

May 1, 2023

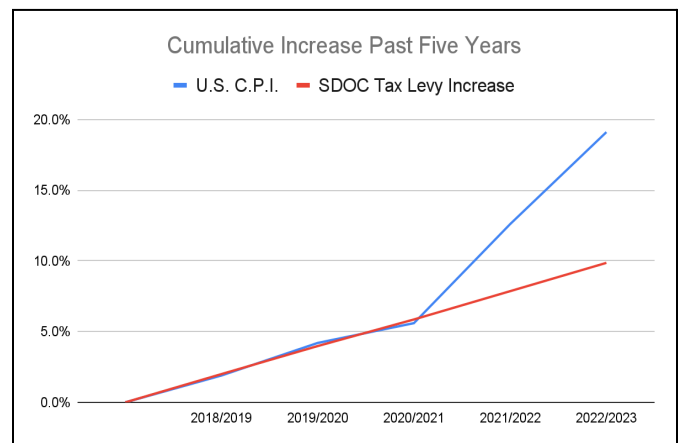
Dear Parent,

Happy May! The following is an update on various items as we approach the final month of the school year.

2023/2024 Budget

The Board of Education recently adopted a budget for the 2023/2024 school year. The budget maintains existing school programs and draws down the district fund balance to hold the tax levy increase to 2%, in spite of increases in costs far above 2% in areas such as inflation, special education, and health benefits. This is the fifth consecutive budget that the Board has maintained a tax levy increase of 2% or less. The chart below compares the cumulative increase in the C.P.I. the past five years with the cumulative tax levy increase.

While additional state aid and declining enrollment have helped in managing increasing costs, the district is unable to address certain priorities in the current environment. It is worth noting that in the spring of 2020, the Board had identified roughly \$16 million of potential capital projects for a referendum in September 2020. The pandemic sunk this prospect, but many of the projects—the improvement of security at school entrances, updates to the art rooms at CHS, re-pointing of the 100-year old brickwork at SBS, various roof replacements, and so on—remain important. In part for these reasons, the Board is proposing two separate proposals for voters to decide in November. The proposals are:



1. Construction of security vestibules at the main entrance of all six schools at a cost of \$850,000. Approval of this proposal by voters would translate into a 1.23% increase in the tax levy, and that increase would become part of the base budget of the district moving forward. The reason the Board has chosen to present a proposal that would permanently increase the base budget is that once the construction of the security vestibules is complete, then the district will have additional funds available in the ensuing years to direct toward the many capital improvements that remain outstanding.
2. Provision of health benefits to full-time paraprofessional staff at a cost of \$950,000. Approval of this proposal would translate into a 1.3% increase in the tax levy, and that increase would also become part of the base budget of the district moving forward. About 15 years ago or so, the Board of Education and administration at the time made the decision to reduce all paraprofessional staff in the district to

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part-time status and eliminate health benefits for this employee segment. This was a cost-saving measure that the Board and administration believed necessary at the time. At present, Chatham is unable to compete with neighboring districts that offer full-time employment and health benefits to paraprofessional staff. As a result, it is challenging for us to attract and retain staff in this area. Paraprofessional staff play a critical role in providing support to our special needs students, as well as performing other key tasks that enable our schools to run. Approval of this proposal would provide greater stability to our students.

The public will have the opportunity to vote on the above proposals in November, and we will communicate more information to you as we near the general election.

Schools Reconfiguration

I have provided recommendations about a broad grade-level reconfiguration in the district at the [September 19](#) and [March 6](#) Board Meetings. The heart of the changes is the relocation of the third grade to Lafayette Avenue School and the relocation of the fifth grade to Chatham Middle School. We plan to implement these changes for the 2025/2026 school year. We are planning for the fall of 2025 due to the enrollments we currently have in grades K-5 and in order to have two full years to work through all of the logistics involved in relocating multiple grade levels in a single year. The reason we are undertaking this change is to implement a full-day kindergarten program for all students.

Full-Day Kindergarten

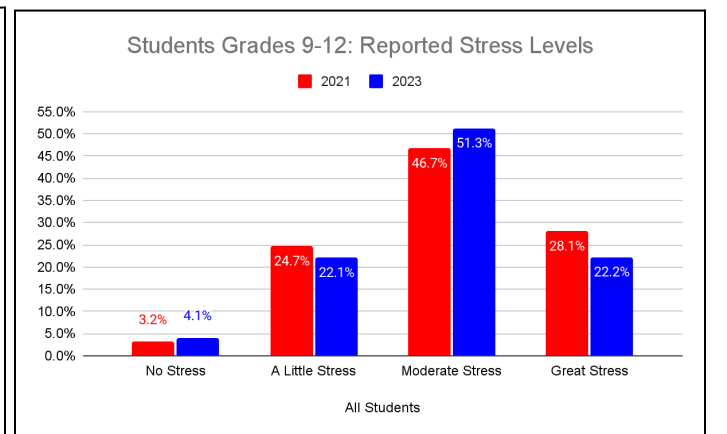
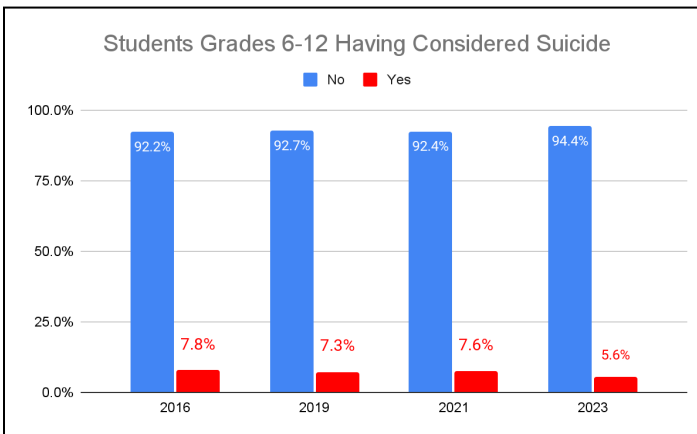
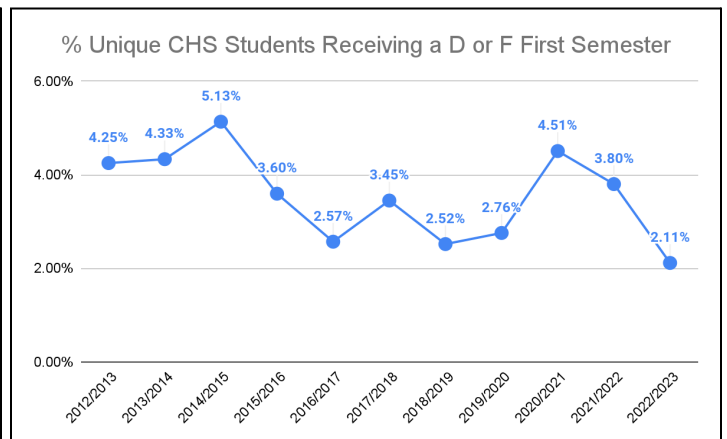
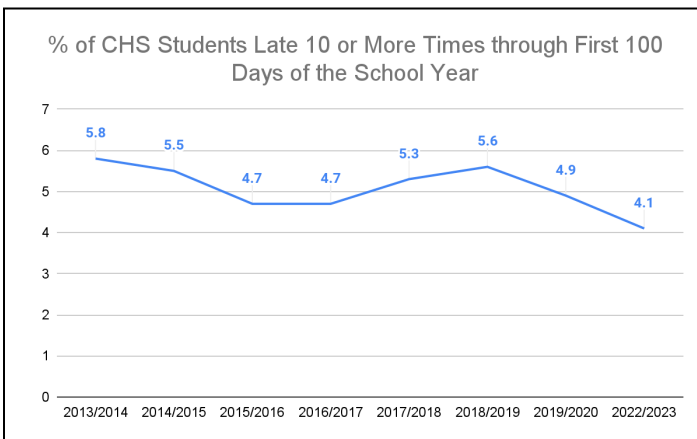
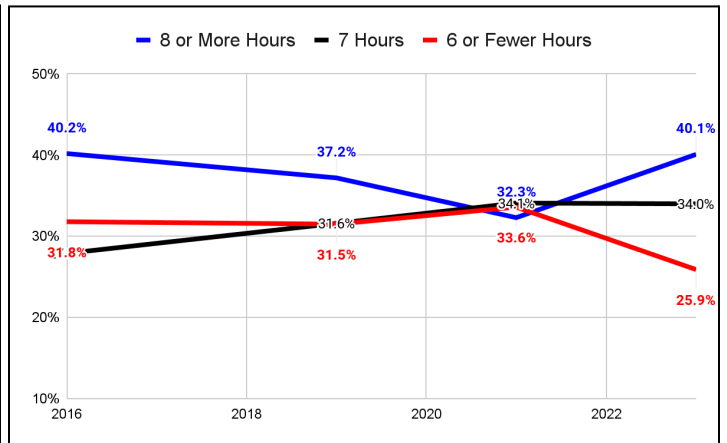
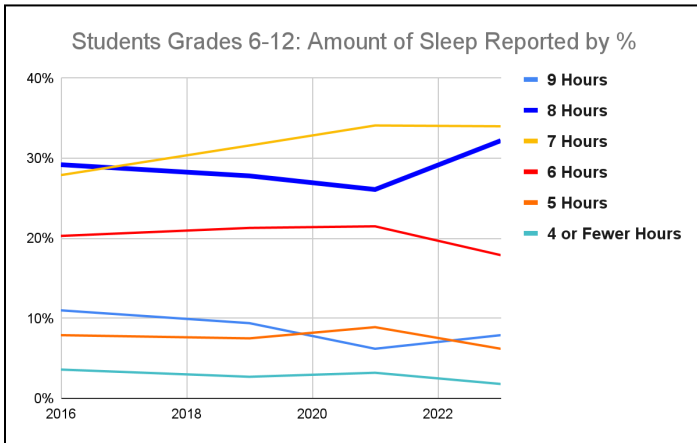
In my 11 years as superintendent, I have heard from many community members and parents who feel that full-day kindergarten is a luxury and unnecessary, in almost all instances because Chatham has never had a full-day program and their own children “did just fine” in a half-day program. We are fortunate that so many of our parents round out the experience of our kindergarten students and provide them with enriching experiences outside of school. However, a full-day program provides much greater learning opportunity within school, 95% of New Jersey districts now offer full-day kindergarten to all students (including all of our neighbors), and instituting a full-day program here in Chatham for all students will ensure a strong foundation for all students as they enter the district.

Website

We are currently transitioning to a new website provider and you will see this transition by June 30. The new provider, Aptegy, integrates web, mobile, and messaging services, and you will receive information about how to download the SDOC app and other features associated with the new website and provider.

High School Start-Time

I want to thank every parent for their flexibility and support in enabling the district to alter the daily start and end times of our schools this year. I have given three updates about this over the course of this year: see [October 17](#), [March 6](#), and [April 24](#) Board Meetings. The following charts depict some of the data we have collected this



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year in relation to years past. In short, our high schoolers are sleeping more and there are some other positive trends, even though of course altering the start-time at CHS is only one of many variables affecting the student experience. Nonetheless, I want to thank every parent for their flexibility and support with regard to these changes.

Work-Family Connection

On a final note, the Work-Family Connection continues to work with our district to provide before and after care to families of younger children. They have added a week of camp [here in Chatham](#) this year that will begin right after school lets out to provide an option for families inconvenienced by the earlier end of the school year, and they have [opened registration](#) for before and after school programs next year. If you are interested in these programs, please visit their website.

Thank you and I wish you a safe and happy end-of-year season!

Sincerely,

Mike LaSusa