

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Superintendent's Newsletter

June 2014

Dear Parent,

The summer has just about arrived and I am writing to give you a final update on some items prior to the break.

First and foremost, I would like to thank you for a terrific year. As I am sure you have seen your own children flourish and develop over the past ten months, so too have I been able to witness a broad array of accomplishments and experiences of our students and staff. We have continued to grow as a school district over this past year and, correspondingly, we have continued to enhance our programs to positively impact as many students as possible.

The approval of the annual school district budget and the additional question have led to improved school programs that we will launch in September. At CHS, for example, we will offer AP Economics for the first time and are proud to say that 97 students have signed up for the course. At CMS, as you know, we will have a diverse offering of cycle courses that enable students more choice in their schedules and the opportunity to choose from more STEM-based classes. Spanning CMS and CHS, we will have a full program of Chinese covering all levels in grades 6-12. At our K-5 level, we will introduce a new technology education program. We have just about completed hiring for the four positions tied to this program and we are very excited about the talented teachers who are poised to join our staff.

Construction has now been moving at a steady clip at Chatham High School. Despite the setback we encountered earlier this year, when the construction company originally hired to do the project folded, we now are back on track to have the four classrooms built two years ago operational by September 1 and the full, seven-classroom addition completed in the middle of next year. This addition will provide us with facilities relief in time to meet the larger classes currently enrolled in grades 6 through 1. We are also set to begin improvements to computer lab spaces at both CMS and CHS once schools close for the summer, as per April's second question.

The summer is a time to re-charge our batteries and look forward to another year of learning and growth. I wish you and your families a safe, healthy, and rewarding couple of months. Thank you again for all of the ways you support our students and schools.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael LaSusa, Superintendent of Schools

PARCC

As I have written before, New Jersey is a member of the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. PARCC is one of two national consortia whose mission is to assess acquisition of the skills outlined in the Common Core State Standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics. Over the course of this past year, New Jersey has taken steps to fully implement PARCC and in recent months Governor Christie's administration and the Department of Education have reaffirmed New Jersey's commitment to both the Common Core and PARCC.

In Chatham, we have followed all state-issued directives and guidance concerning PARCC implementation. We field-tested PARCC assessments, all via computer, at CHS, CMS, LAF, and SBS. We have confirmed our bandwidth requirements with the DOE. We have set out on a plan, drawing on our annual and longer-range budgeting decisions in the area of technology and on the great support system we have in our PTOs and the CEF, to acquire the technology devices necessary to deliver the tests. Last, we are running through preliminary scheduling scenarios to handle the logistical delivery of the tests.

At the current time, the DOE has not yet informed us of the actual number of minutes of the testing sessions. As a result, we cannot commit to a definitive schedule of testing for next year. We do know definitively that in the tested grades—3 through 11—there will be a total of five days of testing in ELA and four days of testing in math. Nine days of testing in each grade level is a marked increase in the amount of testing that students currently undergo, so there will be no way to avoid a certain level of logistical shuffling and disruption during testing windows next year. We anticipate receiving more information from the DOE this summer or in the early fall, and at that time we will be in a position to communicate specific scheduling details through our schools. In preparation for the full implementation of PARCC, we are planning a parent program with our Assistant Superintendent, Karen Chase, and other district supervisors in October, details of which will be forthcoming.

Performing Arts



The Chatham High School Select Voices groups recently made special trips to New York City, where they performed at St. Patrick's Cathedral, Trinity Church, and Federal Hall. The photograph to the left shows Barbara Klemp, the district's Performing Arts Supervisor, directing the Choir in the singing of *America, the Beautiful*, on the steps of Federal Hall, which was the first U.S. Capitol building. The photo to the right shows the Choir at Trinity Church. Congratulations to our student performers on such a special set of shows in the Big Apple!



The Visual Arts



Chatham High School students took home the hardware at the annual Morris County Teen Arts Festival, earning more awards than any other school. Pictured above are Paige Enslow, Adriana Garrison, and Grace Hauck, all of whom won Gold Medals at the competition. Chatham High School as a whole won the “Best in Show” trophy. Meanwhile, at Chatham Middle School, art students undertook a project to create a mural at the entryway of the auditorium. Congratulations to our student artists and their teachers Eric Hreha, Kiera Spadaro, Candace Hull, Katrina Keeshan, and Tracy Kovacsosky!



FAST Friends



Karen Leister, the school nurse at Southern Boulevard School, has pioneered the district's support of students with food allergies. In addition to authoring district policies and procedures, Ms. Leister has facilitated visits from high school students to talk to younger kids about managing their conditions and has launched special events relating to food allergies. Ms. Leister, along with school psychologist Liz Gaynor, leads a student support group known as "F.A.S.T. (Food Allergy Support Team) Friends. FAST Friends came together in 2006 as a result of a Chatham Education Foundation grant and now helps students and parents deal with allergy-related issues. In May, the FAST Friends hosted a visit from F.A.R.E. (Food Allergy Research and Education), a national organization dedicated to research and advocacy on behalf of individuals with severe food allergies. The photograph to the right shows Ms. Gaynor, Ms. Leister, and Lynn Heun, the Family Services Manager from FARE. The photo to the left shows those three adults with a set of FAST students.

Relay for Life



For the second year in a row, the Chatham community participated in the American Cancer Society's Relay for Life. The Relay is the Society's signature event and brings communities together to walk continuously all through the night to honor survivors, remember those who have been lost, and raise money for finding a cure. More than two dozen relay teams comprised of 364 members represented the Chatham community in this moving event. While the top fundraising teams were the Wickham Woodpeckers, Girlz from the Hood, and Hippie Chicks, the top individual fundraisers were MaryAnn McCabe, a paraprofessional at Southern Boulevard School, and Jen Agens, CMS English teacher. Pictured here with Jen Agens (in the Hawaiian lei), are others from Team CMS Staff Striders, including CMS physical education teacher Julie Ullmeyer, student assistant counselor Alex Emr, assistant principal Peter Trebour, and principal Jill Gihorski. Congratulations to all of those who helped raise over \$80,000 for this important cause!

Awesome Grants

The school district never ceases to be amazed at the extraordinary generosity of our school PTOs, booster clubs, and other organizations that support the district in financial and other ways. Although there are too many donations and grants from the above groups to recognize, I make quick mention of three intriguing grants this past year.

“Book Love: Building a Reading Community,” was the title of a CEF grant awarded to CHS English teacher Rachel Ruffner and CHS Special Education teacher Ms. Cavallo to build a classroom library geared toward the interests of high schoolers. According to the teachers, the library has enriched the reading lives of their students.

A second CEF grant that I was fortunate enough to receive enabled me to arrange a series of educational talks, or forums. The most recent talk, delivered by Jonathan Rochelle, a Product Development Manager at Google, provided the roughly 125 students, staff, and parents in attendance with a window into life at one of the most dynamic companies on Earth, as well as a bevy of interesting ideas to consider in relation to schooling and parenting. If you were unable to attend, [his talk may be viewed here](#).

Finally, CHS English teacher Christina McCabe wrote a grant to CEF to screen a documentary about child slavery at the high school. The film, titled “#StandWithMe,” brought out more than 100 students, parents, and staff members for the viewing on June 5. The film was powerful for those who saw it and the DVD is now available at the CHS library-media center.



THANK YOU FOR A GREAT YEAR; HAPPY SUMMER!