

# SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

## Superintendent's Newsletter: November 2019

Dear Parent,

I wish you a happy Thanksgiving and holiday season. There is much for which to be grateful across the school district, and last month we launched a district-wide Twitter account to try to capture some of it. Our hope is to highlight and share some of the big and small moments that we find exciting. You may check out this resource from the [district webpage](#) or follow along using our Twitter handle, @chatham\_sdoc and #weareSDOC.

Student well-being remains a top district priority. Chatham High School hosted an information session about vaping and its attendant health consequences on November 12. Parallel to this, the high school created a video resource for parents and students. You may view the video on the [high school webpage](#).

Our three Student Assistance Counselors also reviewed findings from a survey conducted last spring of our middle and high school students regarding critical health and wellness issues. This presentation may be [viewed here](#) and the full survey results are available on the [home page of our website](#). Among the key findings are that some of our students report very high stress levels and that many of our high school students report not sleeping enough. Sleep is a topic we have discussed from time to time for many years, but have not confronted in a meaningful and impactful way. I would invite you to please view my own presentation from the [November 4 Board of Education meeting](#) or to click through a [brief slideshow](#) that is posted to our website. To summarize my remarks, the research is overwhelming and clear that: 1) adolescents experience a change in circadian rhythms as they progress through adolescence; 2) this change results in their bodies naturally falling asleep at later times; and 3) school start times for adolescents should reflect this physiological fact. For these reasons, major health organizations, such as the American Academy of Pediatrics and the National Sleep Foundation, recommend that high schools begin their day no earlier than 8:30 am for students. We have begun to discuss this recommendation, and how to move toward it, at our Board of Education meetings and will continue to do so. You will be provided more information about this in the coming months and even years, as it will take a long period of time to implement any change to the start of the high school day.

Another topic that has been prominent in Board of Education meetings in recent months is a referendum proposal for 2020. The Finance Committee of the Board of Education has been reviewing capital projects and facilities needs, with an eye on taking advantage of up to a 40% discount on those projects due to available state debt service as well as very low interest rates at the current time. The district is currently finalizing project estimates and the Board plans to solicit input and feedback on potential referendum projects early in 2020, with the goal of presenting a ballot question to voters in the fall of 2020.

I am proud to reiterate that TED Talks continue to have an impact on the District. Since our inaugural [TEDxYouth@Chatham](#) event in June, we had 14 teachers and administrators participate in a Building Voices Workshop this summer that culminated with six professionals presenting their talks to start off our fall professional development days. The talent, strength and courage of our staff continues to impress me. You can watch a [video here](#) to see how this experience impacted them. Of course, our high school elective, Talking the Talk, continues to thrive under the lead of Ms. Christina McCabe, whose students are learning how to craft and deliver a message in a thoughtful, confident, and compelling manner. To view some of their talks, as well as those of our staff members, you may visit [here](#).



I wish you all the best for a restful and enjoyable holiday season

Sincerely,

Michael LaSusa



## LAF 4th GRADERS TAKE ON JEFF LAKE CAMP



In my last newsletter, I highlighted the district's commitment to social and emotional well being. This remains the number one priority of the district. We introduced new field trips at Lafayette and CMS this year. Our fourth graders spent the day at Jeff Lake, while sixth graders went to Fairview Lakes YMCA. These educational experiences were designed to encourage empathy, cooperative learning, effective communication, active listening, leadership development, and team building. These are all great skills to help students transition into new schools and to set them up for long term success.

## FAIRVIEW LAKES YMCA CMS 6th Grade



## CHALLENGE DAY at CMS and CHS

Challenge Day continues to have a profound impact on students who choose to participate. In its eighth year at CHS and second year at CMS, Challenge Day promotes social and emotional learning by connecting students with faculty and staff to help them become more aware of challenges we all share. This in turn empowers them to create a culture that builds an accepting community. Over 85 students participated in grades 10-12 at CHS, with 22 adult participants. At CMS, 94 eighth graders participated with 26 adults.



## Running Abounds

Several of our schools had their students moving around last month. MAS students participated in a duathlon encouraging biking and running. SBS students logged their miles as part of the mileage club. LAF held their annual mini-marathon with strong participation in both grades!



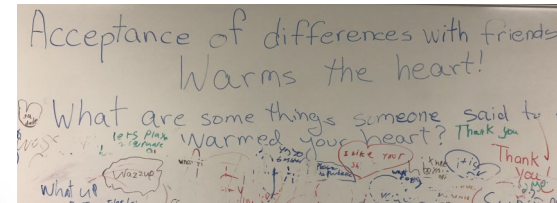
## Reducing Plastics

We have also made efforts to reduce our plastic waste. We have experimented with boxed water in our cafeterias, fewer plastic utensils, and more reusable and refillable items. The PTOs have also cut back on plastic water bottles at events and school activities.



## Week of Respect

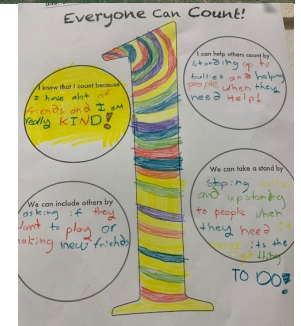
Monday, October 7th through Friday, October 11th marked New Jersey schools' annual "Week of Respect." This recognition is a mandated component of the Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights Act, but it has grown here in Chatham to encompass student wellness, which the District sees as a key factor in developing the whole student and creating a supportive community. The themes of the week centered around being welcoming to all, being an upstander, caring for others and oneself, and gratitude. Lessons took place in classrooms, assemblies and optional school activities throughout the week.



**WAS**  
Opens Hearts  
and Accepts  
Differences

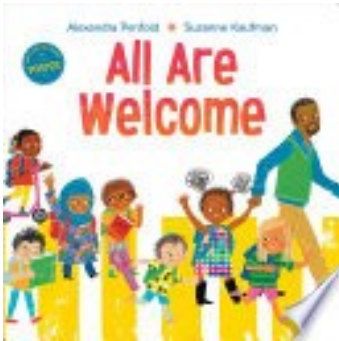
**MAS Learns to Be  
an Upstander**

**SBS Focuses on  
How Everyone  
Counts**





## LAF Celebrates Difference



Leveraging teaching from the book “All Are Welcome,” students were encouraged to celebrate what makes them unique by identifying traits they love in a heart to be displayed in the hallways at school. This encourages students to see what makes them like others and also celebrate what makes them and others unique.

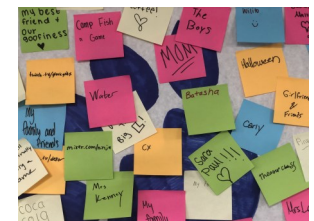
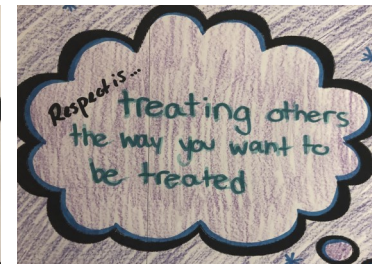
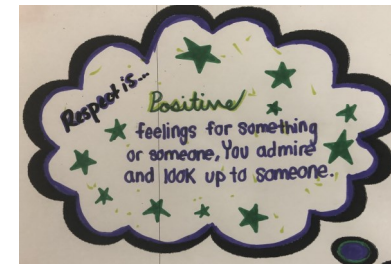
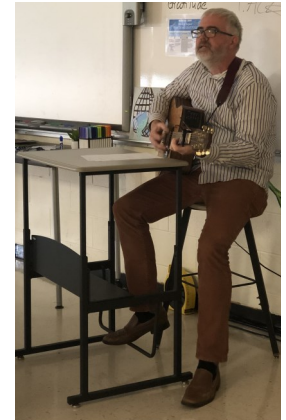
## I Am CMS

CMS students celebrated themselves and others by making t-shirts with “I Am” statements. These “I Am” messages encourage seeing, celebrating and embracing ourselves and others.



## CHS Is Grateful

During the Week of Respect this month at CHS, the students took on a Gratitude Challenge. Each day, students received inspirational messages and videos on different themes such as the importance of practicing gratitude, kindness and acceptance, and accentuating the positive.



As we focus more and more on social and emotional learning, we are continually reminded that words and actions matter. We continue to see benefits from positive messaging and are integrating it into our student learning.

**HAPPY THANKSGIVING**