

SCHOOL DISTRICT OF THE CHATHAMS

Superintendent's Newsletter: September 2017

Dear Parent,

Welcome back! I hope that your children are beginning to hit the sack a little bit earlier and that they are secretly excited to join up with their classmates again next week.

We have been very busy this summer preparing for the 2017/2018 school year. We have undertaken construction projects in the majority of our school buildings, we have hired about 35 teachers to replace those who retired or left in June, we have updated curriculum and learning objectives to reflect new developments in standards, and we have prepared for the distribution of Chromebooks to all students in grades 6-12 to facilitate their learning and improve their instructional experience.

Beyond the above, our administrative team has engaged in professional dialogue about how we can best orient our practices toward meeting the demands—academic, personal, socio-emotional, and so on—that our students face today and will face in their futures. It is cliché to say that the world is different today than it was decades ago or that technology is impacting society in profound ways, but it is impossible not to recognize that life for teenagers today is far more complex than ever before for a multitude of reasons. Part of our role as educators is to equip students with skills and capacities to help them arrive at clarity and well-being in the midst of dynamic school, social, and other environments.

The balance of this newsletter reflects the above: some of the procedural goings-on in the district, as well as some of the more ambitious and far reaching forces and ideas that we grapple with as parents and educators. One of the things I most enjoy about working in education is that there is a re-set every September—a re-set that provides students with a fresh start and gives us all an opportunity to start over again. Our work always evolves and it is inherently iterative. The new year is September 1, not January 1, and is a chance for renewal.

I hope that your children find this coming school year to be their best yet in their school careers. We have grown and moved forward in tangible and important ways in recent years, and we will continue to do so. Thank you in advance for all of your support and hard work in helping your children develop and grow with us. I wish you the best in the coming year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Michael LaSusa, Superintendent of Schools

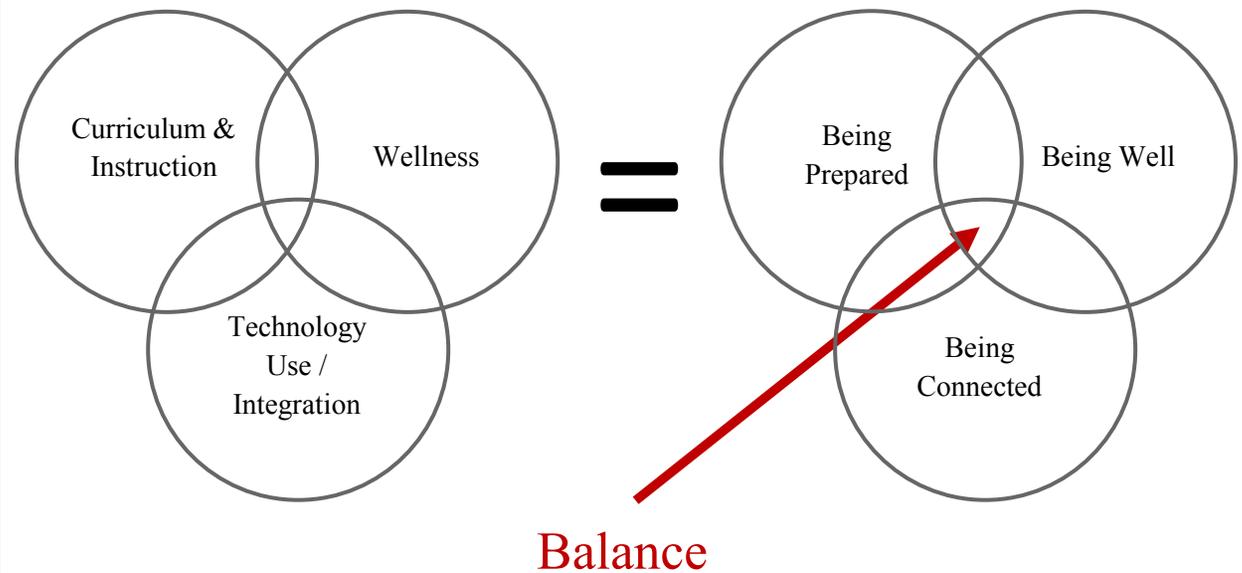
CRITICAL ISSUES

There are two items I would like to draw to your attention as critical for all parents to know:

1. All students deserve to feel respected in the school environment and all students will be expected to respect others. As of this writing, there are 4,192 students enrolled in our schools. They come in all stripes. The school district will not tolerate harassment, intimidation, bullying, or discrimination of any kind. Students found to have engaged in discriminatory activity will be held accountable and may face serious disciplinary consequences. For more information, please consult the student handbook of your child's school, as well as [this page of our website](#).
2. The safety and well-being of our students is more important than anything related to academics, athletics, or the arts. Results from a student survey administered last year, which can be found on [this page of our website](#), show that some of our students engage in risky and concerning behavior. We will work to help students make positive choices and we will also discipline students who deliberately introduce into the school setting illegal substances or paraphernalia used to consume illegal substances. This includes electronic cigarettes and vaping devices. Please make sure your child understands that there will be consequences for using or possessing illicit substances in the school setting or at school events.

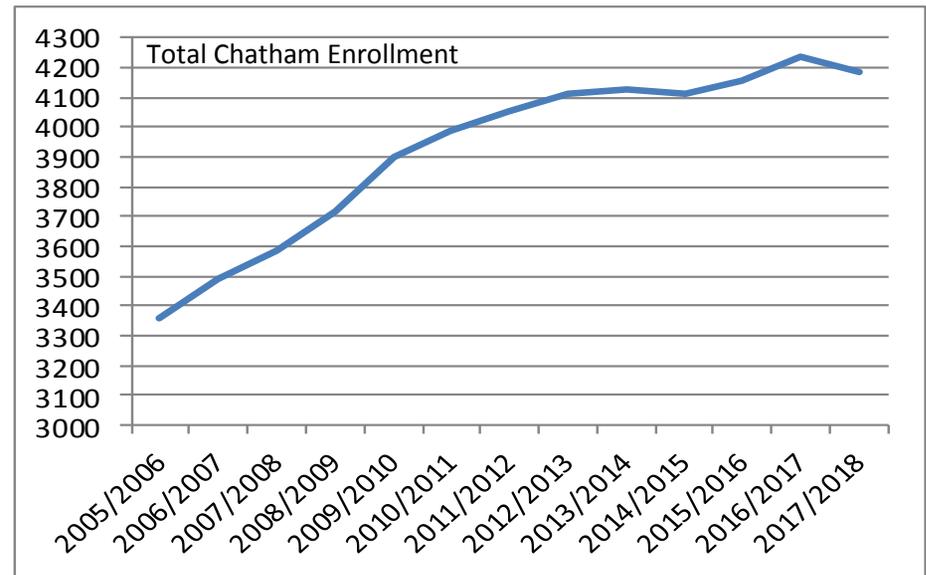
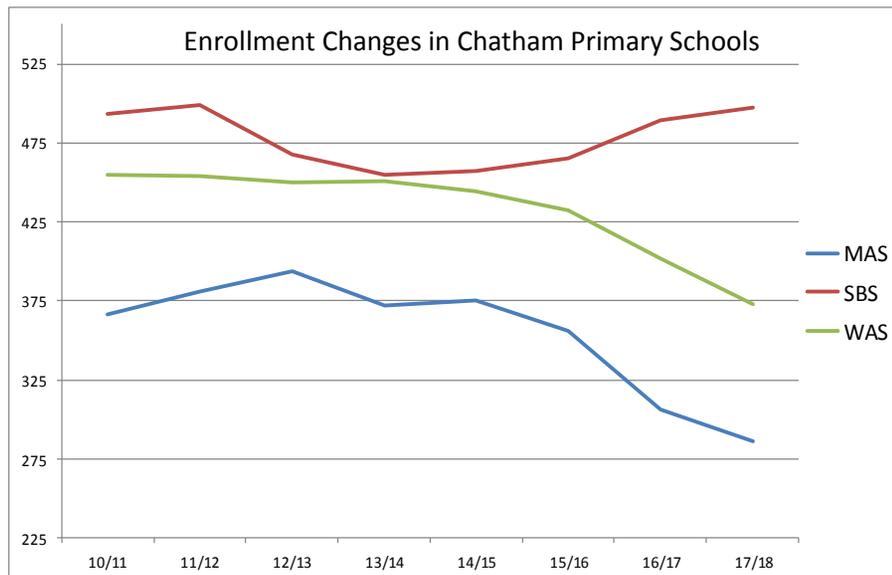
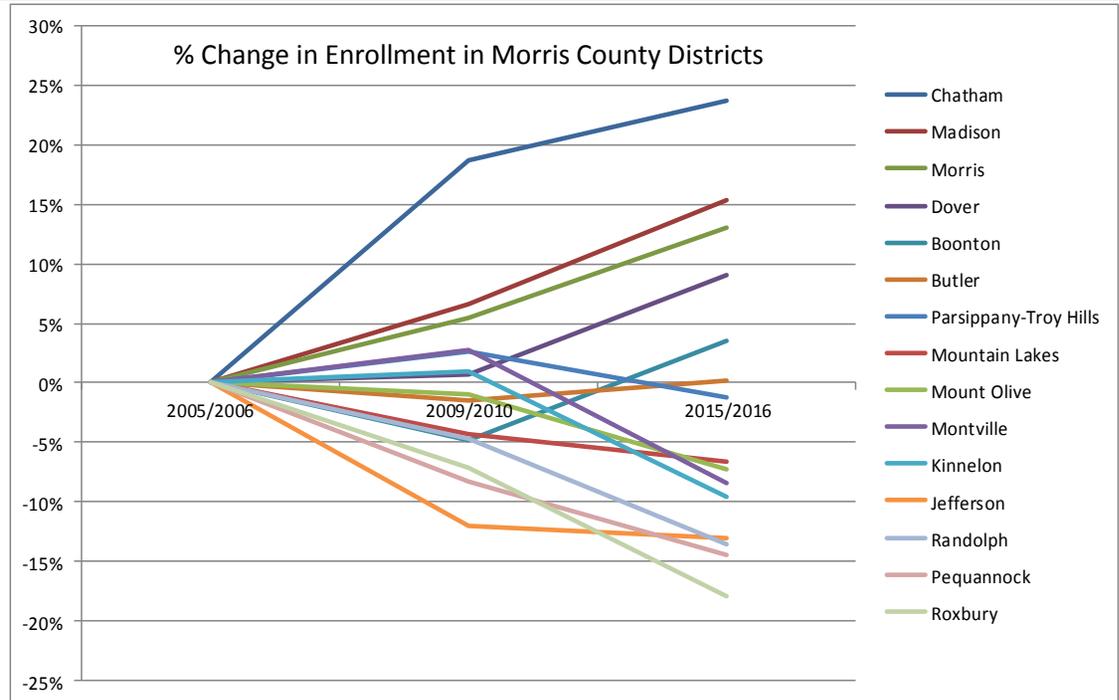
AREAS OF PROFESSIONAL FOCUS

As a school district, we align our professional training and development with the goals we have for our students. Our staff in recent years has been engaged in work and improvement that generally fall into three areas: **curriculum and instruction**, **wellness**, and **technology integration**. Our aim is for this work in turn to translate into Chatham graduates who are well prepared, who have an understanding and awareness of how we connect to technology and to one another, and who appreciate and possess a greater sense of well-being. If we and our students are successful in achieving this aim, it will lead to balance in and out of school.



ENROLLMENT OVERVIEW

District enrollment has experienced growth and other trends over the past dozen years. The charts to the right show 1) how district enrollment has climbed over the year and 2) how Chatham's enrollment growth has outpaced that of every other K-12 school district in Morris County over the same time period. The chart below shows how enrollment has changed in our three pK-3 schools. As you can see, the disparity in enrollment has increased, with SBS growing while MAS and WAS have declined. We have been managing special programs in these schools in order to efficiently utilize the number of classrooms available in each building, but it is possible that we will have to consider re-zoning these neighborhood schools at some point in the future in order to better balance our enrollment and resources.



Construction Progress

There has been widespread construction throughout the district this summer, with much of it continuing into the school year. Following is a summary of projects currently underway:

- * SBS: The main office of the building has been relocated to the rear entrance, between the library-media center and the kindergarten classrooms. The former main office area has been converted into small-group instructional spaces.
- * CHS: The library-media center has been refurbished, courtesy of the CHS PTO. There is new carpeting, new furniture, and a new layout to maximize the space. The auditorium is scheduled to be gutted and renovated beginning about January 1, 2018.



CHS Library-Media Center



CMS New Chorus Room

- * CMS: The classrooms around the perimeter of the auditorium have been refurbished and reconfigured: we have removed the asbestos floor tiles, re-organized the classrooms, purchased new furniture, built two bathrooms, and prepared for the STEM addition that will be built this year.

- * MAS: Work on the new four-classroom addition is expected to begin later this fall.
- * Roofing: Roofs are being replaced at LAF, CMS, and CHS.
- * Central Office Building: Construction of a new building to house the special services department and the central office staff is expected to begin by January 1, 2018, and will be located directly behind the C-Gym of the high school.



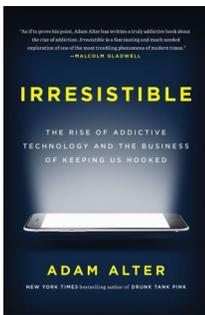
New Walking Path

- * Cougar Field: The entire complex is in the process of being improved: we have installed new bleachers, created a walking/running path around the perimeter of the upper field, replaced the concession stand, fencing, and macadam, and upgraded the parking layout.



New Bleachers

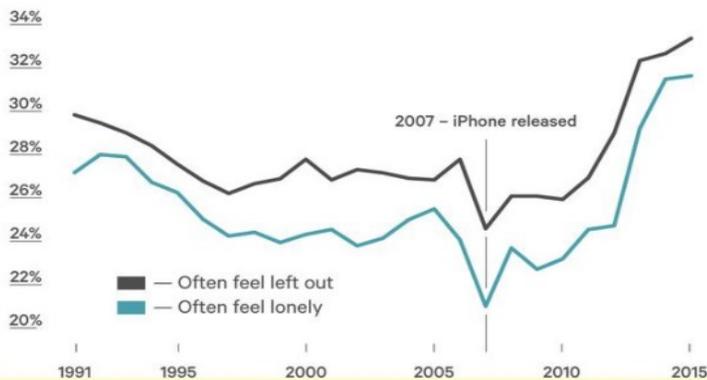
Summer Reading



Lori Gironda, assistant principal at CHS, recommended this book to me early on in the summer. It will just about knock you down. Mr. Alter looks at our use of digital devices, social media, and video games through the lens of behavioral addiction. He lays out how our brains respond to the stimuli that limitless email, social media posts, and digital media provide to us, and how human beings are wired to seek more and more of it. The book is filled with provocative data and tips; let me give you just three of them here. 1) In 2008, U.S. adults spent an average of eighteen minutes on their phones per day; in 2015, the average increased to two hours and forty-eight minutes. 2) 60% of adults between the ages of 18 and 64 sleep with their cell phones within arm's reach. 3) To get a feel for how you use your smartphone, download the app called "Moment." It tracks your overall use and also breaks down the sites and programs that you use over the course of a day.

More Likely to Feel Lonely

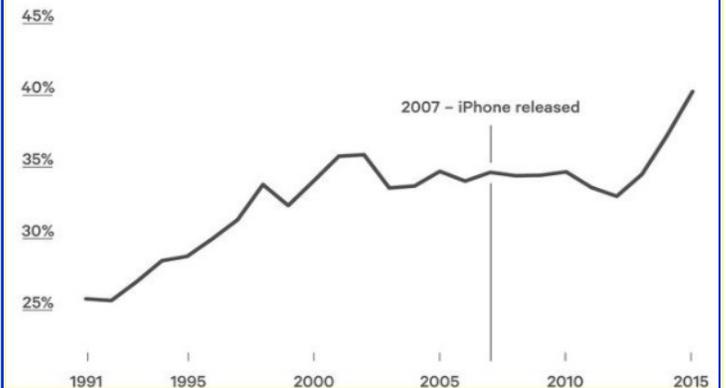
Percentage of 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders who agree or mostly agree with the statement "I often feel left out of things" or "A lot of times I feel lonely"



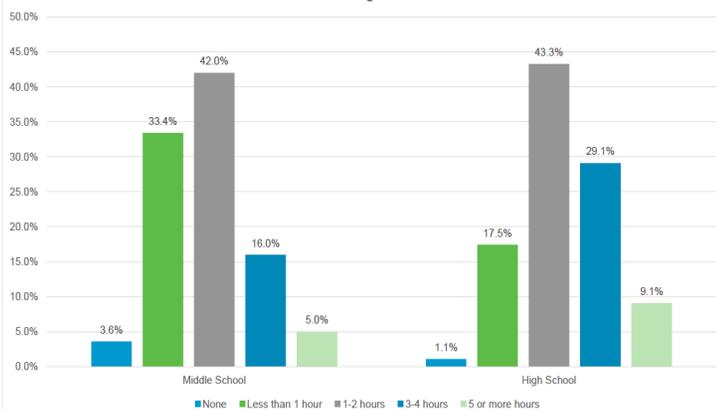
In a similar vein, one of our English teachers, Christina McCabe, shared with me an article from The Atlantic titled, "[Have Smart Phones Destroyed a Generation?](#)" by Jean M. Twenge. This piece also offers a sobering account of how the habits, perspectives, and activities of teens have changed with the advent of the smart phone. I encourage you to click on the link above to read the article, but I offer two snapshot charts from the article in the yellow boxes to the left and right. They show trends in teenagers' reports of feeling lonely and getting enough sleep. Below these charts—the ones with the bars—are answers our own CMS and CHS students gave to the survey I mentioned on page two of this newsletter. There is certainly evidence of what Twenge and Alter write about here in Chatham, and it warrants serious consideration on all of our parts.

Less Likely to Get Enough Sleep

Percentage of 8th-, 10th-, and 12th-graders who get less than seven hours of sleep most nights



How many hours a day do you spend texting, emailing, video chatting, or socializing online?



How many hours of sleep a night do you typically get?

