

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Note from the Superintendent

November 2015

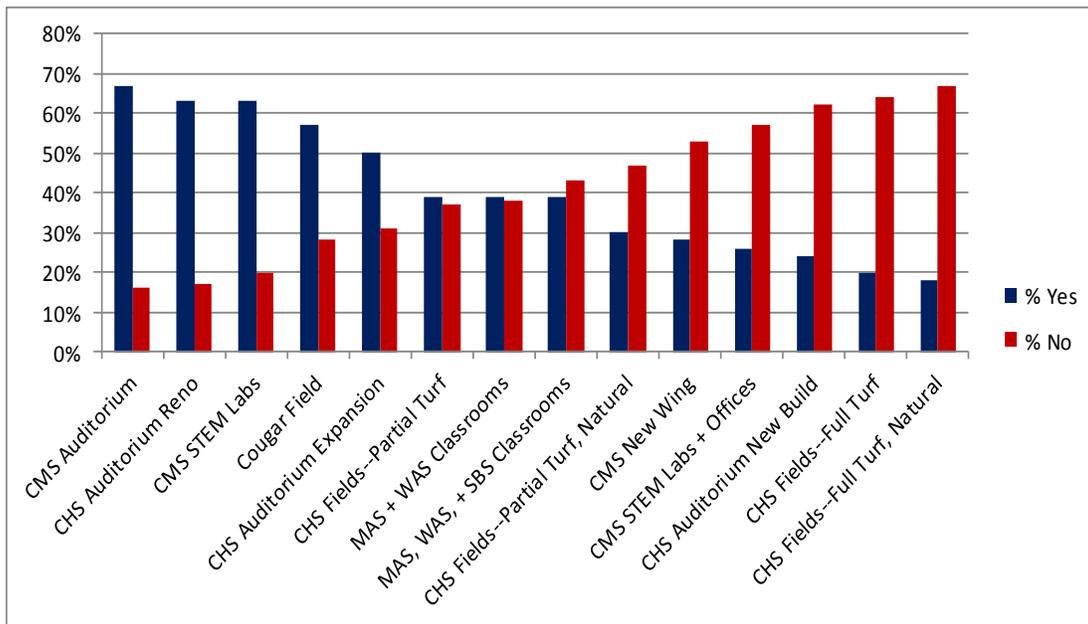
Dear Parent,

Happy Holidays to you and yours! I am writing to update you on a couple of important topics as we enter the winter.

Capital Improvement Plans

More than 1,200 residents shared their feedback with the Board of Education concerning capital improvements that may form the basis of a referendum in 2016. A summary of that feedback may be [found here](#), and I have included an overview chart of the results below. The Board of Education will continue to discuss how to proceed with a potential referendum at the Board meeting scheduled for December 7. At this point, the Board is focusing on September 2016 as the most likely timeframe for such a question, and it is zeroing in on those projects of the greatest need and the greatest amount of community support.

Summary of Support for the Projects Listed



District Website

For more than a year, we have been working toward the implementation of a new school district website. We adopted the template of our old website about ten years ago, at a time before smart phones and tablets were the norm for website traffic. We have formally transitioned to our new site as of today, and I invite you to [visit it](#). We are still in the process of streamlining certain forms of communication and we will continue to make adjustments to our current site as we use it regularly. I hope that you find this to be an improvement over what we had been using.

—over—

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PARCC Results

The Department of Education has released PARCC results for the first administration of these tests last year. We are receiving these scores in waves, and as we receive the individual score reports for students we will send them to parents. There are two factors associated with these tests that are new to us. First, simply because this was the first administration, it is not possible to draw year-over-year comparisons to these tests and their predecessors, NJASK and HSPA. Second, we experienced a significant amount of test refusal last year, which is not something we ever experienced before. As a result, we are not able to readily compare ourselves to other schools in the state, where participation rates were different. We will provide a full overview of all district results at the December 7 Board of Education meeting, and a copy of that presentation will be available on our website beginning December 8.

Overall PARCC Participation

Grade	% of students taking the test
3	98%
4	98%
5	92%
6	88%
7	87%
8	81%
9	54%
10	44%
11	25%

Incident Weather

I would like to take this opportunity to remind you of the decision-making process involved in determining whether to open or close schools when the weather is bad. Whenever the forecast calls for snow or other hazardous weather, I receive alerts from the offices of emergency management of the county and local municipalities. These notifications typically include information beyond that available from commercial internet or television sources. If difficult weather comes to fruition, I communicate directly with the public works directors from Chatham Borough and Chatham Township in order to understand the conditions in the local community. I also communicate with our own supervisor of buildings and grounds, superintendents in nearby school districts, and other personnel as appropriate.

Above all else, the priority is student safety. Conditions must permit the safe travel of students—whether they are walking, being driven by car, being driven by bus, or driving themselves—and the safe acceptance of those students at school. There are times when the majority, but not all, of the conditions are good, and thus we are unable to open school. For example, most streets may appear to be clear and passable, but school buses might not be able to traverse hilly sections of the township. Other times, perhaps the road conditions are all good, but the sidewalks have not yet been cleared of snow. Again, the goal is student safety, and the conditions in the whole of Chatham will dictate whether there is school.

It would be nice if the weather was a sure thing. You might recall that last year the New York City schools shut down the day before a “record” blizzard was going to hit. The blizzard missed. Given the unpredictability of the weather, the timing of school closing announcements will vary. I will always try to make a decision as early as possible—even the night before a school day—in order to provide working parents of young children in particular time to make arrangements for their kids. However, it is often the case that the best decision will come only after waiting to see what the weather actually holds.

The State of New Jersey requires schools to be “open” at least 180 days. The State does not permit online or digital instruction to satisfy this requirement. We have five additional days built in to our calendar so as to ensure we will meet this requirement unless we close for more than five days.

Thank you in advance for your understanding on days when the weather is tough!