



Flemington-Raritan School District

Parent Newsletter



March, 2020 Edition 7

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LOOKING BACK ON THE MONTH OF MARCH

Over the past two weeks, I have missed the normalcy of life. I miss our students in our classrooms and our hallways. I am deeply saddened for the loss of experiences and opportunities that our students are encountering. Please know that our faculty and staff are here for our community. I ask that our students stay committed to the pursuit of their studies and daily learning, but also balance between their academic studies, their health and well-being and those of their family. Emotional well-being is just as important as academic well-being.

The past two weeks remind me of the weeks following 9/11. I remember vividly being home with my second child on September 11, 2001. I watched in horror the images on the television screen and read stories every day of families suffering significant loss. My day was consumed with taking care of my newborn son while worrying about our country, my family and friends, and my fellow neighbors. I was deeply saddened by the loss of life and the effects of the terrible attack on our country.

Soon after 9/11, my husband reenlisted in the Air Force Reserves. The eerie feeling I have now while in the grocery store and as I travel the roads between school and home are similar to how I felt back in the fall of 2001. I was nervous, a little frightened, definitely concerned, but determined to be a sense of calm for those around me and do all that I could to help others.

Over the weeks and months after 9/11, our country rallied. We were committed to supporting each other's health and wellness, those fighting for our country, and members of our community. In many aspects, there are similarities between our current reality and that of 9/11. As a community, we are committed to supporting each other, staying home, practicing social distancing, and checking in on each other virtually and through phone calls. Once again, our fortitude and resilience are what make this country so mighty and strong.

lives. Our schools continue to adjust to meet the needs of our students and our families. On March 30, President Trump extended social distancing through April 30 and told the American public that this could continue into June. At this time, I have no information about the re-opening of our school doors other than what has already been shared with the public.

According to the March 27, 2020 issue of [Education Week](#), President Donald Trump signed the coronavirus stimulus relief package, which "directs billions in federal funding to shore up K-12 education budgets, and also gives states and schools new avenues to seek waivers from federal mandates." According to the article, the stimulus relief package would provide money through the Title I funding to support a variety of learning needs under the Every Student Succeeds Act. Author, Andrew Uijfusa, wrote that despite the good news of the stimulus package, the stimulus "does not provide dedicated funding under the Federal Communications Commission's E-Rate program to provide internet services and internet-connected devices to students in need."

The District continues to problem-solve the lack of Internet connectivity to students' homes while our schools have shut our doors due to the coronavirus. Our District has been working with Verizon and Comcast Xfinity to support families without Internet in their homes. Comcast's CEO, Dave Watson, announced steps to keep people connected during COVID-19, especially when schools are closed to students. The company is offering Xfinity WiFi free for everyone with hotspots across the country. Click [here](#) to learn more and find out where the free hotspots are located in our community. Other carriers are also offering connectivity support during the COVID-19 pandemic. Brian Heater, the author of an article posted in Tech Crunch, provides more information [here](#).

If your family does not have Internet connectivity to support your child's online learning, please let your child's teacher or building principal know. Additionally, if you know of a neighbor or friend in our community who has difficulty with an Internet connection to support their child's virtual learning, please let us know so that the District can get in touch with the family.

COVID-19 UPDATES

The State of New Jersey Department of Health website found [here](#) provides up-to-date information on COVID-19. The pandemic continues to dominate our everyday

Grading Practices During Home Instruction

The new learning environment we are in has necessitated several adaptations. One of those is in the way students' learning is assessed. The District believes that academic learning continues to be important, despite the normal school routines that have been interrupted. Grading practices and reporting of student learning adaptations during home instruction are outlined below:



- The District will not issue quarter three report cards for grades 3 and 4.
- All students will be issued a Quarter 4/Trimester 3 report card as previously scheduled.
- All grade K-8 report cards will be modified to provide teachers with the option of "Not Graded." The mark of "Not Graded" is not a negative mark. In essence, it merely indicates that for reasons associated with the school closure or health crisis that there was insufficient evidence that the child had met the given standard (K-4) or course requirements (5-8).
- In grades 5-8, teachers will choose from the following marks in place of numerical grades:
 - Not Graded
 - Partially Met Expectations
 - Met Expectations
 - Exceeded Expectations
- In grades 5-8, teachers will not calculate "final" cumulative grades.

The Genesis parent portal remains open for grades 5-8 to provide information about assignment completion and student progress.

SUPERINTENDENT'S EQUITY COMMITTEE AND DEMOGRAPHER'S REPORT

At the March 9, 2020 Board of Education meeting, Dr. Richard Grip reported the results of the District demographer study. Statistical Forecasting completed the demographic study for our District, projecting grade-by-grade enrollments from 2020-21 through 2024-25, a five-year period. In addition, the following tasks were completed:

- analyzed community population trends and age structure, fertility rates, and birth counts,
- examined historical enrollment trends, both districtwide and by grade configuration (Pre-K-4, 5-6, and 7-8),
- investigated historical enrollment trends with respect to race and poverty status in each school and districtwide,
- computed student yields by housing type (e.g., detached single-family, townhouse/condominium, and apartment),
- researched new housing starts and the impact on the school district, and
- projected enrollments, in a totally independent analysis, based on student yields and housing turnover rates (resales) in Flemington Borough and Raritan Township.

Members of the public can find the demographer's presentation on the report [here](#).

DISTRICT 2020-2021 SCHOOL BUDGET

At the March 23, 2020 Board of Education meeting, I presented to the Board of Education the tentative school budget. The tentative budget is submitted to the Executive County Superintendent's Office to provide evidence that there are sufficient funds to provide curriculum and instruction, enabling all students to



achieve the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Members of the public can find the tentative school budget presentation [here](#).

The budget invests in Flemington-Raritan Regional School District students. We are committed to ensuring the District focuses on collaborative decision-making with members of the organization, where it belongs, and on giving teachers the support they need to teach the New Jersey student learning standards. By focusing the District's funding priorities on supporting students and teachers, we can usher in a new era of creativity and ingenuity and lay the foundation for building a culture of innovation.

Investing In Our Kids



Investing In Our Community

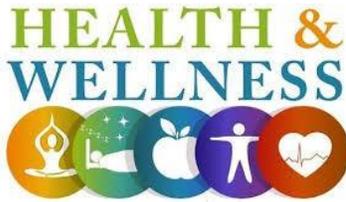
REFERENDUM AND FACILITIES WORK

On March 11, 2020, the Superintendent's Advisory Committee on the Referendum met to discuss the phases of the facilities projects scheduled to begin this April. At the meeting, Project Manager Mr. Paul Graebener, and the District hired architect, Mr. Rich Alderiso from DIGroup Architecture, discussed the tentative schedule for installation of the 21st Century communication system to be installed.

The upgraded telephone system will include new wall-mounted telephone receptacles and telephone handsets to provide personnel the ability to access any given phone while concurrently securing a room in the event that trouble is observed in the corridor. The telephone handsets will provide extra layers of emergency notification support for staff.

The L.E.N.S. (Lockdown Emergency Notification System) scheduling has begun with a plan to start installing the LENS components following the final day of school and continuing through the end of the summer recess. Pre-work for the installation has already begun. The L.E.N.S. system will be extended to serve remote exterior locations (at ballfields, bus-entrances, playgrounds, etc.) through the installation of pole-mounted or light-pole mounted strobes and horns.

As our schools are closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, some work continues to move forward. Referendum work includes a tree removal from the courtyard at Robert Hunter School and another tree removal at Barley Sheaf School. Both of these trees will be replaced with appropriately-sized trees to match the space of the surroundings. The District was still able to move forward with reroofing bids from interested contractors, despite the closing of our schools. Our referendum team and the Superintendent's Office are still operating on a timetable to keep the progress of the projects on schedule.



MENTAL HEALTH & WELLNESS SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS AND STAFF

Our district has created a hub of resources for families in need of mental health and wellness support. [Click here to access this valuable online tool.](#) The site includes links compiled by our district nurses on topics such as refilling prescriptions, financial assistance, food pantry access, and tips for talking to your child(ren) about the COVID-19 virus. In addition, our school counselors have shared resources for children who may be exhibiting signs of stress or anxiety during the day and outside school hours, including crisis hotline information and 24-hour support services. The link <https://www.smcore.com/qsn7f> provides information from our Director of Special Education, Dr. Danielle Hamblin.



NEW JERSEY SCHOOL PERFORMANCE REPORTS

The New Jersey Department of Education released the 2018-2019 School Performance Reports. Members of the public can find that link [here](#). According to the State of New Jersey, the New Jersey School Performance Reports are provided to parents, students, and school communities to provide information about each school and district.

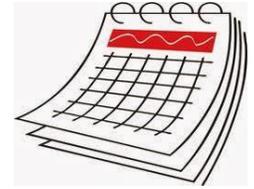
The District met all State Standards in English Language Arts, Mathematics, and Chronic Absenteeism in all student groups. The District exceeded State Standards in mathematics in two subgroup populations; Black or African American and Asian, Native Hawaiian, or Pacific Islander.

The District reports the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District has a total of 3,126 students, with 18% of students identified as economically disadvantaged, 20.4% of students identified as students with disabilities, and 5% are English Language Learners. The student to teacher ratio is 9:1 with the average number of years of experience at 13.5 years. The enrollment data for the district represents the data reported at the end of the school year and only includes those students attending the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District.

Over the next few weeks, parents will be receiving the 2018-2019 New Jersey Student Learning Assessment individual science assessment reports through post office mail for children who were in grades 3-8 during the 2018-2019 school year. If you have a question about your child's education, I encourage you to contact your child's building principal to learn more and have conversations about the high-quality

education your child receives in the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District.

DISTRICT CALENDAR UPDATES



At the April 6, 2020 Board of Education meeting, it will be recommended to use one of the scheduled contingency dates of April 8 or April 20 as a student learning day to meet the 180-day requirement of instructional days. One contingency day was used on March 16 as the District needed to use one of the scheduled contingency days to prepare for virtual learning to begin the following day on March 17.

Governor Murphy's announcement on March 26, 2020, informed the public that the decision to reopen schools rests with him. To quote Governor Phil Murphy, *"Let me be clear: The decision to reopen school districts rests with me. We will not be prepared to review the closure until at least April 17th, at the very earliest. The decision to reopen will be based on careful discussion with our public health and safety experts, and with our educators and districts."* The very earliest we can hope for reopening would be after the Governor revisits school reopening. Governor Murphy advised us that the earliest this would be is April 17. However, we recently heard President Trump announce social distancing would continue through April 30, 2020.

The District will maintain the previously scheduled spring break for students and staff. Following the Board of Education meeting on April 6, the spring break dates will be announced beginning **on Thursday, April 9, and continue through Sunday, April 19, or begin on Friday, April 10 and continue through April 20. Home instruction will not take place for students during spring break.**

The Flemington-Raritan Regional School District does its best to align with Hunterdon Central High School's calendar to support families with children in grades K-8 and 9-12. Before school calendars are published and recommended to the Board of Education, Hunterdon Central's Superintendent and I plan to ensure that siblings have the same winter break and spring break. A consistent spring break between Flemington-Raritan Regional School District and Hunterdon Central is important for many reasons, one of which includes shared bussing.

We also talk together about the beginning of the year and end-of-year dates. We don't always match exactly, but we try to come as close as possible.



SURVEY FOR PARENTS

The district seeks input from parents about our schools and the education of our students. It is the intent of the Board of Education and the Superintendent to improve student achievement, the working and learning environment and the professional

opportunities provided to the staff. At the links below is the 2020-2021 school district climate survey. Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey and provide your comments and suggestions.

The New Jersey Department of Education supports school surveys. According to the Department of Education, many districts have been using school surveys to reinforce positive conditions and address vulnerabilities for learning. The District provides a link for an electronic version.

Unlike last year, this year, the District seeks survey data from our students. The student survey is for all students. The surveys are labeled to identify the appropriate survey for elementary and middle school students. The elementary survey is identified for K-6 students. The middle school survey is for students in grades 7 and 8. The New Jersey Department of Education provides the questions for the survey and is a State-approved survey for students and community members. We would appreciate your child's participation in completing the student survey. Responses will be collected through April 20. [Reference Board of Education Policy 9128-Climate Surveys](#)

Please click to complete the 2019-2020 School Climate Survey:

- [Parent Survey](#)
- [Student Survey \(Elementary/Intermediate School\)](#)
- [Student Survey \(Middle School\)](#)



NATIONAL CENSUS

The United States Census Bureau is the federal government's largest statistical agency dedicated to providing current facts and figures about people, places, and economy in the U.S.

The U.S. Constitution requires that a complete count be taken every ten years of every person living in the 50 states, District of Columbia and the five U.S. territories. April 1, 2020, is Census Day. Participation is critical. The data collected determines how many representatives each state gets in Congress, how much federal funding each state receives, and is used to redraw district boundaries. Data is private and protected and cannot be shared with law enforcement or other governmental agencies.

Households received detailed information on how to respond to the 2020 Census survey online, by phone (in 12 different languages), or by mail. Only one person must respond per household.

Please visit <https://2020census.gov> or www.raritan-township.com for more information or contact Lisa Fania, Municipal Clerk, Raritan Township, lisa.fania@raritantwpnj.gov, 908-806-3682.



SUPERINTENDENT'S ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION

The Superintendent Roundtable discussions are an open forum for community discussion on topics that are on the minds of our community members. The March Superintendent's Roundtable discussion met at Francis A. Desmares Elementary School on the evening of March 10, 2020. At the March Superintendent Roundtable, I spoke with attendees about school security and the COVID-19 outbreaks just beginning to affect the United States. We talked about student mental health and supports in place for students. The session focused on the interests of those in attendance, but also a few topics of interest I shared with those that attended.

Dates alternate between school locations and evening and morning times to try to accommodate community member's schedules. Check the district website [here](#) to register for a session. As our schools remain closed, upcoming roundtable discussions will change to a virtual format.

APRIL IS WORLD AUTISM MONTH **Light It Up Blue – April 2**



A Favorite Article I Recently Read:

I am consumed with reading tips about online learning and how to support families at home. Recently I read an article in The New York Times. A favorite quote from the article, "I want to send a message to parents, and in particular to working moms, who will inevitably take on most of this home labor along with working remotely: This is going to be messy, and that is OK." You can find the wonderful author, Jennie Weiner (University of Connecticut), in The New York Times, March 20, 2020, <https://nyti.ms/33U1mmq>. Her article is titled "I Refuse to Run a Home School."