritage Heights Elementary	(716) 250-1525
Maplemere Elementary	(716) 250-1550
Willow Ridge Elementary	(716) 250-1575

BOARD OF EDUCATION

Amy Battaglia, President
Peter Bellanti, Vice-President
Danyelle Anthon
Marianne Jasen
Scott Johnson
Brian Laible
Dirk Rabenold
Student ex-officio member: Mayesha Subaita



Dr. Michael V. Ginestre, Superintendent of Schools
Donald Feldmann, Assistant Superintendent
for Finance & Plant Services
Dr. Toyia Wilson, Assistant Superintendent
for Curriculum & Instruction



Track your student's bus schedule and receive updates via the Stopfinder app. Contact our Transportation Department at businfo@sweethomeschools.org to activate a Stopfinder account for your family.