

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Note from the Superintendent October 2015

Dear Parent,

I hope you are enjoying the peak foliage of beautiful Morris County. I wanted to update you on a few items of note as we approach Halloween.

Capital Improvement Input

First, I would like to remind you that the Board of Education is requesting feedback on a potential referendum to finance a variety of capital improvements. We held our second of four open discussions about these improvements this morning, and have two remaining sessions scheduled for Monday, October 19, and Monday, October 26. Those sessions will be held at the CMS Library-Media Center at 7:00 pm. If you have not already done so, you may also complete [a survey](#) regarding these projects by visiting the district homepage. The survey will remain open until October 30, and the Board will present the results from the survey at its November 2nd meeting.

Blue Ribbon Schools

As you may know by now, Southern Boulevard School was officially named a Blue Ribbon award-winner by the United States Department of Education. Only nine public schools in New Jersey received this award this year, with SBS as the single Morris County public school to earn the distinction. This is the second SDOC school in as many years to gain such recognition (MAS won the award last year) and the third district school in total to garner the honor (CHS in 2004). Congratulations to our students, parents, and teachers! Mr. Gardella, Ms. Leister, and Mr. Pesapane will travel to Washington D.C. in early November to attend a series of ceremonies recognizing all of the Blue Ribbon schools in the country.

Cougar Fest

I am happy to report that Chatham High School's first-ever Cougar Fest was a huge success. This event preceded Cougar Weekend and involved outdoor competitions between the classes. A unique twist to the competitions—devised by the Spirit Club and the high school administration—was to have the senior and sophomore classes team up together to face off against the combined team of the freshman and junior classes in a series of competitions. To make it even more interesting, a faculty team joined the fray. Students and staff had a great time, and it was the perfect way to launch into the Cougar Weekend festivities!



Stand Up!

We have been diversifying the kinds of furniture in our classrooms in an effort to bring our physical resources in line with what research says about learning. One of our PTO presidents sent [this video](#) to me, and I thought it was worth sharing.

—over—

October 2015

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Substance Abuse Prevention

As I wrote in my previous newsletter, our school district has been working with the Morris County Prosecutor's Office to take advantage of its drug prevention resources. Yesterday, we became one of about a dozen other county school districts to utilize the canine unit of the Prosecutor's Office in conducting our first random drug sweep of Chatham High School. The sweep went exactly according to plan, and the entire process lasted less than 15 minutes.

Our school district is also involved in a partnership with Millburn, Summit, Berkeley Heights, and New Providence. The superintendents and student assistance counselors in those districts are working to stage a different substance abuse or other critical wellness-related event in each school district over the course of this year. The first presentation will take place this Tuesday, October 20, at [Summit High School](#). On hand will be experts in the field of substance abuse trends. All parents are invited to attend.



Week of Respect

During the first full week of October, our schools celebrated the Week of Respect. This is a state-wide program connected to New Jersey's Anti-Bullying Bill of Rights, with events taking place in all of our schools. Pictured left and right are shots of the "Unity Parade" at Chatham Middle School. With an assist from the CHS Marching Band and Color Guard, who marched down Lafayette Avenue to pump a little sound and color into the celebration, middle school students all marched in a parade to show their unity and respect for one another.



Staff and Student Wellness

I am sometimes asked what we do on a "professional development" day. These days are typically filled with departmental meetings and training sessions. This past Monday, October 12, we carved out about ninety minutes during the day to do something different. About 50 of our staff members volunteered to engage their colleagues in sessions aimed at stress reduction, exercise, and/or overall well-being. Sessions included yoga for beginners, cycling, mindfulness, healthy eating and cooking, and more. Additionally, activities shown to help reduce stress—like painting for adults and music appreciation—were also offered. On this last point, I was reminded of something that Harvard professor Richard Elmore once said, which is that it is vitally important for educators to always be involved in learning something new—preferably something that is **down-right difficult**. The reason for this is that we must remember how challenging and complex the act of reading, or solving multifaceted math problems, or learning another language, truly is for a beginner. When we lose sight of this immense degree of difficulty, we lose sight of what our students go through when they engage all day long in these daunting activities.



Our staff had a terrific day of learning with colleagues, and the efforts reinforced our commitment to educating the whole person.

HAPPY HALLOWEEN!

October 2015