

Clarence Bee Article – January 2017
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Smart Schools Bond Act

The Smart Schools Bond Act (SSBA) was overwhelmingly approved by voters in a statewide referendum held in November, 2014. The SSBA authorized New York State to borrow \$2 billion to help finance improved educational technology and infrastructure and to improve learning opportunities for students throughout the State. Directly after the vote, the State Education Department published a document that listed the Smart Schools allocation for each school district in New York State. Clarence is scheduled to receive \$1.9 million.

The SSBA limited the types of technology districts might consider purchasing. SSBA monies could only be used to fund the following items:

- Installation of high-speed broadband or wireless Internet connectivity.
- Purchase of equipment such as laptop, tablets, desktop computers, servers, and interactive whiteboards.
- Funding a capital project to modernize educational facilities.
- Installing high-tech security features in school buildings.

It took the State almost two years to formulate a process that allowed schools to apply for the funding and receive reimbursement from the SSBA. Each school district had to create a Smart Schools Investment Plan that included linkages between the district's long-term educational planning and technology investments, provided learning opportunities beyond the classroom, and specifically addressed the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners. School districts were also required to resubmit their technology plans for approval. It is mandatory that districts purchase equipment with local funds, then apply for reimbursement from the State.

The District Technology Committee in Clarence decided to use SSBA dollars solely to purchase equipment for student use. Our capital renovation project has allowed us to build a technology infrastructure that is state-of-the-art, as well as install security cameras in all our buildings.

We had our Smart Schools Investment Plan approved this past September. Our initial strategy was to make a small purchase in order to determine how long it would take to receive State reimbursement. We made our first purchase of six 30-station Chromebook tablet carts in November, and we received reimbursement from the State for that purchase in December. Our investment plan calls for expending the \$1.9 million of SSBA funds for student computer equipment over a three-year period.

Recently, we surveyed our staff to determine the types of student computer equipment they prefer we acquire with our first big Smart Schools purchase this February. We are sharing the results of that survey at faculty meetings and with our Technology Committee, and based on the feedback we intend to purchase \$500,000 of new student computers next month.