

Flemington - Raritan

Regional School District

News & Notes from the Superintendent's Desk

September-November, 2011

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About News & Notes

News & Notes is brand new. It's all about our students and our team here in the Flemington-Raritan School District.

Together, we are all working hard, focusing on our tasks, meeting our deadlines and looking ahead to what will face us in the future. But as we embrace tomorrow's challenges, it is important to recognize how far we've come, how much we've achieved and how proud we are to be a part of this district. All of us play a significant role here at FRSD. Each of us contributes to every student's educational journey through our schools.

News & Notes celebrates achievements, highlights initiatives and shares our progress. But, more importantly, it showcases our students and our special teachers and staff members that make our schools outstanding and the reason I am so very fortunate to serve as your Superintendent.

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Harassment, Intimidation & Bullying Law: Making It Work

Last December, all of our administrators and I participated in a day-long introductory session to the new law governing the identification and response to harassment, intimidation and bullying. Just reading the definition of bullying created a great deal of anxiety in every one of us in the room. Act of bullying can include "any gesture and written, verbal or physical act or any electronic communication, whether it is a simple incident or a series of incidents."

Let me make this extremely clear that no administrator, teacher or staff member condones or accepts bullying as part of our school environment. We want our students to be safe and feel a strong sense of belonging in school and within the classroom. The root of our concern rested in the fear that we just wouldn't have time to follow the necessary steps to effectively implement the safeguards and procedures.

But, after taking a deep breath, we realized we had nine months to plan. Our next step was to begin by identifying key personnel and

developing training models.

In March 2011, administrators and counselors attended a county-wide training session. The more sessions we attended, the

more we learned and understood. Later in the spring, I named Tony DeMarco as the district's Anti-Bullying Coordinator and asked each of the school counselors to serve as Anti-Bullying Specialists.

Many meetings and training sessions were held throughout the summer months. Under the direction of Daniel Bland, Assistant Superintendent, a Task Force of district staff members met to discuss training models and develop forms. Our bus drivers, cafeteria aides and teacher assistants took part in training sessions as well. Our policy that governs HIB was revised and approved by the Board of Education.

Training for all staff members began the first day of school during a district-wide in-session program. Additional and more in-depth meetings were held later that week at each

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"Students don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

John Maxell

What does great classroom instruction look and sound like?

Let me begin by telling you about my visit to Donna Cherkezian's classroom at J.P. Case Middle School. There you will find a teacher who in four short weeks turned her classroom into a true learning community. The foundation for success in the classroom is

mutual respect. Ms. Cherkezian motivates her students by simply being positive. She recognizes and acknowledges students' efforts and encourages risk-taking throughout the lesson.

When Ms. Cherkezian began introducing personal

narratives she did so by telling a very true and emotional story in the most sincere and captivating style. The modeling she did was so effective and meaningful. How do I know? I asked her students if they would send to me their own

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Student Spotlight: Ryan McGibbon & Adam Bindas

J.P. Case Middle School student Ryan McGibbon has been recognized by the Weller Health Education Center for his outstanding efforts in raising awareness of Asperger's Syndrome. He created an informative presentation that he shared with his fellow peers to help educate others. He was also featured in a PBS anti-bullying special.

I had the pleasure of meeting Ryan and speaking with him about his desire and plans to raise awareness of Asperger's Syndrome. Ryan is an exceptional young man. During our talk, he was mature, articulate, thoughtful and respectful. I am very proud of Ryan for his efforts and achievements. He has demonstrated passion, strong character and great courage.

I also recognize School Counselor Colette Baills for encouraging, supporting and assisting Ryan in his efforts and in continuing to inspire students to do great things.

Another notable effort is one that benefited Desmares School. Hunterdon Central High School student Adam Bindas completed the construction of a greenhouse/shed for the garden at Francis A. Desmares School. Adam completed this effort as part of his Eagle Scout Project.

The greenhouse includes a cedar bench for

planting seedlings and storage for garden materials and equipment. The greenhouse/shed will benefit the students, staff and community of Francis A. Desmares School in the years to come.

I applaud Adam for his hard work, determination and perseverance in planning this project, securing funds and completing construction. I thank him for this addition to the Francis A. Desmares School. I also thank Adam's Unit Leader Richard Rainey and Unit Eagle Advisor Lawrence Ferrari and the many businesses, organizations and families that donated to this cause.



Above: Adam Bindas passes on the keys to the new greenhouse/shed he completed for the Francis A. Desmares School garden as part of his Eagle Scout project. Thanks, Adam!

Out & About

HCYMCA Board Meeting

On September 27, I had the pleasure of meeting and speaking to members of the Hunterdon County YMCA Board of Directors. The meeting was held at Desmares School and the members wanted to know more about the district's partnership with the Y. We reviewed the steps we've taken together to serve the children and future of FRSD.

First, let me say that Mr. Bruce Black, Executive Director of the HCYMCA, and I have a mutually respectful and professional working relationship. I expressed to his Board my appreciation for the patience his organization demonstrated as our District Advisory Committee studied the feasibility of operating a school-age childcare program.

In January 2011, our Board of Education, after careful study of the committee's findings, decided not to enter into the "childcare"

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Ms. Cherkezian, Ms. Fisher, Ms. Gleason ... (continued from Page 1)

personnel narratives and they agreed. Their stories captured their own emotions, happiness and enjoyment, creating a lasting memory.

Risk-taking is not only for students. Michele Fisher, a 4th-grade teacher at Robert Hunter School, demonstrated a great deal of confidence by having her students involved in an inquiry-based science lesson. Students were discovering that air takes up space and has weight. The twist to the lesson was that the students needed to develop the "test," as opposed to being given the procedures which would prove the existence of the two attributes of air—space and weight.

The teams set off to work and within 10 minutes, all had successfully developed the test. The lesson continued as the students completed the scientific method by recording the data. Well done!

Good teaching today may also be supported by technology. Let me clarify that not all good-to-great lessons need to contain a technology component. But, if technology is to be used it should be used because it is the best way to teach a concept.

Ashley Gleason, a Resource Center teacher at Copper Hill School, planned such a lesson. The objective was for the students to solve word problems in math using the eight-step model drawing procedure.

With the help of technology, Ms. Gleason introduced the method by having the steps pre-drawn on an iPad. She guided the students through several examples. The students never took their eyes off of the iPad. During my post conference, Ms. Gleason shared with me an original story problem the students wrote and drew using the iPad. The technology and applied differentiation in instruction during the independent portion of the lesson made good teaching come alive.

To date, I have conducted 14 formal observations. Every lesson and every teacher was extremely successful. I could write additional testimonials for each teacher. They were all creative and effective. As a parent, I hope these examples have raised your confidence level in the professionals that work with your children day in and day out.

Education Foundation Steering Committee

Our district has established a committee to research and report on the purpose, process, need and feasibility of establishing an Education Foundation.

The committee will identify benefits and risks of developing a foundation and will consider various aspects of such an effort, including a mission, membership, structure, operation guidelines, sustainability, and legal considerations.

Conclusions will be shared with the Board of Education in early 2012.

HIB Law: Making It Work at FRSD... (continued from Page 1)

respective school by the Anti-Bullying Specialist. Finally, our district launched an HIB web site for the public, our staff and administrators.

Throughout the fall, teachers and administrators did an outstanding job of educating our parents/guardians and, more importantly, our students. They defined what is and is not considered HIB, reinforced the importance of fostering a safe environment for effective learning to take place and clarified what to do if a student feels harassed, intimidated or bullied.

I observed, first-hand, student programs at many of our schools. They were developmentally appropriate and spoke to the dangers of HIB at each level; elementary, intermediate and middle school. Procedures are in place, we have conducted investigations at all schools and

we have followed the letter of the law.

While many hours were dedicated by our staff in every aspect of developing the FRSD model for addressing HIB, I must compliment our staff, our parents/guardians and our students for participating and cooperating in this initiative. Our students have done an outstanding job listening and applying their new learning. Principals have told me on more than one occasion that the biggest surprise related to the new laws has been the positive behavior and attitude students have exhibited in our classrooms toward our staff and their classmates.

It is early in the school year, but I am hopeful and optimistic that we will continue to succeed

in implementing the HIB law effectively in our schools. I thank all of you for your continued support of this effort.

“If we all lived the way we expected our neighbors to live, we’d have us a wonderful world.”

Will Rogers

Out & About

(...YMCA continued from Page 2.)

business by running its own before- and after-care program.

The YMCA came forward with a fair agreement that helped meet the district’s financial goals and obligations and still allowed the YMCA to provide supervision to our students to accommodate parents’ work schedules.

Later in the meeting, I shared different aspects of the agreement, reviewed the responsibilities of both the YMCA and FRSD and cited the open lines of communication that exist between the YMCA and our schools.

Several members of the YMCA Board are parents of students that attend our schools. They, too, expressed support and appreciation for the working relationship between our two organizations and shared specific examples of how families are benefiting from the new partnership and understanding that has been forged.

In Our District: Celebrating our Students, Staff & Schools

Congratulations to the Francis A. Desmares School Community in celebrating its 20th anniversary!

Mrs. Carol Howell, Principal; Mr. Mark Masessa, Assistant Principal; and the school’s anniversary committee planned an exciting and fun-filled assembly, which featured speeches from Dr. James Swalm, former district Superintendent of Schools, and Dr. James Gamble, the first Desmares School principal.

The celebration included photo montages that captured so many wonderful moments and memories in Desmares School’s history. Students proudly sang the school song and chanted the school cheer, while staff and students together shared what it means to them to be a Demares Dolphin. I applaud the members of the Desmares School community for its unity and pride as the school marked its special milestone.

I also attended two Veterans Day programs in our district. The students in Ms. Jane Roosa’s and Ms. Ashley Gleason’s classes at Copper Hill School interviewed veterans and wrote and

presented their veterans’ biographies during a special assembly. The students listened attentively, participated in a question-and-answer session and appreciated the opportunity to learn about veterans and their service to our nation.

At Reading-Fleming Intermediate School, I attended a comprehensive and thought-provoking assembly, organized by Team 6B. The *Veterans Talk* featured a history of Veterans Day, introductions to Purple Heart

recipients, personal accounts of military service, photos and discussion. Topics included patriotism, teamwork, loyalty and what students and citizens can do to support veterans.

I was honored to attend these programs, to be a part of the lifelong lessons in which our students participated and contributed and to have the opportunity to meet and thank those individuals who have served our country.



Left: At Copper Hill School, students in Jane Roosa’s and Ashley Gleason’s classes held a special assembly to recognize and honor veterans. Each student interviewed and wrote a biography about their veteran and presented an oral report during the program.