



South Davis Second Graders Are Learning Out Loud

At South Davis, a student-led podcast is giving second graders a powerful voice while strengthening key academic and social skills. The idea began during "WIN" (What I Need) Time as an enrichment opportunity for a small group of students. With support from instructional coach Brian Sepe, second grade teacher, Ms. LaPenta launched the project, which quickly evolved into a meaningful learning experience for four students chosen for their curiosity and creativity.



The *LaPenta's Learners* podcast crew poses for a quick picture after wrapping an episode.

The podcast *LaPenta's Learners* goes beyond recording audio. The members of the crew Owen A., Carson B., Mitchell B., and Jackson H. are all building confidence while developing speaking, listening, research, and writing skills. They learn to ask thoughtful questions, organize ideas, and collaborate all while sharing their work with a real audience. Since the first episode of *LaPenta's Learners* launched on February 2, the podcast has become part of a regular routine, which includes new episodes recorded every six-day cycle. Each 8–12 minute episode includes an introduction, a main segment focused on research or discussion, and a fun interactive element.

Every episode is reflective of the students' second-grade curriculum. Students plan, research, and present information in their own words. While Ms. LaPenta guides the process as host and producer, students contribute as co-hosts. Over time, they will take greater ownership, building independence and leadership. The podcast uses simple technology, including a microphone and

basic recording platform, which allows the students to keep the focus on communication and creativity.

The students have embraced the podcast with enthusiasm, taking pride in sharing their voices. With practice and support, all of the speakers have grown more confident. The benefits are wide-ranging: stronger communication and writing skills, improved research abilities, and increased teamwork and self-confidence.

Looking ahead, the podcast will expand to include the entire second grade class with students getting involved in roles of guest speakers, researchers, and writers, allowing more learners to participate.

More than a project, the podcast is a real-world learning experience that makes learning engaging, purposeful, and connected to the broader community. To tune in to the *LaPenta's Learners* podcast visit: <https://tinyurl.com/4w5upe24> or scan the QR code.



The *LaPenta's Learners* crew in the midst of recording episode #6 *From Egg To Chick: Our Hatching Adventure*.

2026–27 School Operating Budget: A Commitment To Our Future

David Lilleck
Superintendent of Schools



As the annual school budget vote approaches on Tuesday, May 19, 2026, the district is proud to present a financial plan that reflects both its educational vision and its commitment to responsible fiscal management.

This year's budget was developed with a clear focus on the district's core mission: providing an exceptional education that maximizes every student's potential. The proposed plan prioritizes meaningful investments in student learning, particularly in the early years, while maintaining a disciplined approach to spending and staying within the state-mandated tax cap.

The recommended budget for the 2026–27 school year totals \$131,659,368. This budget reflects both the expansion of district programs and the district's continued effort to maintain stability and quality across all grade levels. Notably, the tax levy increase is projected at 2.59%, ensuring the district remains within the allowable tax cap while continuing to meet students' needs.

A highlight of this year's proposal is the full integration of the Universal Pre-K program into the district's elementary schools. This initiative underscores a strong commitment to early childhood education by creating a more seamless and supportive transition into the K–12 system. Beginning in the 2026–27 school year, Pre-K students will attend classes within their designated home elementary buildings, helping to build a sense of belonging from the very start of their educational journey. In addition, transportation will be expanded to include busing for all eligible 4-year-old Pre-K students, providing increased accessibility and convenience for families. This investment is significantly helped by an increase of \$1.1 million dollars to OPCSD from New York State in targeted funding for Pre-K programs.

Beyond early learning, the budget continues to advance the district's broader goals of academic excellence, equity, and student support. Efforts include strengthening curriculum alignment from Pre-K through grade 12, with a focus on the Science of Reading and data-informed instruction. The district also remains committed to enhancing its Multi-Tiered System of Supports (MTSS) and inclusive co-teaching models in special education, ensuring that all students receive the resources they need to succeed. Investments in safety, technology, and transportation further support a secure and efficient learning environment.

Community engagement remains a vital part of this process. The district encourages all residents to participate in the upcoming vote and play a role in shaping the future of Orchard Park schools. By coming together, the community continues to demonstrate its shared commitment to student success and educational excellence.

The budget vote will take place on May 19, 2026, from 7 a.m. to 9 p.m. in the Orchard Park High School Gymnasium, offering community members the opportunity to vote on a budget designed with students and taxpayers in mind.

May 19, 2026 Ballot

Proposition # 1 Proposed Operating Budget

The 2026–27 School District Budget for the Orchard Park Central School District is \$131,659,368. This budget is within the allowable tax cap.



Scan the QR code to learn more.

Proposition # 2 Purchase and Financing of Buses, Related Equipment

Voters will decide on the purchase of two (2) seventy-seven (77)-passenger school buses at an estimated maximum cost of \$197,000 each; four (4) seventy-seven (77)-passenger freightliner school buses at an estimated maximum cost of \$200,000; and two (2) thirty (30) passenger school buses at an estimated maximum cost of \$103,000 each. These buses will be funded through state education department reimbursements. This proposition is similar to propositions over the last 20 years; and, if approved, will have no new tax levy impact.

Election of Three Candidates to the Board of Education

Scan the QR code below or see page 7 for Candidate Profiles.



Scan the QR code to learn more.

Total Budget Expenditures

Components	2025-26	2026-27	Change
Program	\$93,820,632	\$96,467,313	\$2,646,681
Capital	\$20,180,097	\$22,154,474	\$1,974,377
Administration	\$12,696,909	\$13,037,581	\$340,672
TOTAL	\$126,697,638	\$131,659,368	\$4,961,730

Program Expenditures

Proposed Operating Budget - Program Component

The program or instructional component includes accounts for instruction and educational support services for the district's over 5,000 students. Transportation, instructional computers, supplies, textbooks, special education services, and salaries and benefits for employees assigned to this category are reported here.

Program	2025-26	2026-27	Change
Regular Education	\$50,139,622	\$52,397,874	\$2,258,252
Special Education	\$14,540,000	\$14,931,000	\$391,000
Transportation	\$5,860,510	\$5,743,439	-\$117,071
Benefits	\$23,280,500	\$23,395,000	\$114,500
TOTAL	\$93,820,632	\$96,467,313	\$2,646,681

Capital Expenses

Proposed Operating Budget - Capital Component

The capital component of the budget includes maintenance and upkeep of the district's facilities and property including electricity, gas, water, sewer, and telephone services. It also includes principal and interest payments on capital projects and salaries and benefits for maintenance and custodial staff.

Program	2025-26	2026-27	Change
Operations & Maintenance	\$7,945,045	\$8,786,017	\$840,972
Debt Service	\$8,415,552	\$9,558,457	\$1,142,905
Benefits	\$3,819,500	\$3,810,000	-\$9,500
TOTAL	\$20,180,097	\$22,154,474	\$1,974,377

Administrative Expenses

Proposed Operating Budget - Administrative Component

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

Program	2025-26	2026-27	Change
Board & District Office	\$6,484,409	\$6,972,581	\$488,172
Building Supervision	\$2,828,000	\$2,890,500	\$62,500
Benefits	\$3,384,500	\$3,174,500	-\$210,000
TOTAL	\$12,696,909	\$13,037,581	\$340,672

Our District In Action



Author and illustrator Alex Willan visited students at Ellicott and Windom this April, sharing writing insights and drawing tips.



Eggert Elementary hosted International Night in April. Students and families explored traditions through cultural foods and hands-on activities, fostering appreciation across cultures.



Eighth-grade members of the News & Views club went on a tour of the courts in Buffalo! Students had the opportunity to see the justice system in action and were honored to snap this photo with State Supreme Court Judge Martoche.



Wednesday, April 15, nine Orchard Park High School Seniors committed to compete at the collegiate level. Congratulations athletes!

Estimated Revenue

School Districts are funded through State Aid, property tax, and other revenue sources including sales tax and fund balance.

Source	2025-26	2026-27	Change
Property Tax Levy	\$75,362,950	\$77,318,329	\$1,955,379
PILOTS	\$650,000	\$505,000	-\$145,000
State & Federal Aid	\$34,296,688	\$36,325,839	\$2,029,151
Erie County Sales Tax	\$7,500,000	\$8,400,000	\$900,000
Other Revenues	\$1,488,000	\$2,410,200	\$922,200
Fund Balance & Reserves	\$7,400,000	\$6,700,000	-\$700,000
TOTAL	\$126,697,638	\$131,659,368	\$4,961,730

2026–27 School Start Time Adjustments

2026-2027 START AND DISMISSAL TIMES FOR ELEMENTARY & MIDDLE SCHOOL:

Elementary	Start: 9:10 a.m.	End: 3:20 p.m.
Middle School	Start: 8:05 a.m.	End: 2:40 p.m.

At Orchard Park CSD, our mission is to maximize every student's potential through high-quality learning for all. To support this goal and ensure reliable transportation, we are adjusting elementary and middle school start and end times for the 2026–27 school year.

Like many districts, we are impacted by ongoing bus driver shortages. These schedule changes will help us use our transportation resources more effectively and ensure consistent, dependable service for all students.

New Student Hours for 2026–27:

Elementary Schools:	9:10 a.m. – 3:20 p.m.
Middle School:	8:05 a.m. – 2:40 p.m.
High School:	No Change

Aligning these schedules ensures buses can complete middle school routes and arrive at elementary schools on time, creating a more predictable experience for students and families.

OPHS Student Elected New York DECA Vice President of Finance

Orchard Park High School sophomore, Andrew Wintringer, has achieved an impressive milestone by being elected New York DECA Vice President of Finance for the 2026-27 school year. This is a significant leadership honor, and this role will allow Andrew an opportunity to give back to an organization that has already had a significant impact on his high school experience.

DECA is a career and technical student organization that prepares emerging leaders and entrepreneurs who are interested in careers in marketing, finance, hospitality, and management. Orchard Park High School's chapter of DECA is led by advisors Kristen Casto and Barb Downs.

Andrew's involvement in DECA began last year as a freshman. After being selected as a voting delegate at the State Career Conference, he observed the election process firsthand, which inspired him to pursue a leadership role. Motivated by the candidates' energy and dedication, he decided to run for office this year.

The process of becoming a candidate was both detailed and competitive. It included completing an application, planning and running a campaign, and participating in an interview. With a set budget, Andrew had to plan carefully to create materials and connect with students across the state. At the 'Meet the Candidates' session during the New York DECA State Conference, Andrew had the opportunity to speak in front of more than 3,000 DECA members. Although he was nervous at first, practice and support from his DECA advisors prior to his speech helped him gain confidence and deliver a strong presentation.



Andrew diligently campaigned by connecting with other students at the New York DECA State Conference.



OPHS sophomore, Andrew Wintringer was recently elected New York DECA Vice President of Finance for the 2026-27 school year.

"This achievement is a true reflection of Andrew's dedication and perseverance. We are incredibly proud of the leadership, responsibility, and integrity he brings to everything he does. Andrew's speech at the 'Meet the Candidates' session truly set him apart, showcasing his confidence, preparation, and passion for leadership. We are so excited to see him serve on New York DECA's Executive Council Team 67," DECA Advisor Kristen Casto said proudly.

Now in his second year of DECA, Andrew continues to demonstrate leadership, serving as Vice President of Finance for the OPHS DECA chapter. His growth within DECA reflects a combination of dedication, mentorship, and a supportive network. Looking ahead, Andrew is focused on strengthening communication across New York DECA. By improving connections between chapters and encouraging the sharing of ideas, he hopes to ensure all student voices are represented and heard. He is also planning to explore new opportunities for leadership development and expand access through partnerships, helping to build a more connected and inclusive DECA community.

2026-27 School District Budget Notice

Overall Budget Proposal	Budget Adopted for the 2025-26 School Year	Budget Proposed for the 2026-27 School Year	Contingency Budget for the 2026-27 School Year *
Total Budgeted Amount, Not Including Separate Propositions	\$ 126,697,638	\$ 131,659,368	\$ 129,703,989
Increase/Decrease for the 2026-27 School Year		\$ 4,961,730	\$ 3,006,351
Percentage Increase/Decrease in Proposed Budget		3.92 %	2.37 %
Change in the Consumer Price Index		2.63 %	
A. Proposed Levy to Support the Total Budgeted Amount			
	\$ 75,362,950	\$ 77,318,329	
B. Levy to Support Library Debt, if Applicable			
	\$ 0	\$ 0	
C. Levy for Non-Excludable Propositions, if Applicable **			
	\$ 0	\$ 0	
D. Total Tax Cap Reserve Amount Used to Reduce Current Year Levy			
	\$ 0	\$ 0	
E. Total Proposed School Year Tax Levy (A + B + C - D)			
	\$ 75,362,950	\$ 77,318,329	\$ 75,362,950
F. Total Permissible Exclusions			
	\$ 5,722,927	\$ 5,333,890	
G. School Tax Levy Limit, <u>Excluding</u> Levy for Permissible Exclusions			
	\$ 70,838,065	\$ 71,984,439	
H. Total Proposed School Year Tax Levy, <u>Excluding</u> Levy to Support Library Debt and/or Permissible Exclusions (E - B - F + D)			
	\$ 69,640,033	\$ 71,984,439	
I. Difference: G - H (Negative Value Requires 60.0% Voter Approval - See Note Below Regarding Separate Propositions) **			
	\$ 1,198,032	\$ 0	
Administrative Component			
	\$ 12,696,909	\$ 13,037,581	\$ 13,037,581
Program Component			
	\$ 93,820,632	\$ 96,467,313	\$ 95,000,779
Capital Component			
	\$ 20,180,097	\$ 22,154,474	\$ 21,665,629

* Provide a statement of assumptions made in projecting a contingency budget for the 2026-27 school year, should the proposed budget be defeated pursuant to Section 2023 of the Education Law.

The exact change to the 2026-27 budget would still need to be determined, however, there would be employee positions eliminated and all equipment purchases would be eliminated, with the exception of state aided computer hardware and equipment essential to assist children with special needs.

** List Separate Propositions that are not included in the Total Budgeted Amount: (Tax Levy associated with educational or transportation services propositions are not eligible for exclusion and may affect voter approval requirements)

Description	Amount
Purchase & Financing of Vehicles, Related Equipment & Supplies (Bus Purchase) (No 2026 Tax Impact)	\$ 1,400,000
	\$
	\$
	\$

*NOTE TO SCHOOL DISTRICT BUSINESS OFFICIALS: Please submit an electronic version (Word or PDF) of this completed form to: emscmgts@nysed.gov

Under the Budget Proposed
for the 2026-27 School Year

Estimated Basic STAR Exemption Savings¹

\$ 392

The annual budget vote for the fiscal year 2026-27 by the qualified voters of the Orchard Park Central School District, Erie County, New York, will be held at Orchard Park High School in said district on Tuesday, May 19, 2026 between the hours of 7:00am and 9:00pm, prevailing time in the Orchard Park High School, at which time the polls will be opened to vote by voting ballot or machine.

1. The basic school tax relief (STAR) exemption is authorized by section 425 of the Real Property Tax Law.



A Word From the Board President

Dr. Jennifer Rogers

As we near the end of another school year, it is important to recognize the accomplishments and progress made throughout the district. The Orchard Park Central School District has experienced meaningful growth and success in many areas this year, both in and out of the classroom. This has been made possible through the steady leadership of Superintendent Lilleck and the administrative team, along with the continued commitment of our teachers and staff, who consistently support and guide their students, as well as the strong support of our parents and the dedication of our students.

During the March 31 Board of Education meeting, the Board unanimously adopted the 2026-27 school budget, which will appear as Proposition 1 on the May 19, 2026, ballot. This budget sustains inclusive programming and current academic offerings from Pre-K through grade 12, while remaining under the state-mandated tax levy cap.

Proposition 2 is for the purchase and financing of eight diesel school buses. This annual initiative is part of the district's long-term strategy to modernize our transportation fleet, ensuring student safety and managing maintenance costs. New York State Transportation Aid will be used to support this purchase, meaning there will be no tax impact associated with this proposition.

Proposition 3 concerns the election of three Trustees to the Board of Education. Effective school boards play a vital role in the success of any district. Our Trustees are community volunteers who bring diverse experiences and a shared commitment to our students and schools. This year, three candidates are running for three open seats.

I want to thank our outgoing Board Member, Steven Comeau, for his dedication and time on the School Board. Steve and I have both decided not to seek re-election to the Board of Education. I also want to thank our Student Ex-Officio member, Sydney Dobmeier, for her dedication, communication, and leadership as she has served her one-year term on the School Board. We encourage all residents to stay informed about the proposed budget and the propositions on the ballot. Please remember to vote on May 19, 2026.

The Role of a Board of Education Member

The Board of Education is elected by District voters to govern schools and determine educational policies. Technically, Board of Education members are Local Officials, their authority and duties are defined by the state and federal constitutions and laws, as well as by rules and regulations promulgated by the Board of Regents and commissioner of education and other regulatory agencies. Members of the Board of Education are volunteers and receive no salary for their work. They do not have the day-to-day duties of running a school district, rather their role is oversight and setting policy; the Superintendent is responsible for all aspects of the district and he reports to the Board. Information regarding the Board of Education candidates is available to the right.

First Annual Eggert Shines Show

In late March, Eggert Elementary held its first annual Eggert Shine Show, celebrating the creativity, courage, and talents of its students. Thirty students performed in 21 acts, showcasing everything from singing and dancing to magic.



Ellicott STEAM Night

Ellicott Elementary once again hosted its annual STEAM Night this spring. Students proudly showcased innovative projects, while local organizations enhanced the experience with interactive exhibits. The event highlighted creativity, exploration, and community collaboration, inspiring students to connect their interests to future possibilities.



Congratulations DARE Graduates!

Fifth grade students at Windom Elementary were the first of the four district elementary schools to graduate from the 15-week DARE program. During the program fifth grade students throughout the district work with their School Resource Officers to learn about making safe and responsible choices using the D.A.R.E. Decision Making Model, dealing with negative peer pressure, social media safety, dangers of alcohol, tobacco and vaping, bullying, and so much more. The program emphasizes teaching students how to become good citizens within our community.



Board of Education Candidates - Elect Three

Below are the candidates running for the Orchard Park Central School District Board of Education. They are listed in the order they will appear on the ballot. District residents will elect three candidates to the Board. This information was provided by the candidates.

1A On The Ballot – Edward Draves



Candidate Address: 23 Eaglebrook Drive, West Seneca, NY 14224

Family Information: Wife: Anne (27 years!), Son: Chris, Daughter: PearlAnne (substitute teacher in the District). Both my kids are graduates of Orchard Park Schools

Career: 36 Years with the Premier Group, including 24 years as Wine Manager of Prestige Wines and Spirits

Reasons for Running: My family moved to the Orchard Park School District 22 years ago. As with many families, we chose Orchard Park because we wanted our children to get a quality, well rounded education in a safe, supportive environment. Their development was a partnership between the schools and our home life. Each having a hand in who our kids grew up to be.

I have served on several committees at Windom Elementary, starting when my daughter was in first grade. I have collaborated with Teachers, Administrators, fellow parents and Staff to make Windom a better place. That, along with my previous 3 years on the board, provide the stability and experience the board needs. I pride myself on being non-political and even tempered. If the voters of Orchard Park choose me, I promise that students and education will be my focus, not a political agenda. I would look forward to collaborating with all school board members to keep Orchard Park School District the wonderful learning environment it was for my kids.

2A On The Ballot – Tijuana Klas



Candidate Address: 36 Cherry Tree Lane, Orchard Park, NY 14127

Family Information: Married (18 years) to Brian; Son, Parker (10); and dog, Kent (2)

Career: Retired Criminal Investigator/Special Agent with a Federal law enforcement agency for 23+ years

Reasons for Running: I want to support the Orchard Park Central School District Board of Education's mission to maintain "an atmosphere of excellence and accountability." I am a product of public education and believe strongly in the idea that a quality, free education is a critical investment in our community's long-term success. During my career I honed skills centered on analyzing and interpreting law, policies, and procedures. Additionally, as a member of a community service based organization, Sigma Gamma Rho Sorority, Incorporated for over 30 years, I understand the importance and impact of community service and engagement. I want to provide a meaningful impact on our community, With a commitment to upholding the values that make OP

schools strong, I ask for your support in helping to shape a school system that prioritizes excellence, fairness, and the best interests of every student.

3A On The Ballot – Erin Andol



Candidate Address: 17 Metzger Drive, Orchard Park, NY 14127

Family Information: Husband: Rick; Children: Ellie - 9th Grade, Ben - 7th Grade

Career: Current: Finance & Legislation Specialist at Erie 1 BOCES

Experience: 6.5 years in School Business Finance, 7 years as a Stay-At-Home Mom/Military Spouse, 5 years in Banking

Reasons for Running: Both my husband and I graduated from OP in 2002. My mother and her siblings are also alumni, which makes my children third-generation OP students. My deep roots in OP have nurtured a strong appreciation for our community and schools, and I am deeply committed to their future. Professionally, I analyze and share information with area school districts regarding the NYS budget, school aid, and legislative impacts. Personally, I am passionate about digital literacy. Smartphones, social media, and AI are

a part of daily life and evolving faster than legislation and protections can adapt, especially as we learn more about the impact on children's mental health, and its impact on how we learn, communicate, and relate to one another. I'm interested in thoughtfully addressing these challenges while keeping students' well-being at the center. I'd love the opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of the district and listen to students, parents, staff and community members to ensure all voices are heard on any topic. Furthermore, I'd like to contribute my perspective to support informed decision making.

Resident

Date, Time, and Location of Public Vote

Tuesday, May 19, 2026

7 a.m. - 9 p.m.

Orchard Park High School Gymnasium,
4040 Baker Road, Orchard Park, NY 14127
(Use Freeman Road Entrance)

Voter Eligibility

- At least 18 years of age.
- A United States citizen.
- A District resident for at least 30 days before the date of the vote.

**Please bring proof of residency. (i.e. driver's license)*

On The Ballot

Proposition I: Operating Budget

- The 2026-27 School District Budget for the Orchard Park Central School District is \$131,659,368. This budget is within the allowable tax cap of 2.59%

Proposition II: School Bus Purchase

- Continues the 20+ year Bus Replacement Program (no new tax levy impact)

Election of Three Board Members

They are listed in the order they will appear on the ballot:

- 1A On The Ballot – Edward Draves
- 2A On The Ballot – Tijuana Klas
- 3A On The Ballot – Erin Andol

Dinner & Dessert To Support Post Prom

The Orchard Park High School Post Prom is hosting a BW's Barbecue Dinner at the Vote. All proceeds benefit Post Prom, a PTO-sponsored drug and alcohol free party for seniors and their dates following the Prom. Order at the door or place your pre-sale order using the QR code below.

- Chicken Dinners are \$15 and include a 1/2 chicken, potato salad, coleslaw and a roll.
- Rib Dinners are \$15 and include a 1/4 rack ribs, potato salad, coleslaw, and a roll
- Dozen Krispy Kreme Donuts \$14



Absentee Ballots and Early Mail Voter Ballots

Applications for absentee ballots or early mail voter ballots for the 2026-27 Annual School Vote may be obtained at the District Clerk's Office, 2240 Southwestern Blvd., West Seneca, NY, 14224. Completed applications must be received by the District Clerk no later than seven days before the election if the ballot is to be mailed to the voter, or no later than the day before the vote if the ballot is to be personally delivered by the voter. Absentee ballots must be received by the District Clerk no later than 5 p.m. prevailing time on May 19, 2026. Absentee Ballot and early mail voter ballot applications are also available on our District website: www.opschools.org. For more information on absentee ballots or early mail voting, please contact the District Clerk at 716-209-6280.

Mark Your Calendar!

ArtSplash 2026, the Orchard Park Central School District's annual Pre-K-12 art show will be on display at the Orchard Park Public Library from May 22 through June 14. This art exhibit highlights the work of students from all grades and from all school buildings across the district. The public is invited to the opening reception on May 22 from 7 - 8:30 p.m. at the Orchard Park Public Library, where we will celebrate our student artists with refreshments and music while enjoying their impressive artworks. ArtSplash can be viewed during regular library hours through June 14.

Orchard Park Central Schools presents **2026 ArtSplash**
Student Art Exhibit
Featuring selected works from artists in grades PreK-12
May 22 through June 14, 2026
Opening Reception
Friday, May 22
7:00 - 8:30 p.m.
Orchard Park Public Library
4570 South Buffalo Street,
Orchard Park, NY
Generously supported by