

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Superintendent's Newsletter

January 2015

Dear Parent,

I hope that the school year is going well for you and your family as we cross into 2015. The mid-point of the school year is always very busy, and this year is no exception. As you know, the Board of Education is planning to put forth a referendum proposal with this year's budget. There is a lot of preliminary information about this proposal on the [front page](#) of our website, with much more to follow in the coming months. Aside from this set of capital improvement projects, though, there are other important and exciting initiatives underway.

The first item of note is the administration of the inaugural PARCC tests. More information about the tests may be found on page two of this document, but I wanted to include a couple of thoughts here. First, although Chatham students have performed very well on standardized test measures over the years, we have never been a district that focuses disproportionately on tests. We recognize that standardized tests, given over the course of just a few hours in the whole scope of a school year, do not accurately reflect all that a student knows and can do. Therefore, although we want our students to feel comfortable and confident when taking the tests, we will administer PARCC in the same manner we have always administered NJASK and HSPA: calmly and without undue pressure on students. Then we will go right back to the exciting and dynamic instructional activities that our students deserve, including some of which I have highlighted in this newsletter.

A second major initiative is the [Future-Focused Education Series](#) that began last year. This program, funded by the Chatham Education Foundation, enabled the district to invite speakers to our community to share with parents, staff, and students their ideas about how educational systems should prepare for the future. We were fortunate to have two guests visit the district last year. The first, Glen Hiemstra, a futurist, spoke mostly about global and societal trends shaping what the future will look like. The second, Jonathan Rochelle, a product design manager at Google, spoke a great deal about creativity, teamwork, and the value of failure in the learning process.

This year, we are going to center our efforts on a celebratory program toward the end of the school year. For the past two years, the district has participated in the Relay for Life, the American Cancer Society's annual fundraiser. This event has taken place on the weekend following Memorial Day. Two weeks later, the Chatham community celebrates the annual Fishawack festival. We have scheduled our Future-Focused Education Celebration in between these two important community events. The schedule of events for this program may be found on the final page of this newsletter.

Other district initiatives include expansion of our design and technology program (page 3), and continuing to provide a diverse and rich set of educational experiences for all students in the district. I am proud of the work that our staff and students are doing to further the already stellar acumen of the school district, and I believe that we continue to improve as each year passes.

All the best to you and your family for a strong back half of the school year.

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. New Jersey adopted the Common Core in 2010 and this year will replace its NJASK testing program with that of PARCC so that the standards and assessments are in alignment.

As a district, we have been taking steps to ensure a smooth delivery of the PARCC tests. We have purchased items like headphones, we have acquired and deployed Chromebooks throughout our grade levels that will take the tests, and we have followed the guidance from the New Jersey Department of Education with regard to bandwidth requirements.

As the D.O.E. releases more information and provides direct training (the first official training is scheduled for the end of this month), we will continue to put in place the logistical details for test administration. Our schools have all been working with our Assistant Superintendent, Karen Chase, to develop schedules that will provide for not only optimal test administration, but also maximize instructional time outside of the tests. As was the case with NJASK, schools will communicate specific testing schedules and parameters with families about a month in advance of the tests.

Should you have any questions about the transition between NJASK and PARCC, please do not hesitate to reach out to your child's school or to Karen Chase at (973) 457-2501.

Neither Rain, Nor Snow . . .

On Saturday, December 6th, students in our third grade choir performed at the annual tree lighting ceremony at the Library of the Chathams. The choir—composed of students from Southern Boulevard School, Washington Avenue School, and Milton Avenue school—was led by our elementary music education teachers Veronica Shaw and Tracy Roskam. Although it was a cold and rainy night, the show went on! This is the second year that our students have performed at this special event.



Caped Crusaders



Ms. Pam McHugh, recent CMS teacher of the year, has brought the Hero Project to her Textile, Design, and Production classes. The Hero Project is connected to The Peyton Manning Children's Hospital in Indianapolis. Chatham students design and then produce an original superhero cape to send to patients at the hospital. Ms. McHugh and her students have set a goal of creating 200 capes to send to ill children by the end of the school year.

International Travel



After the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the school district suspended school-sponsored international travel. Over the past year, the district and Board took steps to venture back into this type of educational experience. Chatham High School French teacher Leslie Caulfield and Supervisor of World Languages Josephine Serrano worked diligently to select and plan a travel itinerary that would provide an enriching experience to students. This past November, they led a group of 14 students to Canada, where they visited Montreal, Quebec, and a host of cultural and historic sites therein (even home of the the Canadiens!).

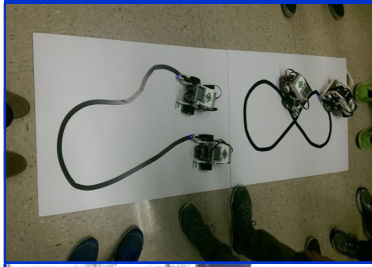
Who Let the Dog Out?

Over the past year, several staff members have been exploring the possibility of using a therapy dog in the school setting. Therapy dogs have been found to have positive outcomes in many contexts, including hospitals, schools, and offices. I am excited to announce that we have introduced our first therapy dog at Southern Boulevard School. Ms. Jen Friedrich, a teacher at SBS, has worked with her dog, Savannah, since last year to obtain the necessary licenses and certifications to have Savannah assist us here in Chatham. The tandem completed their Prestigious Paw training, Canine Good Citizen assessment, and Therapy Dog Evaluation through Therapy Dog International during the course of the past twelve months. Savannah will be housed in Ms. Friedrich's classroom on the days she visits SBS, but she will also make some trips to other classrooms. Therapy dogs have been used in other schools to help lower student anxiety, promote social language of students, serve as a reading partner for students, and provide a range of experiences associated with responsibility, kindness and proper animal treatment. We are thrilled to have Savannah join our team and we thank Ms. Friedrich for all of her hard work!

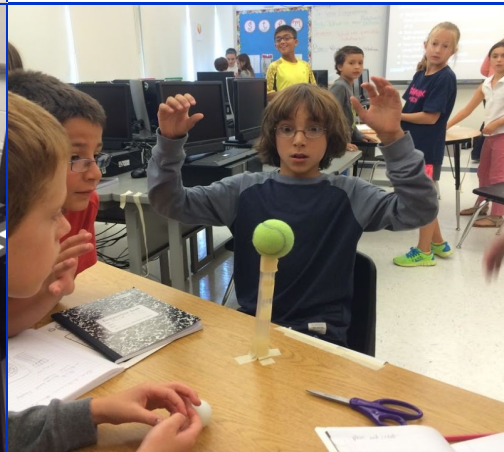




Design & Technology



The approval of last year's second budget question has enabled the district to expand its programs in design and technology. Students receive weekly instruction in D&T at the K-5 level, and the district has expanded offerings in robotics, computer science, and design technology at the middle and high schools. Students in all D&T classes follow the design loop to "ask, imagine, plan, create, and improve" to solve problems. Students district-wide also participated in the recent Hour of Code. On January 26th, at 6:30 pm, prior to the regular Board of Education meeting, Danielle Romero, Supervisor of Design and Technology, and Karen Chase, Assistant Superintendent, will provide an overview of district D&T programs.



School District of the Chathams

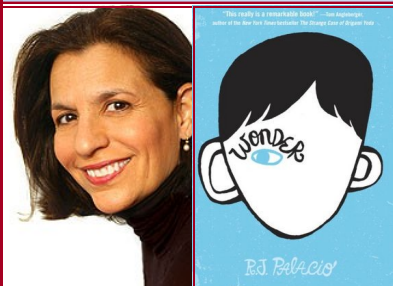
Future-Focused Education Celebration

The Future-Focused Education initiative began in the 2013/2014 school year. The purpose of the initiative is to invite accomplished individuals, with diverse perspectives, to our school district to share with parents and students their beliefs about what skills and attributes are most critical for future success. This year, I am pleased to announce that we will focus our efforts into a celebratory program at the end of the school year. The aim of the program will be to continue to solicit informed opinions about what contributes to accomplishment and success in life, and also to focus ever more attention on qualities like perseverance, compassion, and grit—qualities that lead to success and that prove inspirational to others. —Mike LaSusa

This program is made possible through the generosity and support of the Chatham Education Foundation.

2015 SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

JUNE 2: RJ Palacio



Ms. R.J. Palacio penned *Wonder*, her debut masterpiece that has proven a literary sensation in the young adult genre. The novel tells the tale of Auggie, a boy born with facial anomalies who begins attending public school for the first time in fifth grade. *Wonder* is a # 1 New York Times Bestseller, # 1 Amazon bestseller, and Booklist, Kirkus Reviews, Publishers Weekly, and School Library Journal “Best of Children’s Books” for 2012. In addition to *Wonder*, Ms. Palacio’s Kindle Single follow-up, *The Julian Chapter*, has likewise garnered critical acclaim. Ms. Palacio’s visit will include a talk, a question-and-answer session, and a book signing. Tickets for this event will cost \$10 and information about their sale will follow.

JUNE 9: Eric LeGrand

Eric LeGrand was a standout high school and college football player, but he has achieved his greatest accomplishments after suffering a catastrophic spinal cord injury while playing for Rutgers University in October 2010. Since that day four years ago, Mr. LeGrand has won the Unsung Hero Award from the New Jersey Hall of Fame, the Jimmy V Award for Perseverance at the 2012 ESPYs, and the Sports Illustrated Moment of the Year Award. Mr. LeGrand has also authored *Believe: My Faith and the Tackle that Changed My Life*. He currently leads Team LeGrand of the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation, helping to find a cure for paralysis. Tickets for this event will cost \$10; details will follow.



JUNE 10: Ryan Blume



Ryan Blume has been the subject of various media features. He is legally blind as a result of a form of albinism, yet he has achieved remarkable success as a member of the Summit High School Cross Country and Track squads. He has been a four-year varsity runner, and recently helped the team win the Union County, North 2 Group 3, and Group 3 championships for the 2014 season. His 16:56 time (5:27 per mile) at last year’s Meet of Champions was the fifth-fastest in school history. Ryan will run cross country at Vassar College next year ([click here to read Ryan’s college essay](#)). His visit will cap our program and also provide perfect motivation for Chatham students to take part in the Fishawack races on June 13! Tickets for this event will be free of charge.

All Events Will Take Place at the Chatham Middle School Auditorium at 7:00 pm