

Kopernik Observatory & Science Center

2022-2025 Strategic Plan
A Celebration of 50 Years

June 2022

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center

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A Celebration of 50 Years

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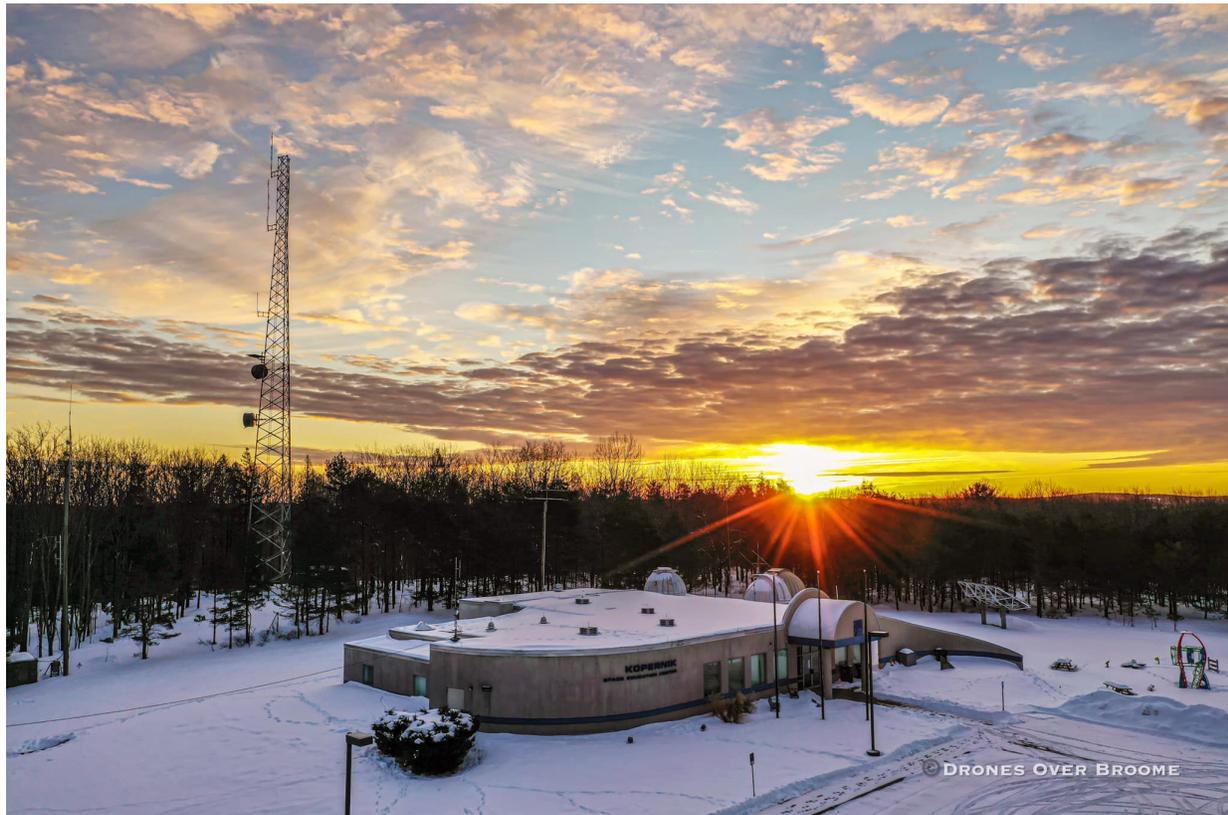
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Introduction

The Kopernik Observatory and Science Center is a place of exploration, discovery, and inspiration for inquisitive minds of all ages. Kopernik offers an important window into our region's rich legacy and ongoing story of scientific and technological advancement, as well as economic and cultural development. Kopernik is distinguished as the best located and best equipped public observatory in the Northeast, and a proud host to novice, amateur, and professional astronomers. Kopernik is designated as a site for informal space education by NASA. Kopernik programming educates the public on NASA initiatives not only in the area of space exploration, but related to NASA's use of innovative technologies to better understand Earth's place in space and manage the earth's environment for long-term sustainability. Finally, Kopernik programming advances interdisciplinary science education.

The year 2023 marks Kopernik's celebration of the 50th Anniversary of its founding. The 2022-2025 strategic plan recognizes this important milestone with the revitalization of Kopernik's vision and mission to carry it forward into the next 50 years. This plan serves as a guide to its board and staff on how Kopernik can strengthen its ties to the community, and as a tool to introduce Kopernik to new partners for support of its broad preK-adult science education vision and mission.

History

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center's origins capture the unique relationship it has always had with the culture and social life of the region. The Kopernik Society was established in 1973 to commemorate the 500th anniversary of Mikołaj Kopernik's birth. To honor the genius of the "father of modern astronomy," the society decided to build a living memorial, an astronomical observatory on one of the highest hills in Broome County, New York. The creation of the observatory was an astounding accomplishment. It would have been easy to build a statue. However, to truly celebrate and perpetuate the exploratory legacy of Mikołaj Kopernik¹, what was needed was a place people could go to experience Kopernik's vision and contributions – an observatory. Fifty years later, we are still benefiting from the founders' vision!

The observatory opened its doors to the Southern Tier in June 1974. Soon after its opening, the observatory was donated to the Roberson Center for the Arts & Sciences as part of their education initiative, and to complement the planetarium located at Roberson. In the early 1990s, the Kopernik Observatory was significantly renovated and expanded to include additional classrooms, a third observatory dome, and office space. At the completion of the expansion Kopernik took on a new name, the "Kopernik Observatory and Space Education Center."

The relationship with Roberson lasted until 2007 when Roberson divested its interest in the observatory, transferring its ownership back to the Kopernik Society of Broome County, Inc., which then assumed a broader governance role. In 2007, the observatory began doing business as the *Kopernik Observatory and Science Center (KOSC)*, establishing a Board of Directors, and hiring its first Executive Director. This marked the beginning of a challenging but successful journey to achieve financial independence and stability. Today, Kopernik is a financially stable, 501(c)(3) nonprofit, science education outreach organization. The celebration of the Kopernik Observatory and Science Center's 50th anniversary in 2023, 550 years after the birth of Mikołaj Kopernik himself, brings renewed excitement and anticipation for the next 50 years and the adventure ahead. We hope you will join us on this journey.



¹ Mikołaj Kopernik (aka Nicolas Copernicus) (1473 – 1543), Polish Astronomer, mathematician, physician, Catholic canon, economist, developed the Heliocentric model of the Solar System. His research on the solar system resulted in the book *De revolutionibus orbium coelestium* (On the Revolutions of the Celestial Spheres).

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center Today

The Kopernik Observatory and Science Center is located in the Town of Vestal, within Broome County and the Southern Tier of New York State. Kopernik is within a fifty mile radius of significant population centers (including the cities of Binghamton, Owego, and Johnson City) and many school districts. This region of New York State has a rich history in technology innovation beginning a century ago as the home to IBM and Link Flight Simulators, and continuing into today, with industries in the field of alternative energy sources, aerospace engineering, and manufacturing systems. Broome County is home to both a Research I University, Binghamton University, and SUNY Broome Community College. Other academic institutions in nearby counties include Cornell University, Syracuse University, Colgate University, Hamilton College, Ithaca College, SUNY Cortland, SUNY Oneonta, and Tompkins County Community College. The cities of Syracuse, Ithaca, Elmira, and Scranton are accessible by car within one to two hours.

Regionally, Kopernik coordinates school district outreach through the Broome-Tioga Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BT-BOCES), serving fifteen urban, suburban, and rural districts in the Southern Tier and approximately 28,000 students of which 55% are designated as economically disadvantaged². Kopernik's outreach also extends to several districts within the Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga (TST-BOCES), Delaware-Chenango-Madison-Otsego (DCMO-BOCES), as well as Pennsylvania schools adjacent to the Southern Tier.³

The Kopernik facility is partially powered by a solar panel array and consists of:

- Classroom spaces that include a computer lab, space science lab, earth science lab, and physics lab
- Four permanent telescopes, three housed in domes and a roof mounted solar heliostat
- Multiple portable telescopes, including a wheelchair accessible telescope
- Weather station
- Solar prominence scope
- Amateur radio station (K2ZRO)
- Photographic darkroom and digital cameras
- Portable planetarium



The Kopernik Science Park (www.kopernik.org/visitor-info/science-park/) opened in 2020. The science park features an interactive, science-themed playground, a pond, and an outdoor classroom. This playground is open and free to the public, with families enjoying it throughout the year. The Kopernik facility and science park occupy three acres. Additionally, Kopernik owns 21 acres nearby with future potential for development as nature trails and outdoor learning.

² <https://data.nysed.gov/enrollment.php?year=2021&county=03>

³ See [Appendix A, "BOCES Consortium Districts"](#)



Kopernik's resources allow for a range of programming to meet the interests of all ages. The summer of 2022 marks the 30th consecutive year for Kopernik's STEM-themed summer camp for students in second through twelfth grade. The Edwin Link Foundation has provided partial funding for the summer camps since their inception. These week-long camps give students rich opportunities to explore a wide range of science topics including astronomy, biology, chemistry, and geology, as well as engineering topics in the areas of space exploration, electronics, robotics, coding, and virtual reality.

Kopernik's annual special events include:

- Girl Power, a program geared towards empowering third through eighth grade girls to explore STEM careers
- Astrofest, an annual astronomy festival
- Winter Star Party, a celebration of Mikołaj Kopernik's birth and astronomy
- Rocketfest, the building and launching of model rockets

Finally, Friday Night Programs are a Kopernik tradition, hosting events for people of all ages both in-person and online. Kopernik regularly opens the observatory for night viewings. Additionally, Kopernik opens on selected evenings for a range of astronomical events such as eclipses, meteor showers, comets, and planetary alignments.

Governance and Strategic Management

Kopernik's successful financial condition and standing within the community can be attributed to a collaborative model of leadership shared between the Executive Director and the Board of Directors. The Board of Directors oversees Kopernik's strategic growth and financial sustainability with designated sub-committees working directly with the Executive Director on oversight, planning, and management of all areas of operations. The Executive Director oversees eight part-time science educators and two support staff. The Executive Director is

responsible for personnel, facilities management, grant writing, program development, publicity and outreach, and networking.

The 2022-2025 Strategic Planning Process

In the fall of 2021, the Kopernik Board of Directors established the Strategic Planning Committee to undertake the revision of the existing strategic plan completed in 2014. The existing plan had served Kopernik well in the process of restructuring its governance and financial management processes, and laying the foundation for Kopernik's financial and programmatic sustainability. This revised plan is both a celebration of that success, and an aspiration to a future of greater accomplishments.

The first step in the strategic planning process was the solicitation of feedback from stakeholder groups. In November 2021, an electronic survey was disseminated to Kopernik members and all persons included in the Kopernik email distribution list⁴. The majority of the respondents agreed that Kopernik fulfilled its mission as “an innovative teaching institution that promotes interdisciplinary education in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM).” Additional stakeholder groups were surveyed, including staff and members of the Board Of Directors. This information was reviewed by the Board of Directors, and by the board designated Finance and Audit sub-committee and Buildings and Grounds sub-committee. The Strategic Planning Committee met alternating weeks to synthesize this information and feedback, resulting in the five strategic priorities detailed in this 2022-2025 plan. The 2022-2025 plan proposes new wording for the Kopernik mission and vision statements, highlights Kopernik's proposed strategic direction by defining organizational values, and establishes its strategic priorities. This plan was presented to the board for final review, concluding with board adoption in June 2022. The next strategic planning cycle will commence in the fall of 2025.



⁴ See [Appendix B, “Survey of Membership”](#)

Mission, Vision, and Values

The mission, vision, and values of Kopernik Observatory and Science Center reflect its dynamic relationship to the region, and its growing impact beyond the region through expanding web-based programs and offerings.

Mission

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center is an innovative leader in interdisciplinary, lifelong learning in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM). Kopernik is a place of exploration, discovery, and inspiration for inquisitive minds of all ages.

Vision

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center is an organization committed to the advancement of scientific literacy as the foundation for personal and social decisions that impact us all. Scientific literacy is essential to creating an equitable and sustainable world by inspiring all to participate in the improvement of their community. Opportunities to advance scientific literacy should be available in and beyond school, in ways that challenge and engage.

Values

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center...

- **appreciates** that we live on one spaceship called Earth, and must act globally to share knowledge, resources, and learning to protect living and future generations.
- **fosters** a multigenerational approach that emphasizes experiential, engaged, and active learning as a model for both formal and informal STEM education for "students" of all ages and teachers.
- **promotes** science and engineering practices built on the foundation of empirical evidence, logical argument, and skeptical review.
- **disseminates** scientific discoveries and research to the public to support informed personal and social decision making.
- **embraces** both our Polish legacy, and the international, collaborative nature of scientific exploration.



The Kopernik Community

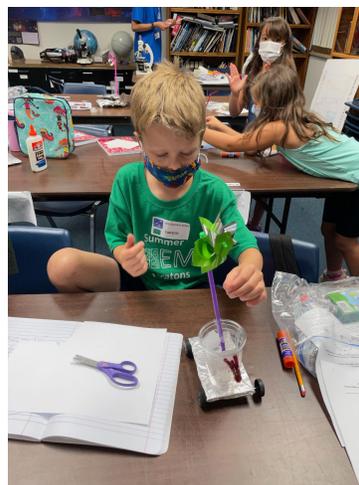
Kopernik Observatory and Science Center is at the center of a vibrant social and intellectual community committed to scientific literacy and lifelong learning. Kopernik was formed by a group of community members dedicated to preserving the legacy of Mikołaj Kopernik. This spirit of innovation, preservation, education, and celebration continues to drive Kopernik's vision and mission.

A Foundation in Scientific Literacy

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center promotes the advancement of scientific literacy as central to its mission, vision, and values. We define scientific literacy as the dispositions, knowledge, and ability to use science and engineering practices, and the most up-to-date scientific information, to inform personal and social decisions and actions, including STEM-related consumer choices, civic issues, career aspirations, hobbies, and sustainable living.

A Commitment to Education

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center provides formal and informal opportunities for pre-kindergarten, K-12, and college students at the science center and at school district locations. Kopernik regularly hosts college students as interns and assistant teachers to support community and school-age programming. Teacher education is a critical dimension of Kopernik's long term mission to promote STEM education. Kopernik also partners with local libraries for science related events, and develops programming for Scouting. The recently opened Kopernik Science Park offers an opportunity for children and their parents to discover how science and engineering are found everywhere in the world, even in playground structures.



Adult Learning as A Way of Life

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center serves as a liaison between science organizations and adult community members. Kopernik frequently hosts speakers from local colleges and universities during its regular "Friday Night Program" series. In the spirit of promoting scientific literacy, Kopernik facilitates regular opportunities for conversations related to contemporary issues in science and technology. Kopernik is distinguished as the best located and best equipped public observatory in the Northeast, and a proud host to novice, amateur, and professional astronomers. Kopernik is designated as a site for informal space education by NASA. Kopernik programming educates the public on NASA initiatives not only in the area of space exploration, but related to NASA's use of innovative technologies to better understand and manage the Earth's environment, and its place in the universe.

A Heritage of Community Partnerships

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center maintains a connection to the region's cultural past and present. The Kopernik Astronomical Society and Binghamton Amateur Radio Association are independent groups housed at Kopernik, who actively contribute to Kopernik's classes, events, and programs. Kopernik's staff regularly present for local organizations including Lion's Club, Rotary, Lyceum, and Sertoma. Additionally, Kopernik is a resource for news media on topics related to science and technology.

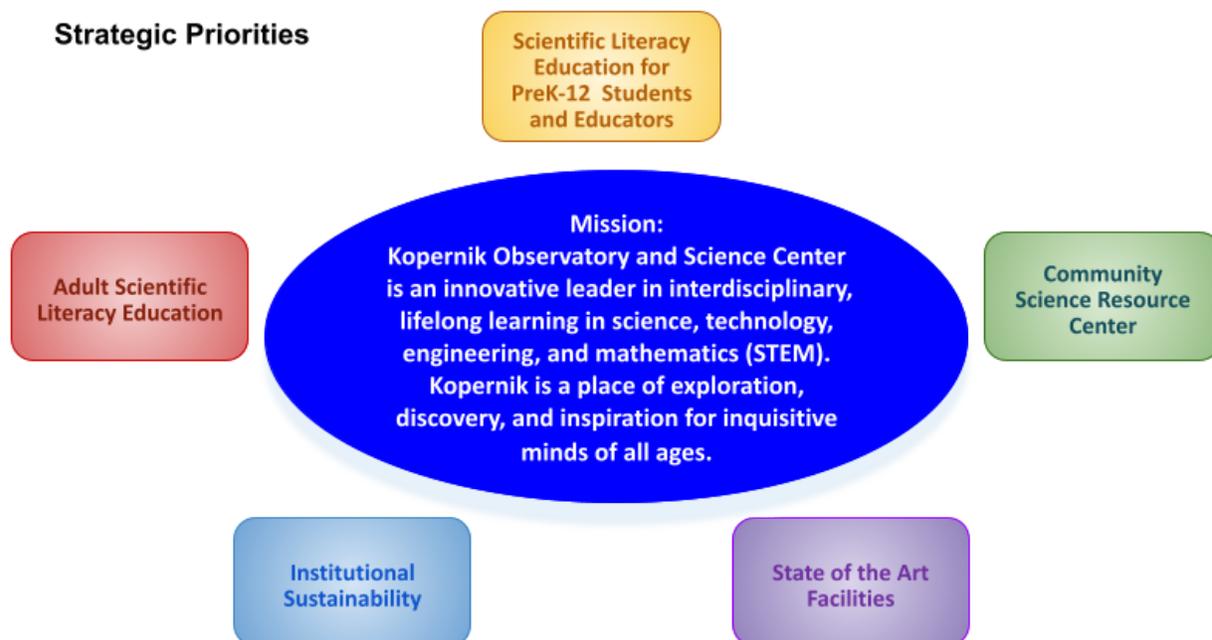
Engaged Membership

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center has a strong and committed membership base that includes individuals, students, families, community organizations, libraries, and corporations. Kopernik is a member organization of the Association of Science and Technology Centers (ASTC). Kopernik members are eligible for free admission to over 350 nationwide centers through the ASTC Passport Program (www.astc.org).



2022-2025 Strategic Priorities

The 2022-2025 strategic priorities represent Kopernik’s commitment to establishing a foundation of innovative science education for the next fifty years that is aligned to our vision, mission, and values. This section outlines existing programs and resources, and the priority areas of growth and expansion to be undertaken in the coming three years. Kopernik has established these priorities to ensure its sustainability and permanence as a regional science center in order to fulfill its mission and vision, and enrich the cultural life of the Broome County region.



Scientific Literacy Education for PreK through 12 Students and Educators

As a regional science center, Kopernik creates and enriches STEM experiences for Pre-K through 12 students through on-site and school district based programs, as well as broadens K-12 educators' knowledge of contemporary issues, resources, and methodologies in STEM education. Kopernik’s summer camps serve approximately 200 students each year, giving rich experiences in science, technology, engineering, and applied mathematics. Additionally, these summer camps host high school students as interns, developing their leadership and subject matter expertise. To advance contributions in the area of scientific literacy education, Kopernik will:

- Maintain and expand classes, events, and programs which provide interactive, experience-based learning aligned to the New York State Science Learning Standards (NYSSLS/Next Generation Science Standards/NGSS).
- Formalize “Local Liaison” relationship with NASA, bringing NASA related events, resources, and research to area schools and the broader community.
- Maintain and expand high school and college student internships to include mentoring experiences to promote careers in science, technology, and engineering.
- Expand professional learning opportunities for area educators focusing on scientific literacy, innovations in technology, astronomy and earth science, and NASA resources. To do this, hire staff who can provide professional training to teachers, including a Director of Education and designated professional developers in science education.
- Expand outreach to underserved communities through collaboration with regional school districts, BOCES, and youth-based community organizations.
- Actively promote diversity and inclusion in the fields of science, technology, engineering and applied mathematics by promoting career role models.
- Reestablish the “teacher ambassadors” program to serve as liaisons between Kopernik and area school districts.



Adult Scientific Literacy Education

Kopernik Observatory and Science Center serves an essential role in the community of providing programming, education, and social opportunities for adults in the area of science and technology. Kopernik’s commitment to adult education upholds its intergenerational vision for the advancement of scientific literacy. To broaden impact as a regional science center, Kopernik will:

- Increase workshops, events, classes, and conferences focusing on contemporary STEM issues.
- Expand use of digital media to promote on-site and remote outreach and education.
- Coordinate partnerships with other education organizations to broaden outreach.
- Expand college student participation through volunteer, informal, and formal partnerships.

Community Science Resource Center

Kopernik’s distinction as a public observatory makes it a unique community resource. Through adult and student programming and events, Kopernik has introduced generations into the exciting areas of astronomy, engineering, physics, geology, and technology. Annual events such

as RocketFest, AstroFest, as well as astronomical events, draw large numbers of participants to the grounds of the observatory. Meteor showers typically draw more than 200 people to the observatory. In 2017, 1500 visitors attended Kopernik's viewing of the solar eclipse. The Kopernik Science Park has become a gathering place for families. Local news media turn to Kopernik for context and information on science related topics, occurrences, and developments. To broaden influence as a community science resource center, Kopernik will:

- Increase partnerships with regional cultural organizations and institutions to enrich and expand its impact.
- Maintain and expand digital media outreach and accessibility by way of social and video media, including YouTube channel, Facebook live, Twitter, and Instagram.
- Develop "satellite" locations for Kopernik programming and events located within regional communities, and during regional festivities such as First Fridays, art walks, and festivals.

Institutional Sustainability

The 50th anniversary of Kopernik marks its strongest financial position since its inception. Through careful oversight, Kopernik has maintained a positive cash flow during the past decade even through the challenges of the pandemic. Kopernik has successfully solicited grants from local corporations and foundations to maintain and expand its programming. Significantly, in 2015, the Junior League of Binghamton partnered with Kopernik to design, fundraise, and construct the Kopernik Science Park, a public, interactive science-themed playground. The Link Foundation partially underwrites Kopernik's annual summer STEM education program with average enrollments of over 200 students. In pursuit of expansion and broader impact as a science resource center, greater emphasis will be on diversification of revenue sources. This will require Kopernik to expand its educational and scientific staff, broadening its team in order to provide greater outreach to schools, youth and adult science education, and innovative programming in the fields of technology, space science, and earth systems sustainability. To maintain institutional sustainability, Kopernik will:



- Establish the position of Director of Education who will be responsible for educational programming in the areas of program development, professional development for area teachers, and collaboration with districts in regional BOCES.
- Increase education faculty to support the work of the Director of Education.
- Pursue a competitive salary structure aligned to regional standards.
- Expand grant writing initiatives.
- Establish a board directed investment fund to support long-term financial growth.
- Increase membership and expand membership outreach.
- Enhance branding and marketing to reflect the broad spectrum of services Kopernik offers.

- Initiate long-term planning related to land acquisition and development of off-site, “satellite” locations.

State-of-the-Art Facilities

Kopernik opened to the public in 1974. At that time, Kopernik consisted of a single classroom, and an observatory with two telescope domes. With Kopernik’s growing popularity, it became necessary to expand its facilities to include additional classroom spaces. In 1993, Kopernik underwent a major expansion that resulted in an educational wing which included a physics lab, earth science lab, technology lab, space and science classroom, and increased office space. A third observatory dome and research grade telescope was added along with photo-voltaic solar panels, and a geothermal HVAC system. In 2020, Kopernik completed the construction of the first phase of Kopernik Science Park. To maintain and expand state-of-the-art facilities, Kopernik will:

- Upgrade interior spaces to reflect contemporary themes, designs, and presentation technology (high-resolution monitors, audio systems, etc.) including redesigning the main entrance as an interactive welcome center and refinement of a classroom for enhanced public programming.
- Renovate existing technology lab into a technology makerspace environment including collaborative workstations to support robotics, engineering design, and virtual reality creation.
- Evaluate exterior spaces for community and educational use. This may include nature trails, dorms for night programming, improvements to the parking area, the addition of a performance stage, and the expansion of the Kopernik Science Park.
- Design and construct a large-scale photo-voltaic system to provide 100% of Kopernik’s energy needs, and serve as an educational model.



The Importance of Legacy

The Kopernik Observatory and Science Center was created through the visionary benevolence of community members who themselves were enriched by our region's dynamic history as a center for technology innovation. In the spirit of this history, Kopernik builds on the tradition of advancing the fields of science and technology by mentoring young people and inspiring families and community members. Equally important is Kopernik's continuation of our region's rich legacy of civic pride and community engagement. As such, Kopernik honors our past and serves as a beacon for our region's future.



APPENDICES

Appendix A: BOCES Consortium Districts

Broome-Tioga (BT) BOCES

District	Website	2019-2020 Enrollment
Binghamton CSD	https://www.binghamtonschools.org/	4946
Chenango Forks CSD	https://www.cforks.org/	1340
Chenango Valley CSD	https://www.cvcasd.stier.org/	1648
Deposit CSD	https://www.depositcsd.org/	458
Harpursville CSD	https://www.hcs.stier.org/	641
Johnson City CSD	https://www.jcschools.com/	2347
Maine-Endwell CSD	https://www.me.stier.org/	2459
Newark Valley CSD	https://www.nvcs.stier.org/	1075
Owego-Apalachin CSD	https://www.oacsd.org/	1922
Susquehanna Valley CSD	https://www.svsabers.org/	1426
Tioga CSD	https://www.tiogacentral.org/	886
Union-Endicott CSD	https://www.uek12.org/	3569
Vestal CSD	https://www.vestal.stier.org/	3291
Whitney Point CSD	https://www.wpcsd.org/	1329
Windsor CSD	https://www.windsor-csd.org/	1528
Broome-Tioga BOCES	https://www.btboces.org/	

Delaware-Chenango-Madison-Otsego (DCMO) BOCES

District	Website	2019-2020 Enrollment
Afton CSD	https://www.aftoncsd.org/	507
Bainbridge-Guilford CSD	http://https://www.bgcsd.org	773
Delhi CSD	http://www.delhischools.org/	747
Downsville CSD	http://www.dcseagles.org/	207
Franklin CSD	http://www.franklincsd.org/	244
Georgetown-South Otselic CSD	http://www.ovcs.org/	291
Gilbertsville-Mount Van Upton CSD	http://www.gmucsd.org/	338
Greene CSD	http://www.greenecsd.org/	924
Hancock CSD	http://www.hancock.stier.org/	308
Norwich City SD	http://www.norwichcsd.org/	1672
Otego-Unadilla CSD	http://www.unatego.org/	716
Oxford Academy & CSD	http://www.oxac.org/	706
Sherburne-Earville CSD	http://www.secsd.org/	1,286
Sidney CSD	http://www.sidneycsd.org/	1,057
Unadilla Valley CSD	http://www.uvstorm.org/	758
Walton CSD	http://www.waltoncsd.org/	866
DCMO BOCES	http://www.dcmoboces.com/	

Tompkins-Seneca-Tioga (TST) BOCES

District	Website	2019-2020 Enrollment
Candor CSD	http://www.candorcsc.org/	718
Dryden CSD	http://www.dcsd-ny.schoolloop.com/	1,364
Groton CSD	http://www.grotoncs.org/	778
Ithaca City School District	http://www.ithacacityschools.org/	5,052
Lansing CSD	http://www.lcsd.k12.ny.us/	1,187
Newfield CSD	http://www.newfieldschools.org/	728
South Seneca CSD	http://www.southseneca.org/	618
Trumansburg CSD	http://www.tburgschools.org/	999
TST BOCES	http://www.tstboces.org/	

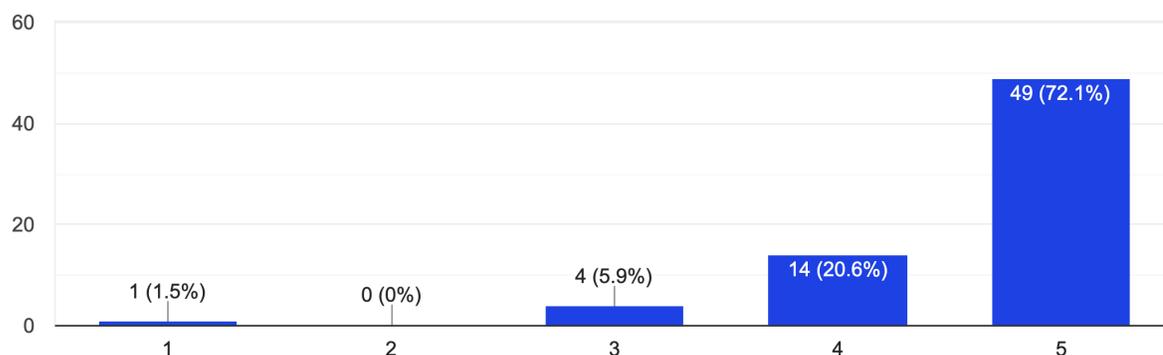
Appendix B: Survey of Membership

Completed November 2021

Based on your experience of Kopernik programs and events, please rate the extent to which you agree with Kopernik's mission statements...

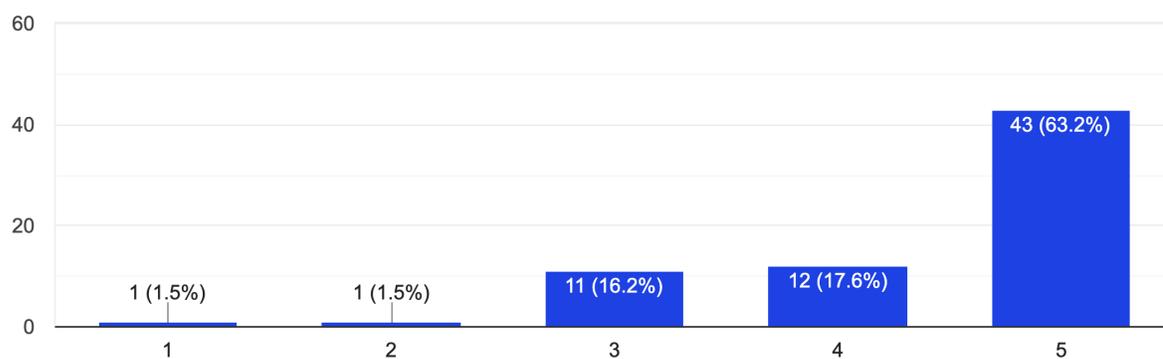
"KOSC is an innovative teaching institution that promotes interdisciplinary education in the fields of Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM)."

68 responses



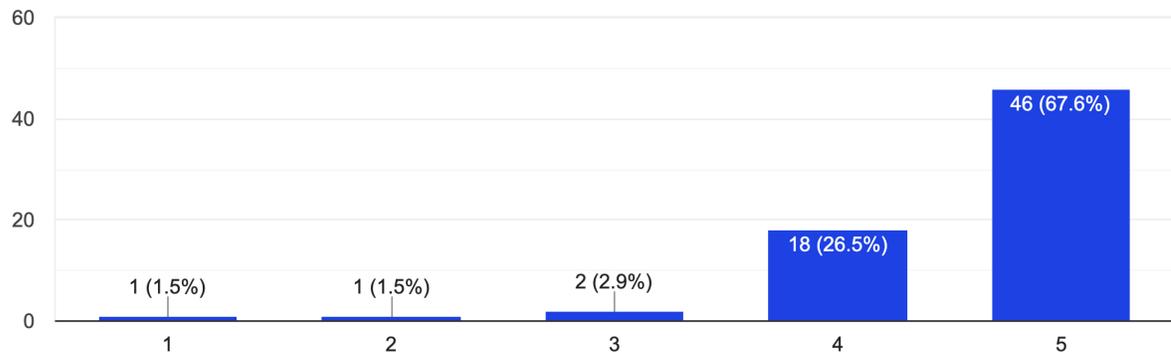
"KOSC helps the public to understand scientific issues that affect their communities and helps them to make informed decisions."

68 responses



"KOSC's multigenerational approach emphasizes experiential, engaged and active learning as a model of STEM education in our region."

68 responses



Appendix C: Principles of Board Governance and Strategic Management

The Kopernik Observatory and Science Center Board of Directors operates in accordance with the Revitalization Act of 2014. Small nonprofits extensively rely on their Boards and community volunteers for guidance and support. Effective boards have well defined division of responsibilities, with clear expectations for each executive committee member, each committee chair position, and the Executive Director. There is a mechanism for the circulation and expansion of board and committee memberships.

I. Engagement of the Board

The Kopernik Board recognizes that it is the enthusiastic person that gets things done. Kopernik's Board of Directors are quite active, meeting monthly as a board and are engaged in committee work between board meetings. Kopernik's Board consists of a diverse group of community members who bring expertise and professional networks that help cultivate and implement ideas. The staff looks to the Board for support in finance expertise (including development of financial policies and procedures), legal assistance, fundraising, assistance with building/land management, and the development of policies, procedures, and programs.

II. Committees

The model of governance the Board of Directors follows is based on the distribution of governance practices among board designated committees. Each committee is focused on specific tasks and duties. Committees regularly report on their activities to the entire board, including recommendations on initiatives, expenditures, and policies for review and approval. Each board member is required to participate in at least one committee.

A board director chairs each committee. Some committees invite participation from community and staff persons and have extended invitations to non-Board and/or non-members of Kopernik to participate. These include standing and as-needed (ad hoc) committees.

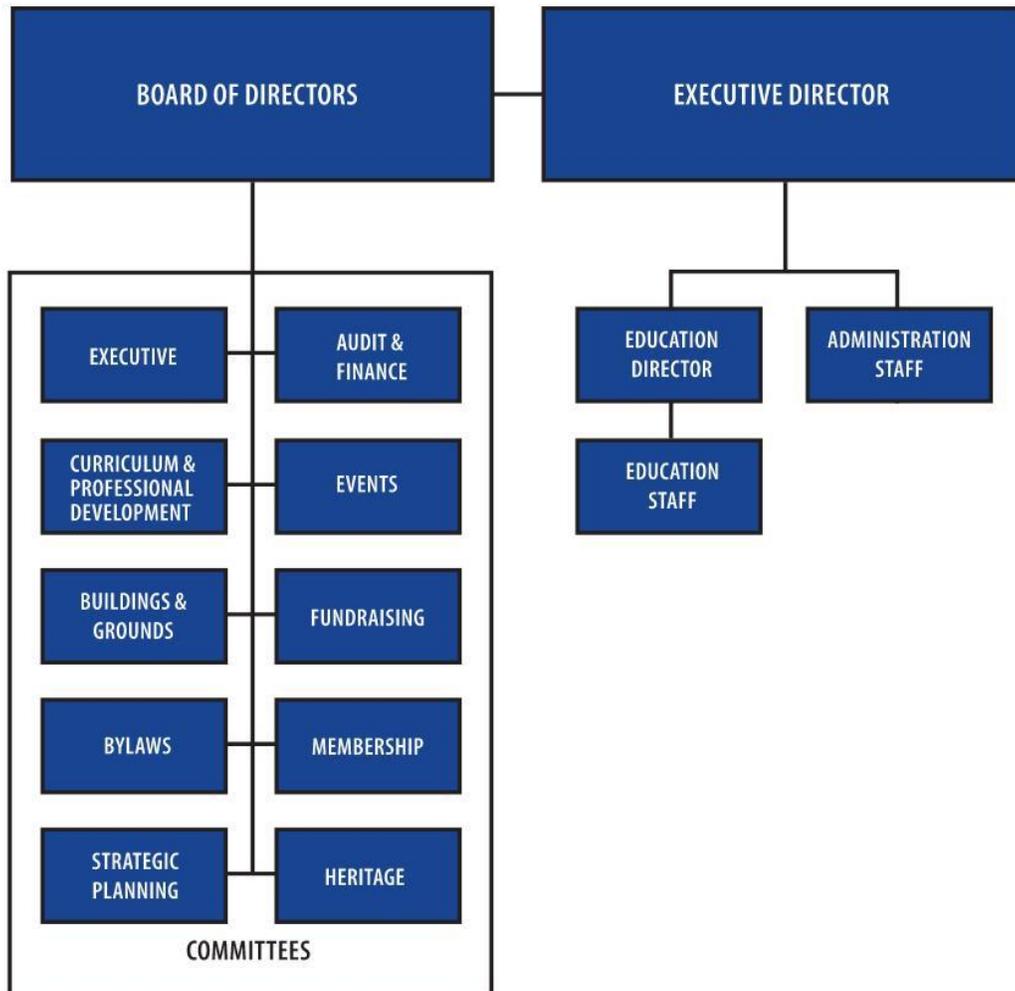
These committees that are solely supported by Board directors are:

- Executive
- Audit and Finance
- Bylaws (As-needed basis)
- Strategic Planning (As-needed basis)

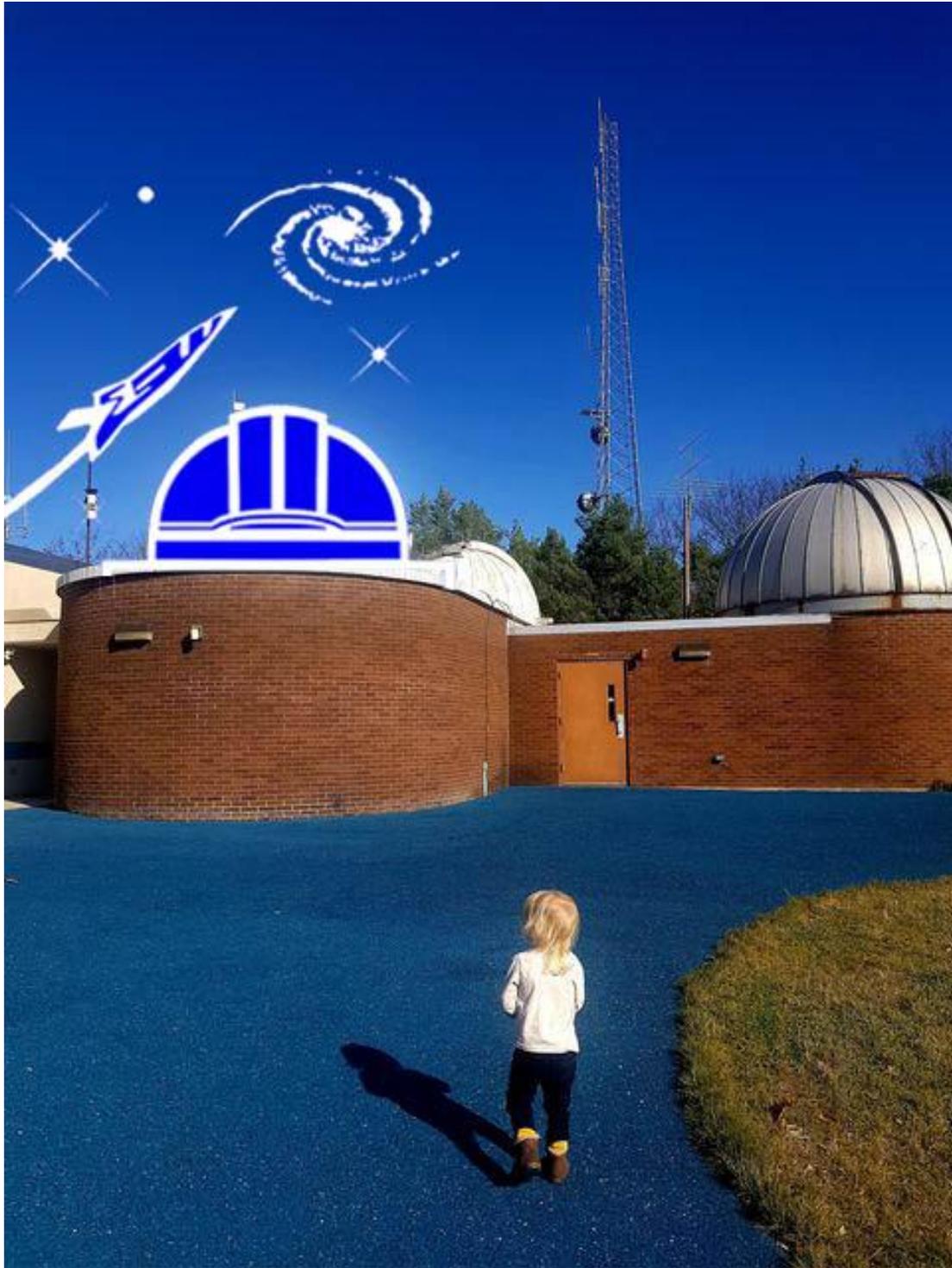
Committees that have a combination of Kopernik directors and non- Kopernik directors/members are:

- Buildings & Grounds
- Curriculum and Professional Development
- Fundraising
- Membership
- Events (As-needed basis)
- Heritage (As-needed basis)

ORGANIZATIONAL CHART



**Kopernik Observatory and Science Center
2022-2025 Strategic Plan**



**Kopernik Observatory and Science Center
2022-2025 Strategic Plan**