



AASA LEARNING 2025 Lighthouse District Vignette: Seneca Valley School District, Pennsylvania

Seneca Valley School District (SVSD) is located in one of the fastest growing communities in the state of Pennsylvania. Serving 7,400 students and 880 staff members, the district is comprised of four elementary schools, two middle schools, and one secondary campus. SVSD was recognized in 2023 as an AASA Lighthouse District because of its sustained commitment to Innovation by Design.

Highlights of the district's commitment to innovation include its opening of a dynamic and innovative K-6 facility, named by TIME Magazine in 2022 as a "Best Invention." Its innovative program development also includes a unique cyber drop-in facility, the only one of its kind in Western Pennsylvania and its ongoing planning for a completely reimaged 9-10 intermediate high school.

The design for these innovative programs involves a range of community and educational resources and institutions, including the University of Pittsburgh's Collaborative for Evaluation and Assessment Capacity (CEAC), which conducted and analyzed the results of a survey asking respondents their satisfaction with the district's instruction in 21st century skills and its achievement of its articulated mission statement. The result has been a clear plan for the district's new K-4/5-6 elementary school, including the following identified outcomes:

- A commitment to developing a sustainable, safe, and dynamic content for learning that engages unique minds in diverse ways and is reflective of the community;
- An organization that is adaptable and striving towards net zero;
- A safe learning environment that fosters a sense of bravery;
- An education that is fun and fitting for all age groups;
- Support for individualized and organic learning experiences;
- Engaging the mind through multiple media, both physical and virtual; and
- Connecting and driving community activity.

Similarly, the district has developed its Ehrman Crest Elementary/Middle School in partnership with the Children's Museum of Pittsburgh. This site is committed to advancing bold new opportunities for school design, emphasizing the entire campus as a context for education—with learning spaces that are compelling, relevant, and engaging for students, especially when teachers are empowered to curate their own experiences and learning spaces. Specific design components (acknowledged by TIME Magazine as a "Best Innovation of 2022") include mindfulness rooms, a movement studio, audio devices to ensure teacher projection, small group rooms for supplemental support, sensory walls, reading intervention rooms, and comfortable seating with movable furniture and an open floor plan for classrooms.

Additionally, the Seneca Valley Academy of Choice has provided full-time and hybrid cyber opportunities for students during the past 15 years. Serving over 2,000 K-12

Seneca Valley students, the academy offers over 175 courses for grades K-12, partnerships with over 60 organizations, small group grade-level instruction, and access to an individualized learning path designed to meet students at their current learning levels. A recent addition to the program is the site's new drop-in center, which offers on-site personalized learning opportunities in STEM, tutoring, intervention, enrichment activities, physical education classes, and a range of other programs.

The new Seneca Valley Intermediate High School Program is projected to serve students in grades 9-10. Its innovative design includes ensuring that all students experience a wide range of authentic and experience-based learning opportunities. The program will also enhance students' capacity for problem solving and critical thinking. Advancements in technology will allow the district to adopt more personalized approaches that include tailored learning goals based on individual students' needs and interests. The new program will also emphasize students STEM Education, incorporating hands-on projects, coding, robotics, and other activities that develop students' critical thinking, problem solving, and digital literacy skills.

In all SVSD classrooms and schools, there is also a major focus on addressing the needs of the Whole Learner, including students' social-emotional (SEL) competencies, cognitive, and physical growth and development. Highlights of the district's emphasis on SEL include the following: a Mindfulness Room; emphasis upon collaborative learning; a sustained focus on attendance and engagement; reinforcement of social interaction competencies; and a deep commitment to accessibility and inclusion. Cognitive/academic programming includes a cyber interactive classroom; a Gamer Zone; a demonstration kitchen; hydroponics lab; STEM lab; science labs; technical assistance at the district's drop-in center; a focus on a structured environment for students who require it; support and tutoring; extensive student resource access; and flexibility (accommodating students' learner profiles, allowing for variations in flexibility and levels of structure).

The designation of Seneca Valley as an AASA 2023 Lighthouse District aligns powerfully with its comprehensive and innovative approach to education. According to district publications: "We recognize the importance of skills like communication, collaboration, creativity, and flexibility. We believe these learning spaces allow us to give increased attention to interpersonal skills and interdisciplinary approaches to develop authentic and meaningful learning opportunities to equip students for the future. We are 'Proud of the Past, Committed to the Future.'"