

**U.S. Department of Education**  
**2018 National Blue Ribbon Schools Program**

---

[X] Public or [ ] Non-public

For Public Schools only: (Check all that apply) [ ] Title I [ ] Charter [ ] Magnet [ ] Choice

Name of Principal Mr. Steven J. Malkischer

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., etc.) (As it should appear in the official records)

Official School Name Spackenkill High School

(As it should appear in the official records)

School Mailing Address 112 Spackenkill Road

(If address is P.O. Box, also include street address.)

Poughkeepsie NY 12603-5024  
City State Zip Code+4 (9 digits total)

County Dutchess County

Telephone (845) 463-7810

Fax (845) 463-7826

Web site/URL http://www.spackenkillschools.org/ E-mail steven.malkischer@sufsdny.org

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Principal's Signature)

Name of Superintendent\*Dr. Mark Villanti

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other) E-mail mark.villanti@sufsdny.org

District Name Spackenkill Union Free School District Tel. (845) 463-7800

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(Superintendent's Signature)

Name of School Board

President/Chairperson Mr. Thomas Keith

(Specify: Ms., Miss, Mrs., Dr., Mr., Other)

I have reviewed the information in this application, including the eligibility requirements on page 2 (Part I-Eligibility Certification), and certify, to the best of my knowledge, that it is accurate.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

(School Board President's/Chairperson's Signature)

The original signed cover sheet only should be converted to a PDF file and uploaded via the online portal.

*\*Non-public Schools: If the information requested is not applicable, write N/A in the space.*

## **Part I – Eligibility Certification**

---

The signatures on the first page of this application (cover page) certify that each of the statements below, concerning the school's eligibility and compliance with U.S. Department of Education and National Blue Ribbon Schools requirements, are true and correct.

1. The school configuration includes one or more of grades K-12. (Schools on the same campus with one principal, even a K-12 school, must apply as an entire school.)
2. All nominated public schools must meet the state's performance targets in reading (or English language arts) and mathematics and other academic indicators (i.e., attendance rate and graduation rate), for the all students group and all subgroups, including having participation rates of at least 95 percent using the most recent accountability results available for nomination.
3. To meet final eligibility, all nominated public schools must be certified by states prior to September 2018 in order to meet all eligibility requirements. Any status appeals must be resolved at least two weeks before the awards ceremony for the school to receive the award.
4. If the school includes grades 7 or higher, the school must have foreign language as a part of its curriculum.
5. The school has been in existence for five full years, that is, from at least September 2012 and each tested grade must have been part of the school for the past three years.
6. The nominated school has not received the National Blue Ribbon Schools award in the past five years: 2013, 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2017.
7. The nominated school has no history of testing irregularities, nor have charges of irregularities been brought against the school at the time of nomination. The U.S. Department of Education reserves the right to disqualify a school's application and/or rescind a school's award if irregularities are later discovered and proven by the state.
8. The nominated school has not been identified by the state as "persistently dangerous" within the last two years.
9. The nominated school or district is not refusing Office of Civil Rights (OCR) access to information necessary to investigate a civil rights complaint or to conduct a district-wide compliance review.
10. The OCR has not issued a violation letter of findings to the school district concluding that the nominated school or the district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes. A violation letter of findings will not be considered outstanding if OCR has accepted a corrective action plan from the district to remedy the violation.
11. The U.S. Department of Justice does not have a pending suit alleging that the nominated school or the school district as a whole has violated one or more of the civil rights statutes or the Constitution's equal protection clause.
12. There are no findings of violations of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in a U.S. Department of Education monitoring report that apply to the school or school district in question; or if there are such findings, the state or district has corrected, or agreed to correct, the findings.

## PART II - DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

---

Data should be provided for the most recent school year (2017-2018) unless otherwise stated.

### DISTRICT

1. Number of schools in the district (per district designation):
- 2 Elementary schools (includes K-8)
  - 1 Middle/Junior high schools
  - 1 High schools
  - 0 K-12 schools
- 4 TOTAL

### SCHOOL (To be completed by all schools)

2. Category that best describes the area where the school is located:
- Urban or large central city
  - Suburban
  - Rural or small city/town
3. Number of students as of October 1, 2017 enrolled at each grade level or its equivalent in applying school:

Grade	# of Males	# of Females	Grade Total
<b>PreK</b>	0	0	0
<b>K</b>	0	0	0
<b>1</b>	0	0	0
<b>2</b>	0	0	0
<b>3</b>	0	0	0
<b>4</b>	0	0	0
<b>5</b>	0	0	0
<b>6</b>	0	0	0
<b>7</b>	0	0	0
<b>8</b>	0	0	0
<b>9</b>	59	65	124
<b>10</b>	53	50	103
<b>11</b>	57	65	122
<b>12 or higher</b>	67	73	140
<b>Total Students</b>	236	253	489

4. Racial/ethnic composition of the school:
- 0 % American Indian or Alaska Native
  - 14 % Asian
  - 12 % Black or African American
  - 9 % Hispanic or Latino
  - 0 % Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
  - 62 % White
  - 3 % Two or more races
  - 100 % Total**

(Only these seven standard categories should be used to report the racial/ethnic composition of your school. The Final Guidance on Maintaining, Collecting, and Reporting Racial and Ethnic Data to the U.S. Department of Education published in the October 19, 2007 *Federal Register* provides definitions for each of the seven categories.)

5. Student turnover, or mobility rate, during the 2016 – 2017 school year: 4%

If the mobility rate is above 15%, please explain.

This rate should be calculated using the grid below. The answer to (6) is the mobility rate.

<b>Steps For Determining Mobility Rate</b>	<b>Answer</b>
(1) Number of students who transferred <i>to</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	10
(2) Number of students who transferred <i>from</i> the school after October 1, 2016 until the end of the 2016-2017 school year	12
(3) Total of all transferred students [sum of rows (1) and (2)]	22
(4) Total number of students in the school as of October 1, 2016	490
(5) Total transferred students in row (3) divided by total students in row (4)	0.04
(6) Amount in row (5) multiplied by 100	4

6. English Language Learners (ELL) in the school: 0 %  
1 Total number ELL

Specify each non-English language represented in the school (separate languages by commas):  
Mandarin

7. Students eligible for free/reduced-priced meals: 24 %  
Total number students who qualify: 118

8. Students receiving special education services: 16 %  
78 Total number of students served

Indicate below the number of students with disabilities according to conditions designated in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act. Do not add additional conditions. It is possible that students may be classified in more than one condition.

- |                                  |  |
|----------------------------------|--|
| <u>1</u> Autism                  | <u>7</u> Multiple Disabilities                 |
| <u>0</u> Deafness                | <u>0</u> Orthopedic Impairment                 |
| <u>0</u> Deaf-Blindness          | <u>29</u> Other Health Impaired                |
| <u>0</u> Developmentally Delayed | <u>40</u> Specific Learning Disability         |
| <u>1</u> Emotional Disturbance   | <u>0</u> Speech or Language Impairment         |
| <u>0</u> Hearing Impairment      | <u>0</u> Traumatic Brain Injury                |
| <u>0</u> Intellectual Disability | <u>0</u> Visual Impairment Including Blindness |

9. Number of years the principal has been in her/his position at this school: 6
10. Use Full-Time Equivalents (FTEs), rounded to nearest whole numeral, to indicate the number of school staff in each of the categories below:

	<b>Number of Staff</b>
Administrators	2
Classroom teachers including those teaching high school specialty subjects, e.g., third grade teacher, history teacher, algebra teacher.	37
Resource teachers/specialists/coaches e.g., reading specialist, science coach, special education teacher, technology specialist, art teacher, etc.	13
Paraprofessionals under the supervision of a professional supporting single, group, or classroom students.	7
Student support personnel e.g., guidance counselors, behavior interventionists, mental/physical health service providers, psychologists, family engagement liaisons, career/college attainment coaches, etc.	7

11. Average student-classroom teacher ratio, that is, the number of students in the school divided by the FTE of classroom teachers, e.g., 22:1 13:1

12. Show daily student attendance rates. Only high schools need to supply yearly graduation rates.

<b>Required Information</b>	2016-2017	2015-2016	2014-2015	2013-2014	2012-2013
Daily student attendance	95%	95%	94%	95%	96%
High school graduation rate	98%	96%	95%	95%	91%

13. **For high schools only, that is, schools ending in grade 12 or higher.**

Show percentages to indicate the post-secondary status of students who graduated in Spring 2017.

<b>Post-Secondary Status</b>	
Graduating class size	118
Enrolled in a 4-year college or university	69%
Enrolled in a community college	26%
Enrolled in career/technical training program	0%
Found employment	4%
Joined the military or other public service	1%
Other	0%

14. Indicate whether your school has previously received a National Blue Ribbon Schools award.

Yes  No

If yes, select the year in which your school received the award.

15. In a couple of sentences, provide the school’s mission or vision statement.

Inspired by a tradition of excellence and a spirit of continuous improvement, the Spackenkill School District will provide all of our students with the academic and social skills necessary to pursue their goals and become responsible citizens in an interdependent global community.

16. **For public schools only**, if the school is a magnet, charter, or choice school, explain how students are chosen to attend.

## **PART III – SUMMARY**

---

Located in the heart of the scenic Hudson Valley between metropolitan New York City and the state capital of Albany, Spackenkill High School is the cornerstone of a tight-knit community. The school district was established in 1866, but the high school was built in 1973 in direct response to the significant impact local corporation IBM made on the district. Our student population of just under 500 students is provided with what many refer to as a “private education in a public school setting.”

Spackenkill High School has changed considerably over the last decade. The poverty rate is almost at 25 percent, however we take great pride in the fact that, based on state data, our disadvantaged students perform in the top 90 percent when compared to disadvantaged students in other districts across the state. While there have been a lot of changes, we have still preserved the school and academic culture.

The face of the district has also changed and in many ways mirrors the New York State population. One out of three students in our district is a minority. The cultural diversity serves as an asset to our school community. It’s a close-knit, culturally rich learning environment that fosters an atmosphere of understanding and appreciation of differences between race, gender, and sexual orientation. All of the different cultures and students get along and work well together, whether academically or in sports.

Steeped in a tradition of excellence in which all members of the school community are expected to give their best effort, Spackenkill High School provides students with the latest technology and up-to-date curriculum. Rigorous and challenging courses, including 14 AP and eight college-credit-bearing courses, are offered to any student who wishes to participate. Chromebooks, which are provided to everyone, enhance and individualize the learning experience for all. Although we’re a small school, we offer a rich and diverse curriculum, encompassing the arts, supportive classes, challenging college-level courses, after-school clubs and activities, and athletics teams.

Small in size but huge in heart, Spackenkill’s state-wide reputation for excellence is well-deserved. We aspire for excellence in everything we do, from the core curriculum to our extracurricular activities. We have more performance groups in music than schools that are five to eight times our size, including a String Ensemble, Jazz Band, and Chorus that performs at local parades and with such well-known celebrities as Aretha Franklin. Our Math Team is ranked in the top 20 teams in the state, often competing successfully against schools that are much larger. Sixteen out of 17 varsity teams achieved the New York State Public High School Athletic Association scholar-athlete team award in the last school year (team’s average GPA for 75% of the roster must be greater than or equal to 90.00) and our teams are county and statewide champions. Our Science Olympiad team finished number one in the small schools division of the New York State organization, and number four among all schools statewide. In addition, one of our juniors earned second place nationally in the prestigious Siemens Competition this fall. We recently had four finalists recognized for the National Merit Scholarship Award and four students who placed in the top 2.5% among Hispanic and Latino PSAT/NMSQT test takers in our region. Engaging students in their school comes easily here in this intimate setting. Over 70% of our students participate in a school club or athletic team. Almost 40% of our students give back to their community by actively participating in LEO Club (Leadership Experience Opportunity). At the end of every school day, teachers and students gather for optional additional instruction and academic support.

Spackenkill High School is one of nine schools statewide that has received Reward School recognition for three years in a row by the New York State Department of Education as a result of being one of the state’s highest performing high schools. In addition, the high school has appeared on the top high school lists for US News and World Report, Newsweek, and in Niche (an online ratings system intended to help homebuyers).

The pride our graduates feel is evident when they return to our celebrations, continue to live in the community in which they were raised, send their children to school here, and even return to teach alongside those who taught them. In addition, a significant number of our teachers who live out of the district take advantage of the tuition-free policy and enroll their children in our school because of the quality of the

educational program and because they feel a real connection to the district. The recently created Alumni Association promotes school and community connections. Our Alumni Corner in our weekly newsletter, “What’s Right with Spackenkill!,” is intended to inspire students in varying career areas. All of these factors contribute to a safe, family-style environment, where every teacher knows every student and success means more than just academic accomplishment.

## **PART IV – CURRICULUM AND INSTRUCTION**

---

### **1. Core Curriculum:**

Spackenkill High School provides a wide-ranging and rigorous curriculum designed to engage and inspire students. Whether it is a required core class, an optional writing lab, or a Science Research seminar, students take classes that challenge and motivate them.

The English Department prepares our students to meet the New York State Common Core Learning Standards by providing the reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills they need to be college and career ready. Courses challenge students to explore how humans have communicated their individual experiences in ways that have a significant impact on society.

In addition to offering two AP courses – AP English Language and Composition and AP English Literature and Composition – the department also gives students the opportunity to earn college credit in a Dutchess Community College (DCC) concurrent course. The department offers such electives as Public Speaking and The World of Sports through its Literature, which encourages the exploration of the written word and appeals to a diverse audience of learners.

For students who need additional support in ELA, Spackenkill offers co-taught classes, modified classes, English Academic Intervention, and our recently created Writing Lab.

Students can further develop their writing and reading skills and appreciation for the arts through enrichment by participating in extracurricular activities such as The Art and Literary Magazine, and/or the school's news broadcast. Each year students have enriching opportunities to visit the nearby Rhinebeck Performing Arts Center and theatrical performances at local universities, as well as New York City museums and Broadway shows.

The goal of the Mathematics Department is to develop independent thinkers and creative problem solvers. To this end we offer three Advanced Placement courses: Calculus BC, Calculus AB, and Computer Science. Last year 25 of 27 BC Calculus students earned a maximum score of 5-5 on the AP exam. Precalculus Honors students earn DCC credits. We expect students to challenge themselves fully, so it is not unusual for students to choose to accelerate into the honors program.

To help struggling students meet the Common Core standards, we offer sections with attached lab periods for Algebra I, Geometry, and Algebra II. Currently, we are piloting a Math Lab, where students can seek help in any course during a lunch period. We also use an online program to enhance the skills of students who lack fluency in critical areas. In order to promote perseverance, the Mathematics Team welcomes all students and participates in contests at varying levels of difficulty. In addition to having students ranked first in the four-county league, our teams have placed first in both league and sectional competitions.

We have embraced technology and work hard to integrate it into our curriculum. Our district was an early adopter of “a SMART Board for every classroom,” and each mathematics teacher has a classroom set of calculators.

Coursework in science challenges students to investigate, discover, and develop an understanding of the physical world around us. In addition to the core classes, honors and AP courses are offered in biology, chemistry, and physics. Students in the AP Biology Course also have the opportunity to receive college course credit through DCC. All courses are open enrollment. Two introductory courses in Project Lead the Way are offered to expose students to concepts in engineering. Additional coursework in Forensics, Physical Sciences, and Integrated Mathematics, Science, and Technology is available for students to pursue interests beyond the core courses.

An extensive, three-year Science Research Program is offered under guidelines established by State University of New York (SUNY) Albany. Students are supported by local and regional mentors from

institutions that have previously included Yale University, MIT, the Weill/Cornell Medical Center, and the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies. Among the many mentorships, research ranges from studying the characteristics of ticks that enable them to transport diseases to using a catalyst to turn atmospheric carbon dioxide into useful products to discovering markers that might lead to a reduction in deaths from aneurysms. Students have co-authored articles on their research and excelled in prestigious competitions, such as ranking among the top 300 in the Regeneron Science Talent Search.

The Social Studies Department is committed to empowering students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in the 21st century and follows the New York State standards. Seniors take both Participation in Government and Economics, both half year courses. Students can opt to take Participation in Government as a concurrent three-credit course with DCC, which covers a more intensive curriculum. Spackenkill also offers juniors and seniors various elective courses, such as Psychology, Sociology, Nazi Germany, and AP European History.

We are committed to preparing students for college and career opportunities and enhancing the curriculum with hands-on activities. For example, students attend Model UN meetings at Vassar College twice a year, go on field trips to such places as the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Museum of Modern Art, the Museum of Jewish Heritage, and the United Nations. The department also hosts guest speakers for economics and government classes. Furthermore, government teachers register their students to vote. During election season, government students prepare lessons for elementary students on the election process. In addition, economic students attend Board of Education meetings to become familiar with the budget process first-hand.

Many of our courses allow students to earn college credit while still in high school. They include 14 Advanced Placement courses, four DCC dual-enrollment courses, three RIT (Project Lead the Way) courses in which students can earn credit from the Rochester Institute of Technology, and our Science Research Program (credit through SUNY Albany). Ninety-five percent of our students continue their education following graduation.

Students who thrive in a more hands-on learning environment are encouraged to visit the Dutchess County BOCES Career and Technical Institute (CTI) on a school-sponsored field trip. Our high school recently partnered with the Council of Industry to provide apprenticeship programs for graduates who might prefer that route in preparation for a career in the trades.

Graduate follow-up surveys demonstrate that alumni are prepared for their college studies or the workplace.

## **2. Other Curriculum Areas:**

The following elective courses are offered to all students in grades 9 through 12 (though most of our students exceed the state requirements), except for physical education, which must be taken every year, two-and-a-half days per week. Health is mandatory for one-half year in grades 10 through 12.

The Visual Arts Program welcomes both the career-oriented student and the student who seeks the benefits that an arts education has to offer: increased creative problem solving ability, cultural awareness, and self-directed learning. Historically, approximately half the students at the high school are enrolled in Visual Arts classes. Beyond the foundation classes of Studio in Art and Drawing for Production and Design, we offer classes in Graphics, Architecture, Ceramics, Drawing and Painting, Advanced Drawing and Painting (honors), and AP Studio in Drawing.

Our students also take advantage of extracurricular opportunities to explore avant-garde media and arts, such as participating in Photography Club and Art Club. Each year the Art & Literary Club creates and publishes a full-color publication that archives — both in our library and digitally — creative writing and visual art submitted by our students. Members of the National Art Honor Society annually participate in the Memory Project by painting portraits that they gift to underprivileged children, with the intention of creating a positive memory in their lives. The students' work spans six continents and 10 countries. We also regularly participate and place in the national Scholastic Arts and Writing Competition as well as contribute to our

Big Read events, sponsored by the National Endowment for the Arts.

Music classes are student driven, allowing them to hone their skills in leadership and interdependence by setting goals and achieving them collectively. Students are often asked to improvise and compose their own music as part of the curriculum, which is aligned with the NYS Standards for the Arts. A recent addition to the program is a Music Theory course. Ensembles such as string orchestra, chorus, and concert band are open to all students and foster techniques for both performance and self-assessment. Students may participate in smaller, auditioned groups such as Strings Ensemble, Women's Chorus, and Jazz Band.

The music staff is currently developing a portfolio program for all participating students that will, via audio/video recording, document their progress throughout their high school career. Students will use this data to outline and present a final project/performance of their choice.

We offer enrichment opportunities such as residencies with Lincoln Center, New York Philharmonic, and PROJECT Trio. Additional community events, such as Prisms Concerts, Jazz Nights, and Chamber Music Recitals, showcase our students. Additionally, our musicians are active in the community, performing at local nursing homes, annual parades, holiday celebrations, school plays, and during graduation.

For five consecutive years, our music program has been nationally recognized by the National Association of Music Merchants Foundation (NAMM) with a Best Communities for Music Education honor.

Our Physical Education Department designs classes that are meant to promote the growth, development, and mature behavior of each student. Students develop a personal fitness plan using the five components of a strong physical education. The hallmark of our program is the completion and subsequent certification for all upper-level students in CPR/AED. Our department offers intramural classes every day after school, including the use of our state-of-the-art weight room.

The Spackenkill Union Free School District consistently fosters in its student an awareness of other cultures and world affairs. The Foreign Language Department offers instruction in Spanish and French, from basic to advanced levels, including Advanced Placement. Although the vast majority of our students fulfill New York State's one-year foreign language requirement for graduation in the middle school, most students continue their study of another language at the high school, many in the upper-level courses we offer in Spanish Language and Culture and French Language and Culture. Some students study both languages. The French Club sponsors various activities throughout the year to inspire an interest in French culture. Additionally, we offer yearly trips to Spain and France for students enrolled in our language courses.

The Spackenkill High School Library, staffed with a full-time library media specialist and a full-time library aide, provides space and services to foster both independent and collaborative learning. The extensive electronic collection of databases and electronic books for research rivals those found in area colleges. All electronic resources are available through the library's website and catalog, for use on school property and with remote access at home.

The library media specialist, a certified Google educator, along with the district's technology integrator, provide support for all students and staff. They collaborate with classroom teachers to provide and instruct on the most appropriate curricular delivery methods, including apps, extensions, programs and online resources, Google Classroom, and all components of the Google Educational suite.

### **3. Instructional Methods, Interventions, and Assessments:**

Our school and districtwide curriculum is developed using the Understanding by Design (UbD) model. The scope and sequences are accessible to parents via Rubicon Atlas through the district website. Teachers maintain individual web pages that provide students and parents with access to resources that support the learning process.

Teachers utilize a variety of instructional methods in their classrooms. Examples include, but are not limited to, differentiated and direct instructional approaches, cooperative groups, and inquiry-based learning.

We embrace technology and integrate it into our curriculum. Our district was an early adopter of SMART Boards, and every classroom is equipped with either an interactive TV or SMART Board. Teachers utilize a variety of apps and software in their classrooms to enhance teaching and learning. These tools allow for students to move about the classroom and physically engage in their learning by manipulating the screen. The one-to-one Chromebook initiative has helped teachers utilize software such as Google Classroom to augment instructional approaches that promote active engagement in the teaching and learning process. It has provided more collaborative opportunities for our students via shared documents. Many teachers link Google Classroom to their web pages.

We maintain our current level of student achievement through the following methods. The High School and District Data Teams analyze state assessment performance trends and look for patterns of underperformance in all courses and within any subgroups. When patterns arise, action plans are developed, which may include targeted professional development. We have formative and summative assessments, including New York State Regents exams across the curricular areas, teacher-developed Student Learning Objectives, departmentally developed culminating assessments, College Board AP exams, and concurrent course college-level final exams.

Students who are at risk of failing classes are referred to the Response to Intervention (RTI) Team. The RTI Team meets weekly and members include the principal, assistant principal, school nurse, school psychologist, social worker, guidance counselor, school resource officer (SRO) and athletic director. Any student can be referred to the RTI committee when either academic and/or social emotional concerns arise. Supports for all students are divided into three tiers and may include individualized counseling, credit recovery, and assistance with academics after school.

The RTI Team uses both qualitative and quantitative data when making intervention decisions about students. Members review attendance records, report cards, state assessment data, discipline referrals, teacher reports, and psycho-educational evaluation results for students with disabilities. This data is used to determine what level of interventions the student requires to help him/her to be academically successful.

Case managers are assigned to each student identified with a disability. Our school offers a variety of supportive programs, which include Resource Room, Integrated Co-Taught classes, a Study Skills course, and special classes when appropriate. The continuum of special education services is based upon individual needs and reevaluated every year. Our school surveys parents/guardians of students with special needs to determine ways in which our school can improve our special education program and better help students transition to post-graduation activities.

We have developed multiple avenues of support to meet the needs of all of our students. We boast the smallest student-to-guidance-counselor ratio in the county. All teachers stay after school four days a week to provide extra help for their students. This year we are piloting English and Mathematics Labs, an opportunity for students to seek extra help from content teachers during a lunch period on an as-needed basis. An Academic Study Hall is required for all at-risk athletes. Struggling seniors are closely monitored. If they are failing a required course at the end of the first semester, they have the opportunity to recover credit through an online program. Suspended students or students with an illness or issue that prevents them from attending class during the regular school day are offered a tutoring option from 3 pm – 5 pm daily.

For students who haven't passed required courses, our school provides a summer school program taught by our own teachers and paraprofessionals. Each day of the week there is a different certified subject-specific teacher to support the students. A special education teacher is available every day of the week to ensure that our special education students' needs are being met. We strongly believe that students benefit from established relationships with other students and teachers and are more likely to succeed in a familiar and caring environment.

Spackenkill is admired for its success in preparing students for college and career. Teachers have the academic freedom to choose and vary their instructional approach and tweak the content. This approach, coupled with our extensive safety net, has resulted in a 98% graduation rate.



## PART V – SCHOOL SUPPORTS

---

### 1. School Climate/Culture:

At Spackenkill High School, the words of our district motto, “a tradition of excellence with a vision for tomorrow,” guide us daily. Known for a long tradition of excellence and high standards, Spackenkill takes pride in our small class sizes, low student-to-teacher ratios, and an individualized approach to learning. We strive for students to meet and exceed New York State and Advanced Placement standards.

We have a robust one-to-one teacher mentoring and induction program to acclimate them to our Spackenkill culture and expectations. Communication between teachers is enhanced through monthly department meetings and the high school internal website.

We promote professional development for all of our teachers, not necessarily limited to subject content. We have developed a Teacher Fellows model that is research based and have moved much of our out-of-district staff development to within district. One example is a week-long Summer Technology Fellows program with neighboring Dover High School to train teachers in the use of the latest technology. Another example is contracting our local mental health association to provide an eight-hour course on recognizing and responding to mental health issues.

Student surveys indicate that Spackenkill High School is an environment where they feel supported and academically challenged. Positive sentiments are reinforced daily: Staff members greet students by name as they enter the building, administrators and guidance counselors are visible in our school, and we even post birthday announcements on a monthly basis. Our high school principal sets the tone in the school: As a former psychologist, he has established a climate where personal relationships with our students are valued in our school. It’s rarely necessary to suspend a student out of school.

Motivation comes in many forms. Our school offers clubs, teams, drama, and the arts to engage students in multiple ways. The opportunities range from competition (Mathematics Team, Science Olympiad, and Mock Trial) to service (LEO Club) to governance (Student Government) to recognition (National Honor Society and Art Honor Society). Nothing better exemplifies our commitment to maintaining a safe and inclusive climate than our Gay Straight Alliance, which predates New York State’s Dignity for All Students Act.

Traditions such as Homecoming and Spirit Week bring faculty, students, and families together to enjoy experiences that are remembered by graduates for years to come. The annual Spirit Week celebration culminates with a teacher “pie-in-the-face challenge,” which raises money for an identified charity.

Spackenkill boasts multiple Scholar-Athlete Team Awards recognized by NYSPHSAA. In addition, we were one of only 60 schools statewide to receive the School of Excellence Award in athletics, in recognition of at least 75% of our varsity athletic programs earning the NYSPHSAA Scholar-Athlete Team Award.

The Spackenkill bond does not end when students graduate. They frequently return to attend concerts and athletic events and to visit staff members. Sometimes they even come back for support, advice, and guidance as they struggle with declaring a major or making a career choice.

### 2. Engaging Families and Community:

Building leaders and teachers maintain an open and accessible relationship with parents. Parents are able to drop in, where possible, and talk to administration. Building leaders maintain a confidential, anonymous hotline for parents and students to keep up with the latest concerns.

Parent are very involved in the academic progress of their teens. Teachers are accessible and proactive in their parent communications. In addition, we have technological support, such as our Parent Portal, an

online grade and progress reporting system that allows parents and students to monitor their academic progress.

The principal and superintendent attend every monthly Parent Teacher Student Association (PTSA) meeting. Recently, for example, we had a well-attended meeting to discuss school safety and respond to parents' questions and concerns. That meeting also included our School SRO, who has become part of the fabric of the school.

We are a close-knit and invested community – the extended Spackenkill family. The school community supports us in promoting and celebrating a culture that pursues excellence. Parental involvement does not decline as students enter the high school. Parents, community members, and former students visit our classrooms to share expertise and experiences. Examples include a Spackenkill graduate who is working on the Laser Interferometer Gravitational-Wave Observatory (LIGO) project, which made world-wide news when it detected gravitational waves, as well as local politicians and attorneys. Our local police department partners with us in financially supporting an SRO, who not only works to keep our school safe, but also co-teaches our forensics class and several units in our health classes.

There are myriad examples of community support. The Drama Parent Boosters guide students as they build sets and assemble costumes for theater performances, and dinner theater events and plays sell out. Our annual budget votes have passed by a significantly positive margin. We had a Capital Project vote that was largely successful because of the support of a Community Advisory Group that included many parents and students.

We encourage family involvement in our schools. Our concerts are always well attended. Our athletic events are well supported. As an example, Homecoming includes alumni comprised of past players and coaches. District Art Shows, Health Fairs, and STEAM events involve the entire community. As part of our school's culture we celebrate the accomplishments of our teachers, staff, and students through our yearly awards ceremonies. These include a sports recognition night, a junior awards ceremony, and a senior awards night. Our June Board of Education meeting is dedicated to a community celebration of noteworthy accomplishments achieved over the course of the school year.

### **3. Professional Development:**

We have a vision for the future of the district, including our instructional plan. Professional development is a critical tool in the implementation of that Strategic Plan. Stakeholders were involved in the creation of that plan and it is communicated and reviewed regularly.

Professional development is a shared partnership between teachers and administration. As an example, we have a districtwide Professional Development Committee that identifies areas of need and links it with a professional development provider and the leadership of our assistant superintendent for curriculum. We believe that collegial support within our district is important to the success of any professional development initiative, and as a result, we have shifted to more in-district professional development. These activities occur at Superintendent's Conference Days, extended faculty meetings, afterschool programs, and teacher-initiated summer grant programs. Any new instructional program at the high school has included professional development. Some examples include workshops on developing a Writing Learning Center. Project Lead the Way courses all require a RIT residency. All teachers teaching AP courses must receive additional training. In addition, we have curriculum coordinators whose role it is to support administration in implementing New York state teaching standards in science, math, literacy, social studies, and art. We maintain those curriculum requirements in Atlas Rubicon, which is accessible to parents.

Continued professional development is crucial to the success of our school and directly driven by our district's mission statement.

Developing teacher capacity is the cornerstone of our school improvement initiatives. Teacher initiative is promoted in the district. As an example, teachers can submit a professional development course for their colleagues and be remunerated for the preparation and the presentation, as long as it connects to building

and district.

Last year we knew that our high school would be implementing a one-to-one Chromebook program for students this year. In preparation we paired up with a neighboring district to draw on their expertise and train several of our teachers along with a paraprofessional. These turnkey trainers subsequently provided professional development and took a lead to ensure the successful integration of the Chromebook initiative at the high school.

Teachers serve as mentors for other teachers and as resources for each other. In order to assist in preparing and retaining high quality staff, we recently upgraded our teacher mentoring program. All mentors must complete a rigorous training program, and all mentees receive their own personal mentor within their curriculum area for a minimum of two years. Not only does this provide our probationary teachers with instructional and curriculum support, but it also provides support as new hires transition to our school's unique culture.

#### **4. School Leadership:**

Leadership style at the high school is characterized as collaborative, visible, and engaging of stakeholders. Spackenkill High School is a small school, which allows the principal to be actively involved in all aspects of its operation. The administrative team is comprised of a principal and an assistant principal who work together seamlessly to evaluate, develop, and implement strategies needed to run a highly successful school.

Parents/guardians, community members, students, teachers, paraprofessionals, and building administration meet monthly with our Site Based Team to generate our yearly building-level goals and generate an implementation plan to ensure these goals are met.

The principal is focused on teacher instruction and student achievement. Our curriculum and instruction is managed by a team of building administrators, curriculum coordinators, and department chairs. Each curriculum area—including the arts, physical education, foreign language, and health—is represented by teacher leaders. Monthly meetings are held to review best practices, curriculum changes, achievement data, professional development, and course offerings. Additional Data Team meetings review student achievement data, which provides the foundation on which curriculum and instructional practice decisions are made.

Issues surrounding the physical building and facilities are discussed monthly with our custodial team, director of buildings and grounds, and business administrator. We review work orders submitted by faculty and staff and plan for future capital improvements to ensure that our school is physically safe and meets the needs of our students.

The assistant principal chairs our Safety Team, which meets monthly with teacher representatives, the SRO, and school nurse to review policies, practices, and procedures to ensure the safety of our faculty and staff, students, and community. Data generated from injury reports drives recommended actions deemed necessary and pertinent to safety at our school.

Our RTI Team (comprised of building administration, guidance counselors, social worker, school psychologist, SRO, and school nurse) meets weekly to review the needs of students who are experiencing difficulties academically, socially, or emotionally. Teachers, paraprofessionals, parents/guardians, and students themselves can submit their concerns to be reviewed by this team. Student attendance and discipline data are regularly reviewed as well. All academic, social, and emotional intervention recommendations are generated through the RTI Team process.

The leadership developed at our building spills over into many other facets of education. The many accolades garnered by our staff are a testament to the caliber of leaders developed at Spackenkill High School. They include the 40 Under 40 Shaker and Mover Award, selection as New York State Master

Teacher, National Board Certification, an appointment to serve on a State Standards Review Committee, and the GLSEN Ally Award.

## **Part VI – STRATEGIES FOR ACADEMIC SUCCESS**

---

Central to our success at Spackenkill High School is the delivery of personalized education. It begins with the relationships that our faculty, staff, and administrators develop with students, parents/guardians, and community members. Individual knowledge of students as learners and of their character traits and abilities enables us to tailor their educational experiences. These educator-student relationships have allowed for the vast amount of personalization inherent in our building.

Whether it be to determine if a student can benefit from a specific instructional method or from having additional educational supports such as study skills, learning labs in mathematics and English, academic intervention services in all core academic subjects, special education services, or social and emotional support, we are well positioned to determine the best match for each student. Aided by small class sizes and a passion for teaching that comes across in the classroom, we are able to engage students and motivate them to excel. We continuously reflect on our practices to ensure that we have a wide variety of programs and strategies in place so that every child can succeed.

Recent student surveys show that our students feel that teachers provide the time and support that they need, and that the relationships that they have developed with them make the difference in their education. Ultimately, it is the quality of these personal relationships and the atmosphere that they engender that lays the foundation for student success. In turn, these successes inspire each subsequent cohort of students to strive for excellence.

Besides the work that our educators perform in the classroom, personal relationships are nurtured by time spent outside the classroom. Our faculty, staff, and administration can be seen at athletic events, concerts, and evening presentations, as well as coaching and chaperoning competitions. Students know that they are supported both in and out of the classroom.

An added bonus of these educator-student relationships is the healthy and safe environment we have established at the high school. Not only do students feel comfortable speaking with counseling staff when they are concerned about themselves or a peer, but they and their parents/guardians are comfortable with approaching the principal to voice concerns.

Our philosophy of personalized education is the foundation for all of Spackenkill High School's practices, and it is the most significant contributing factor to our school's success. We'll end this section by quoting the words of one of our alumni from the class of 2007 who is today a strings teacher and orchestra conductor and was recently featured in our weekly newsletter: "The most important thing I remember about Spackenkill was being a part of something that was such a close family. The music program at Spackenkill is much smaller than the music program that I teach in now, but I strive to make every student in my program now feel as much a part of our program as I felt when I was in the program at Spackenkill. This is true not only for the music program, but my involvement in Spackenkill as a whole. It is such a blessing to have grown up in such a small school district where I felt like my teachers were always really invested in my success, and inspired us to be better students."