

# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

## Superintendent's Newsletter: September 2018

Dear Parent,

I hope that your child(ren) and family have rejuvenated and relaxed this summer, and are now ready to return to the routine of school.

We have been busy in district all summer in an effort to build upon past successes and improve upon areas where we can do better. The entire administrative team participated in a retreat this July with Dr. Maurice Elias, a Rutgers University professor who specializes in social and emotional learning. Our team has begun to put in place some activities and programs stemming from this training that we hope will continue to advance us in this area, and there will be ongoing work that principals and others will share with you as the year progresses.

We have also been extremely busy in the realm of construction. Several capital maintenance projects—like restroom refurbishments at Southern Boulevard and paving at SBS and Lafayette—are in the process of being completed. Most of the projects approved in the 2016 referendum are also in process. Additional information on these projects follows in this newsletter.

As always, one of our foremost priorities of the summer is making sure our schools are fully staffed. We have hired more than 30 full-time teaching staff members who will hit the ground running in September. Among them are two new supervisors—James Lawrence, supervisor of performing arts and special programs, and Dr. Evan Jaffe, supervisor of special education—who are replacing two of our supervisors who retired in June. We also included in this year's budget additional mental health staff, including a third district student assistance counselor and a second psychologist at Chatham High School. We hope that these two staff members provide additional support to our students particularly as our high school continues to grow in enrollment. All of our new staff have been in district this week at our annual New Teacher Orientation.

Some of the other prominent issues facing the school district are detailed in the pages that follow. Please take note that Board of Education meetings this year will take place in the library-media center at Chatham High School. All administrative offices in the district will be moving to the CHS site later on this year, and holding the meetings at this location will be more central and will also enable us to stream the meetings live to both Borough and Township residents for the first time.

Thank you for your ongoing support of our school system. I wish you and your children the very best for an exciting and enriching school year. Welcome back!

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael LaSusa, Superintendent of Schools

## SCHOOL SAFETY AND SECURITY

The safety and well-being of students has always been and always will be the most important charge of the school district, and national tragedies continue to shine a light on this importance. The State of New Jersey has undertaken a series of actions to guide school districts in meeting this charge. Shortly after the Sandy Hook mass shooting, the Legislature established a taskforce to study issues of school safety and make recommendations about how to improve the safety and security of schools. The taskforce, a joint effort between the Department of Education and the Department of Homeland Security & Preparedness, issued [its report in 2015](#). Since that time, the Legislature and Department of Education have enacted a number of the taskforce's recommendations.

The taskforce, for example, recommended that every school district designate a "School Safety Specialist" and that this individual undergo state-run training in the area of safety and security. The Legislature codified this recommendation, which has taken effect this year. Marco Freyre, assistant principal at Lafayette Avenue School, and I have both been appointed as School Safety Specialists and we both attended four days of training conducted by the Department of Education and law enforcement officials this summer.

We are currently in the process of discussing and sharing the content of the training with other members of our school district, and making determinations on whether and how to implement many of the recommendations. Another one of the recommendations of the taskforce and one that was discussed in great length during the training this summer was the assignment of police officers to school buildings. Many, many school districts in New Jersey and in our area already have police officers in their schools and many more are moving to put them in place this school year. Marco and I have met with Chief Gibbons of Chatham Borough and Lieutenant Miller in Chatham Township since the training to discuss this issue in greater detail. Our Board of Education has also been having ongoing discussion and debate of the matter, and will continue to do so as we enter the fall.

The training and the guidance from the DOE may result in potential changes to some of our procedures and protocols around the schools, some of our capital infrastructure, and some of our personnel. I and/or your child's principal will communicate further information about these potential changes if and/or when we make them. Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me or the principal to talk.

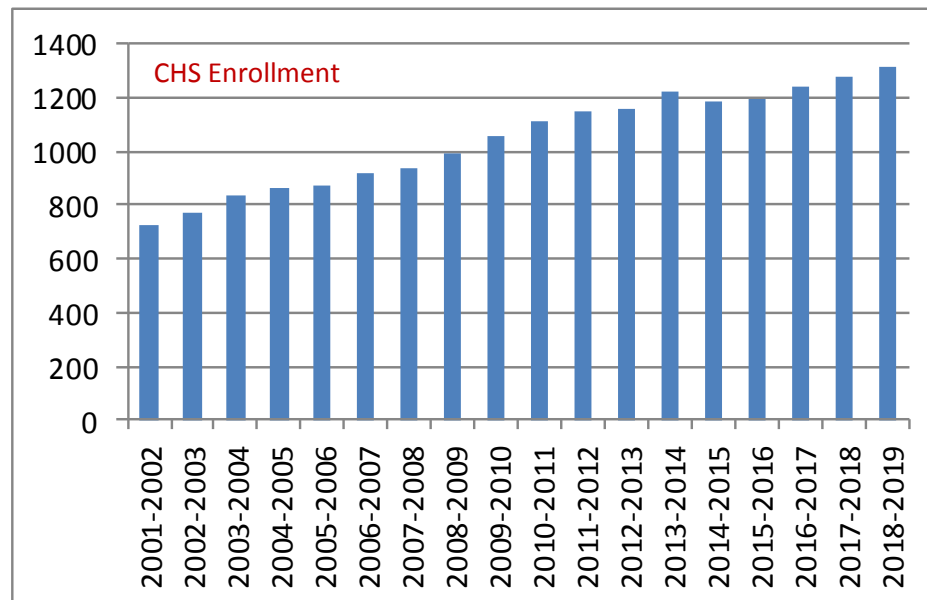
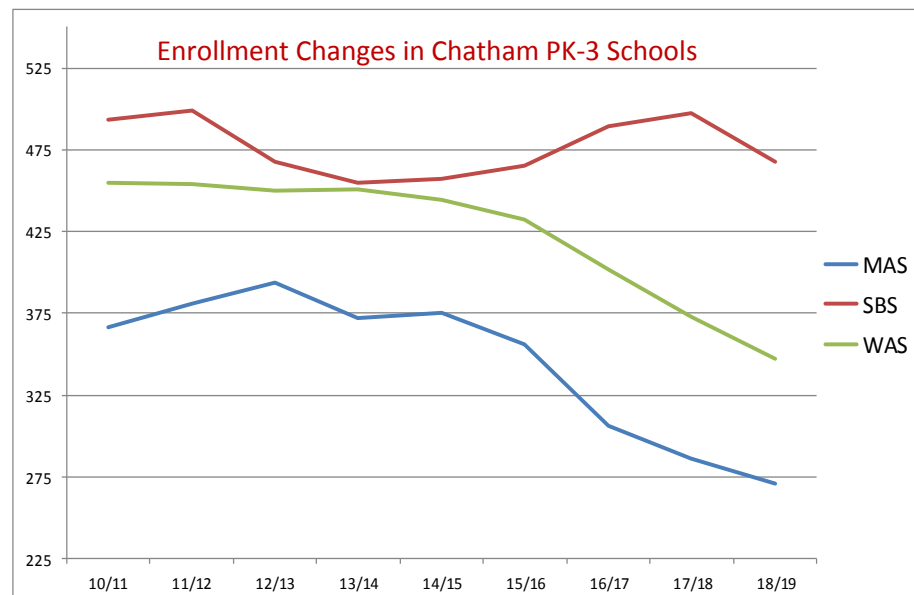
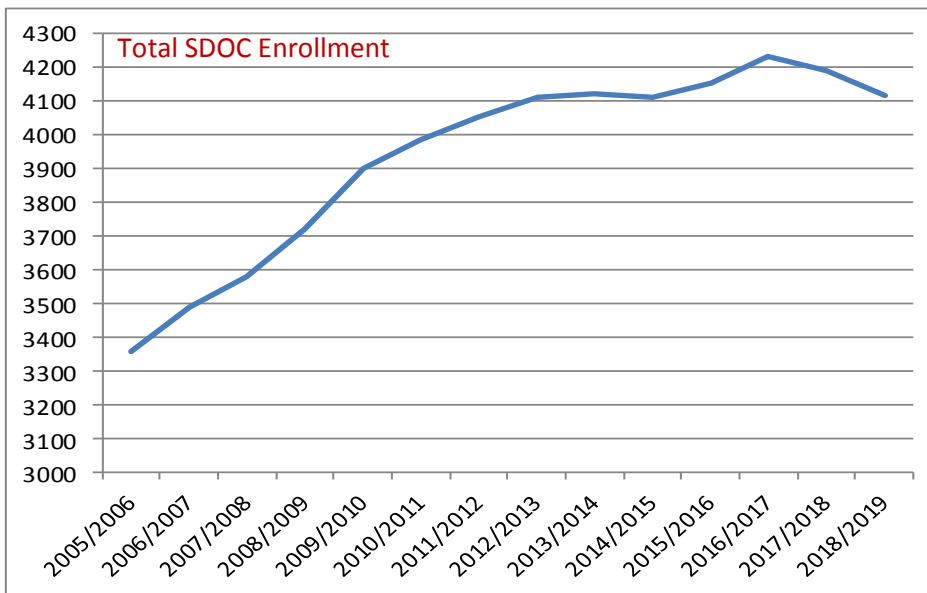
## HARASSMENT, INTIMIDATION, and BULLYING

We strive to uphold our schools as safe, inclusive places of learning and respect. All of our schools have School Safety Teams, anti-bullying specialists, and programs and events designed to promote a positive and safe climate in the school setting. Our school district takes any potential act of Harassment, Intimidation, and Bullying seriously and responds accordingly. Please discuss with your child the importance of treating all students with respect, being an upstander, and abiding by school rules. Incidents of HIB may lead to significant disciplinary consequences for students, up to and including suspension from school. In addition, under the Memorandum of Agreement with our police departments, HIB incidents may also lead to referrals to the police and potential involvement of the Morris County Prosecutor's Office. Please take the time to review our [HIB policy and regulation](#).

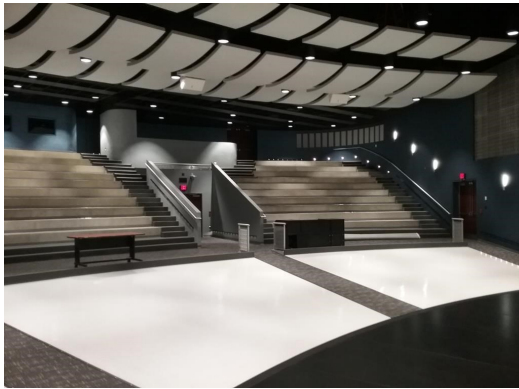
Thank you in advance for your proactive cooperation in preventing harassment, intimidation, and bullying among our students.

# ENROLLMENT AND DEMOGRAPHICS

Our schools experience shifts in enrollment, with certain patterns emerging, from year to year. Our overall enrollment (right) has risen over the past decade, but hit a plateau and begun to decline in the past two years. Our high school enrollment (below right) has grown steadily, nearly doubling since I have worked in the school district. The enrollment at our PK-3 schools (below) has grown in disparity over the past five years. Our most recent demographic reports underestimated our projected enrollment. For this reason, and because both Chatham Borough and Chatham Township have been discussing plans for potential new residential development, our Board of Education recently contracted with a new demographer to help gain clarity into what the coming years may hold from an enrollment perspective. The demographer is scheduled to present his report at the October 15 Board of Education meeting, which will be held in the Chatham High School library-media center. This report is also the first step toward considering a re-zoning of our neighborhood elementary schools to achieve greater balance in their student populations.



# Construction Progress



CHS Auditorium

There has been widespread construction over the course of the summer at almost all of our schools. Six projects in total were approved in the 2016 referendum. We completed one of those projects—upgrades to the Cougar Field Complex—last school year. Four more of the projects are nearing completion right now. They are the Milton Avenue four-classroom addition (below right), the Chatham Middle School three-classroom addition (next page), roof replacements at multiple schools, and the Chatham High School auditorium (left). The one remaining item at the auditorium is the new seating. There was a delay in the manufacture of the seats and, as a result, installation of the seats is scheduled to take place within the next six weeks. We plan to hold a celebratory event in the auditorium once it is ready to open. The Milton Avenue School addition is also nearing completion and we are currently working through inspections to ensure that we are able to occupy the new rooms as soon as possible. In addition to the projects approved via the 2016 referendum, we have undertaken multiple other projects using primarily our capital reserve. These projects include re-paving and striping our parking lots and driveways at Lafayette Avenue and Southern Boulevard Schools (below and left), the construction of an addition at CHS to house all district administrative staff, and the refurbishment of two bathrooms at SBS, both of which were original to the school. Interestingly, during the course of construction we discovered that in one of these bathrooms there had never been a hot water line run to it (things were a little different in the 1920s!). We expect to complete all of the above named projects this fall. Once our high school auditorium is ready to open, we will move on to the final project approved in 2016, which is the refurbishment of the Chatham Middle School auditorium. We have begun meetings to plan for this project and we expect construction to begin about January 1, 2019.



Repaved Lot and Drive at LAF

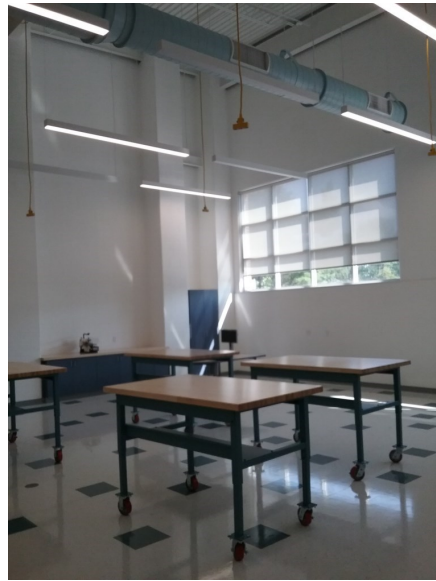


Repaved Lot and Drive at SBS



Exterior of MAS Addition (at left)

## Construction (continued)



We have completed construction of the Chatham Middle School addition, which comprises three design and technology labs. Each lab will serve a dedicated purpose, such as fabrication, design and prototyping, and so forth. You may notice that the ceilings are high in these lab spaces. This is to accommodate ventilation for tasks like 3-D printing and fabrication of projects, and also because we anticipate that aero-robotics (i.e. drones) will become a more prominent area of study as we move forward. We are excited to welcome our students into these spaces in September!

## Summer Reading

An article appeared last week in the *New York Times* that caught my eye: “[An Underappreciated Key to College Success: Sleep](#).” Jane Brody, the author, asserts that the amount and quality of sleep a student gets is a better predictor of college success and graduation than habits related to alcohol or drug use. Further, a lack of sleep results in a decline in grades, higher rates of depression, and more anxiety among college kids. These findings, of course, are not confined to college campuses, but also hold true for students of all ages. Numerous studies demonstrate that sleep deprivation in adolescent children in particular leads to steep educational, social, health, and even economic costs (mainly associated with increases in car accidents). For this reason, prominent health organizations like the American Academy of Pediatrics recommend middle and high schools start their days no earlier than 8:30 am. The reason they focus on middle and high schools is that early start times for students at that age run directly counter to the circadian rhythms that accompany the physiological development of adolescents. In short, teenagers are unable to naturally fall asleep early. When we start school earlier than we should, they do not sleep enough and the problems described above surface and grow. An AAP white paper entitled “[Let Them Sleep](#)” succinctly summarizes the issue.

In Chatham, we know from [surveys of our middle school and high school students](#) that sleep deprivation is a problem. We also continue to operate our secondary schools on schedules that contravene the recommendations from the AAP and other professional organizations. We do so because there are many factors that affect school scheduling: extracurricular programs that depend on sunlight, the desirability to have teenage children arrive home before their younger siblings, costs to run buses on straight routes (rather than stacked routes), and more. In an ideal world, we would adhere to our [guiding principles](#) and work toward moving back the time that our middle and high schoolers report to school. Short of accomplishing that objective, however, it still is worth reading up on the impact and value of sleep, and trying to take small steps toward ensuring that our children get enough.