



Flemington-Raritan School District Parent & Community Newsletter



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MARCHING INTO SPRING

The tastes of springtime weather earlier this month brought with it warmer temperatures, blooming daffodils, and the slightest bit of color on flowering trees around campuses. To some, springtime represents new beginnings and a season of change. Longer days, more chirping birds, the lovely sight of newborn goats and lambs that can be seen in the many fields around Hunterdon County are all signs of spring that make students wonder about our beautiful world.

A daytime walk around any of our campuses will highlight some traditional signs of springtime. Robert Hunter School and Copper Hill School have trees that are beginning to bud in their courtyards. Barley Sheaf School's front walkway is lined with pops of spring daffodils sprouting. Reading-Fleming Intermediate School's sign at the front of the building has little buds of hyacinth just popping their heads from under the soil. J.P. Case Middle School's spring athletic fields have new clay on fields and grass areas spruced up in anticipation of the spring season. Francis A. Desmares School is beginning to show signs of springtime growth with buds growing from the soil and new foliage on bushes and shrubbery. All around the community springtime yellow forsythia has blossomed. The weather, while a bit colder lately, has still provided the warmth that springtime flowers needed.

Inside our classrooms spring prompts conversations about our world. As kindergarten students participate in morning routines with the calendar and weather reports, they wonder about "Why is it usually cooler in the morning than in the afternoon?" or "Why is it snowing in springtime?" Older students may wonder why selected stars are only visible from New Jersey in winter months and seem to have drifted below the horizon unable to be seen, whereas only a month ago they were seen high in the nighttime sky.

Our curriculum assists students to understand the wonder behind the seemingly mysterious happenings in our world. As they discover about the Earth's place in our universe, they are taught using science standards from the Next Generation Science Standards, or NGSS. The NGSS layer crosscutting concepts throughout the grades to build understanding about our science practices, core ideas, and crosscutting standards. The science learning experiences are designed to foster wonder and inquiry throughout the year. Students in the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District experience science instruction linked to real-world experiences.

Beginning in [kindergarten](#) students learn about the patterns in the natural world to describe phenomena. Middle school students build on the learning from elementary and intermediate school to understand time, space, and energy phenomena. In [grades 6-8](#), New Jersey's adoption of Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) allows for students to explore themes such as [Earth's Place in our Universe](#). Students learn about the cyclic patters of lunar phases, eclipses of the sun and moon, and seasons. Models are typically used to help explain patterns and cause-and-effect relationships of the seasons, the rotation of the planets, and explain how some events happen very quickly and others occur very slowly, over a time period much longer than one can observe.

When I taught second grade a favorite field trip during our astronomy unit of study was to the Raritan Valley Planetarium to see the Magic Tree Houe Space Mission. My students would travel with Jack and Annie to discover answers to questions they had about the Sun, Moon, planets, and more. Raritan Valley offers shows to the public throughout the spring months. Find April's schedule [here](#). It's a great family activity on a weekend when the weather might not be too cooperative for outside fun.



ENROLLMENT TRENDS AND RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION UPDATE #3

One of the Board of Education's goals is to continue to build on collective knowledge and understanding of equity and diversity in the education environment through professional development, policy, budget, curriculum formulation and strategic planning. A Flemington-Raritan Regional School District goal is to continue to work toward reducing and eliminating inequities within our educational system, including professional development; meeting with the equity advisory committee and supporting the Three-Year Comprehensive Diversity, Equity, and Opportunity Action Plan.

With these goals in mind, the Superintendent's Equity Ad Hoc Committee has been meeting regularly to analyze the growing disparities in school enrollment and the lack of instructional space in some schools which inevitably leads to larger class sizes. Growing disparities in school enrollment and the lack of instructional space in some schools may result in the

inability to implement instructional programs using the same activities and materials. The inability to implement instructional programs will result in a lack of equity in programs.

The Superintendent's Equity Ad Hoc Committee has been reviewing housing development data and enrollment. This school year, the Ad Hoc Committee met in November, December, January and twice in March and is scheduled to meet again in the beginning of April. I share my sincere appreciation to the members for their powerful thinking!

My appreciation to the Superintendent's Equity Ad Hoc Committee Members for their time and energy:

Hanan Attiyah	Pamela Baker
Kristen Boyce	Amanda Fernandes
Karen Gabruk	Dan Bland
Yvonne Patel	Brad Currie
Ana Washington	Jesse Lockett
Laura Hernandez	Lindsay Shirvanian
Julie Bell	Lilian Colpas
Lori Castronuovo	Murty Varanasi
John Giotis	Megan Pacyna
Nydia Peake	Jessica Braynor
Meredith Weil	Ariej Dawood
Melanie Rosengarden	Mark Masessa
Robyn Fatooh	Amy Switkes
Melissa Bentley	Josue Penaloza
Marie Corfield	Jessica Alonso
Dawn Hlavsa-Suk	Julia Whitley
Katherine Rayburn	

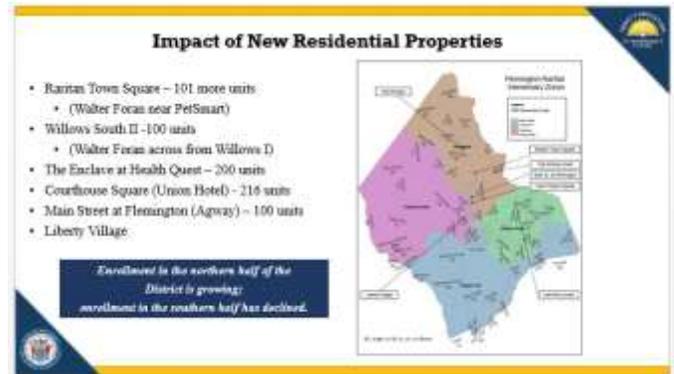
Disparities in school enrollment have been fueled by the growing new construction in the northern end of the community. Housing developments in the northern section of our community will impact our district enrollment and school total enrollment. The graph below shows the changes in enrollment over the years. Francis A. Desmares School has grown consistently in enrollment since 2017. Copper Hill School has experienced the greatest decline in enrollment, but has been relatively stable since 2016.



Members of the Equity Ad Hoc Committee have reviewed the number of units under development in seven new residential

properties, and recently learned about an eighth property planned. The seven new residential properties that are under approval, development, or study are:

- 1) The Cain/Altra Townhomes,
 - 2) Raritan Town Square Apartments,
 - 3) Willow South Apartments;
 - 4) Courthouse Square Apartments;
 - 5) The Enclave Apartments;
 - 6) Main Street Flemington Apartments;
 - and 7) Liberty Village (A Flemington Borough Town Council ad hoc committee has been approved to study the possibility of Liberty Village redevelopment.)
- An eighth additional development is planned near Walter Foran Blvd. with projections to be essentially those of Raritan Town Square next to PetSmart. The newest development is not shown on the map below.



The Committee has done an excellent job working through the data and providing input to the Superintendent. Members of the Committee provided input using a Google Survey and spent hours collaborating in small groups while reviewing data. Data results from the Google Survey were reviewed by the entire committee at the second meeting in March. The entire committee recommended redistricting to address growing disparities in enrollment and building capacity issues, especially at Francis A. Desmares School. A sample of the recommendations by the committee include the following:

- Address functional capacity issues especially at FAD;
- Review and address the functional capacity disparity between Copper Hill School and other elementary schools;
- Address special education disparity in buildings;
- Address and balance the percentage of economically disadvantaged student enrollment among schools; and
- Address and balance the percentage of English as a Second Language student enrollment among schools.

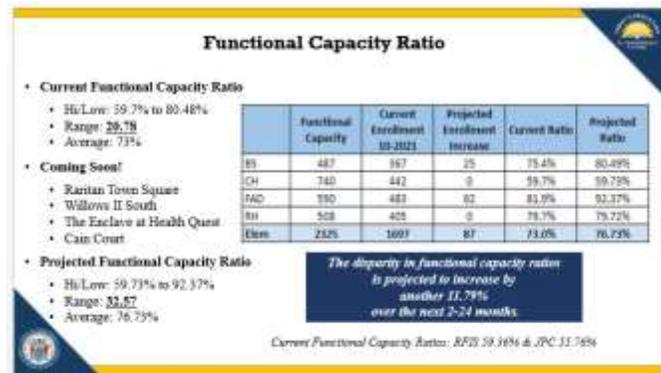
Much of the conversation of the committee has been how to address the growing enrollment at Francis A. Desmares Elementary School and reduce the functional capacity percentage.

“Functional Capacity is defined by the [New Jersey Department of Education](#), as the number of students that can be housed in a building to provide sufficient space for the building to be educationally adequate for the delivery of programs and services necessary for student

achievement of the New Jersey Student Learning Standards. Functional capacity is determined by dividing the adjusted gross square footage of a school facility by the minimum area allowance per FTE student for the grade level students contained therein.”



One should not assume that buildings are fully utilized unless they are at a 100% functional capacity ratio. This is an incorrect assumption. Francis A. Desmares School is already at 92% capacity and there are no additional classrooms available for instruction. The goal is for functional capacity to be at a ratio that provides ample space for programs and class size to meet that of our [District Regulations on class size](#).



The Equity Ad Hoc Committee is in the final stages of proposals and decision-making. We recognize that the possibility of changing elementary schools can create worry over the anticipation of attending a new school. Information about specific families that will be affected as a result of redistricting will be shared with individual families no later than the beginning of May.

As per Board of Education policy, the District makes every effort to reassign children only once during their elementary school years. In the months of April, May, and June the district will include a multitude of activities to ease the worry of families and students that will be affected by redistricting. The District will provide the following:

- School and district newsletter information in the months preceding any redistricting;
- School-based parent “question and answer” programs;
- Assignment of small groups of redistricted students to the same new homerooms the upcoming fall;

- Involve staff from both schools in the placement of students;
- Discussion at Superintendent Talk-a-Latte Events
- Continued work with the Superintendent’s Equity Ad Hoc Committee.

To keep the community advised of the new residential properties and adjustments the District must make, the [December](#) and [January issue of the Community Newsletter](#) featured information on enrollment trends and residential construction. [A link on the District’s website](#) is also available to provide information.

Below are the numbers for students registered for Kindergarten NEXT YEAR so far in each school. These numbers are definitely early, low, and will change, but... this is where they sit today. As the district finalizes redistricting, kindergarten families that registered for school in a building may be shifted to another building.



- Barley Sheaf Elementary School: 59
- Copper Hill Elementary School: 62
- Francis A Desmares Elementary School: 73
- Robert Hunter Elementary School: 57
- Total Enrollment to date: 235

COVID-19 UPDATE

The New Jersey Department of Health provides a communicable disease site with all COVID-19 weekly CALI reports. You can find that link [here](#). The Hunterdon County Department of Health reports that there are on average, about 12 cases per day, not including home-tests, with a county-wide seven day average that has leveled. Testing and vaccinations are still available through Vault testing. Appointments can be made by calling (908) 237-4230.

As of March 19, according to the [CDC](#), the seven-day moving average of U.S. COVID-19 cases was 27,747, down nearly 18% from a week earlier. Most of the country is considered to be in low COVID transmission, according to new CDC guidelines introduced last month that emphasized hospital capacity over case counts and most people were advised they no longer need to wear masks indoors. Governor Murphy stated on Friday, March 4, that the State would host its final public health emergency briefing. “As coronavirus moves from pandemic to endemic, and as we transition away from crisis management to a more normal way of life, it is the right time.”

The District will continue to collaborate with the Hunterdon County Department of Health, as required by New Jersey Code. District nurses will report individual positive cases in the Surveillance for Influenza and COVID-SIC Module in the Communicable Disease Reporting and Surveillance System (CDRSS). The District will continue with surveillance of

positive cases of COVID-19 as required by all legal mandates. Case investigation and contact tracing for COVID-19 in school buildings will be influenced by community factors such as a high level of infection cases and three or more cases linked together in school settings. The District counts on the partnership with our health department to focus efforts on case investigation and contact tracing in specific settings and groups at increased risk. As explained on the [CDC website through key points](#), “universal case investigation and contact tracing are not recommended for COVID-19.” The District will continue to utilize COVID-19 prevention measures and support broad-based efforts to notify people of a potential exposure, but we will not exclude students from school unless mandated by the Department of Health to do so. The District continues to be required to test unvaccinated staff per [Governor’s Executive Order #253](#). Remote learning will be used on virtual emergency days only in accordance with N.J.S.A. 18A:7F-9.2 and [State Legislature](#). We’re so pleased to take the next steps to move forward from the pandemic.

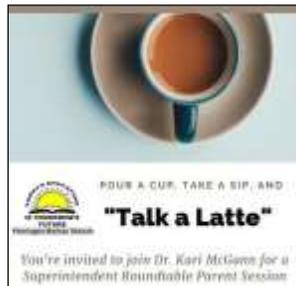
SUPERINTENDENT'S LUNCH BUNCH

I had the pleasure of having lunch with a group of 4th-grade students from Robert Hunter School a few weeks ago. This group of students was very interested to learn about how the school district functions and how decisions are made. We talked about the business of a school district with one student initiating the discussion by saying, “Let’s get down to business!” He prompted the start of the conversation by asking about how start times are decided and who makes the decision to hire people at the school. (Did you know there is a new bill that proposes later start times for high school students? If passed, the new bill [\(A3816\)](#) would go into effect at the start of the 2024-25 school year. You can read more [here](#). The legislation would not impact elementary and middle school students.) Further into the conversation with Robert Hunter 4th-graders, our conversation blended into needs versus wants and how to prioritize how the district chooses to allocate funding. At one point during the conversation a student commented saying, “This is hard!” after a back-and-forth occurred between students on where to spend funding. I look forward to my next lunch bunch scheduled to take place this month at Barley Sheaf School. Students are invited to attend by school administration and guidance counselors.



APRIL "TALK A LATTE"

The next "Talk a Latte" Superintendent's Roundtable Discussion will be held on April 7, from 6-7:30 p.m. at Francis A. Desmares School. The intent of this session is to have an open dialogue with community members about issues that are important and on-the-mind of Flemington-Raritan residents. [Please click here to register and reserve a seat.](#)



WHOLE CHILD RESOURCE FAIR

The Department of Special Services is hosting a Whole Child Community Resource Fair on April 12 from 6:30-8 p.m. at Reading-Fleming Intermediate School. Join the educators of the Flemington-Raritan School District and various community agencies for an evening of informational and educational resources for families and to support students in their educational journey. To view a list of community resources and to learn more, click [here](#) and [here](#).

TECHNOLOGY SURVEY

Earlier this month the Assistant Superintendent’s Office shared with parents a survey to gather information about the availability of technology in students’ homes. The information is being gathered to support an application for a federal grant. If you haven’t yet completed the survey, please take a few minutes to support the district’s application for federal funding. For the English survey, [click](#) here; for the Spanish survey, [click](#) here.



MIND FULL, or MINDFUL?

COVID-19 sent mental health into a freefall, according to a research analysis in the journal JAMA Pediatrics. According to JAMA Pediatrics, “In the early days of the pandemic, children and teens in the United States and around the globe experienced widespread anxiety and depression, driven by an increase in isolation and screen time and a decrease in exercise and adult supervision. (The analysis also found that there was no significant connection between school closures and suicide in the early days of the pandemic.” However, two years later, many students are still struggling. In the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District we appropriated some of the American Rescue Plan funds to address mental health needs. Funds through the American Rescue Plan supported a district wellness initiative designed to support the social-emotional needs of students.

At Barley Sheaf: We purchased a wide variety of tools and resources, including fidgets, sensory bracelets, weighted lap pads, thinking sand, foot rollers and more! The school counselor is working with staff to determine which resources best support individual student and classroom needs. In addition, Barley Sheaf Elementary School utilized funds to purchase books that would further support students within their classroom. Each homeroom received copies of:

- My Magic Breath: Finding Calm Through Mindful Breathing by Nick Ortner and Alison Taylor
- Breathing Makes It Better: A Book for Sad Days, Mad Days, Glad Days, and All the Feelings In Between by Christopher Willard and Wendy O’Leary
- Mindful Kids: 50 Mindfulness Activities for Kindness, Focus and Calm by Whitney Stewart and Mina Braun to be used during Brain Breaks and Morning Meeting.

School Counselor Gina Collins and School Social Worker Renee Taft have organized lunch bunch groups. Additionally, students have been working in small groups to learn about managing emotions through mindfulness and self-care activities.

Students at Barley Sheaf School enjoyed a PTO sponsored Virtual Music Technology assembly with Brent Daniels. Through the engaging use of interactive music technology, Mr. Daniels shared the message of character education and how important a student’s education, great study habits, and positive decision-making are for his or her success in life and in any career.

At Copper Hill: Staff and faculty infuse mindfulness into the school community and classes in many ways. Mindfulness is

an important tool in students’ social-emotional learning toolkit. This year, Copper Hill Elementary has three new, exciting ways that they are incorporating mindfulness into students’ learning. First, students are working with Madeline the therapy dog. Madeline, Dr. Hamblin’s therapy dog, brings positivity and calm to our students through classroom visits and small group counseling sessions. She helps students to work on being mindful, present, compassionate, and reduce anxiety. Second, students are using a new Social and Emotional Learning curriculum titled CharacterStrong. Character Strong’s lessons feature a mindfulness component that connects to each character trait of the month, helping students to practice mindfulness while generalizing strategies to connect with topics such as kindness and perseverance.



Additionally, students have been participating in a series of workshops and assemblies by Shanna Truffini using her program, You Are a Gardener. Shanna Truffini will be holding grade level workshops with students this spring based on her program and book called “You Are a Gardener,” which helps students to build mindfulness skills and emotional resilience through gardening as a metaphor for your social-emotional health, and will lead activities such as mindful breathing and movement with our students.

In addition to these three new strategies, Copper Hill continues to hold Town Hall meetings each month, focusing on a character trait and strategies for being mindful and empathetic. Students also continue to receive individual and group mindfulness strategies through individual and group counseling sessions, such as lunch bunch groups.

At Desmares and Robert Hunter: Desmares and Robert Hunter students will take part in LIVE virtual mindfulness lessons presented by members of the Pratyush Sinha Foundation. Students will participate in eight, 20-minute lessons, one time a week, for eight weeks. This is an initiative that started last year, and we are so glad that we are able to continue to integrate mindfulness into the school to support our students’ emotional health and well-being. The team of presenters at the foundation are a fantastic group of experts who are very well prepared with engaging activities.

At Reading-Fleming Intermediate School: RFIS has been strategically implementing mindfulness practices since 2017. In that time, RFIS staff have participated in four different mindfulness professional learning communities. This has resulted in mindfulness being embedded into daily instruction and practice throughout the school. Mindfulness is also included within our current social-emotional learning lessons which occur every Wednesday during extended homeroom times. Staff and students have access to mindfulness tips and strategies through a number of easy to access online platforms. Please be sure to visit the [Student Self-Care Lounge](#) which

includes a [Mindfulness Room](#). These and other resources can be found on the [RFIS Counseling Office Website](#).

At J.P. Case: J.P. Case has created opportunities for students to strengthen their mental health, social-emotional well-being, and school life experience by restructuring Lunch/DEAR to foster student agency in specialized programs and enrichment activities. These include SEM Passages, indoor recreational activities, outdoor recreational activities, board game challenges, recreational reading, creative expression activities, social-emotional learning groups offered by school counselors, and team building games. These activities help to promote a culture of acceptance, physical and emotional strength and academic curiosity.

OPPORTUNITY & ACCESS IN STEM

Research shows that students who are engaged in STEM by the time they are adolescents are more likely to pursue the field as adults. “Young kids are, all on their own, completely committed to being excited and interested in STEM topics,” reported David Evans, the former executive director of the National Science Teachers Association. “The sad thing is, if there isn’t good support in schools, they lose that by the time they get to middle school.” The Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), which have been adopted in 19 states and the District of Columbia, ask students to learn and think like scientists and build connections across the science fields. The standards seek to fully integrate knowing and doing in the classroom. The District’s science supervisor, Mrs. Kristen Wolff, received a \$2,000 grant from the New Jersey Research and Development Council/NJ STEM Pathways Network to promote STEM education. We are looking forward to using these funds to support STEM opportunity and access.



GRANT AWARDED TO J.P. CASE

J.P. Case Middle School has received a \$1,500 grant from Unified Champion Schools (UCS). The funds will help students participate in the Special Olympics New Jersey UCS program. The program engages districts as partners in creating inclusive school communities. Students have equal access to meaningful opportunities to participate in educational, social, co-curricular, and athletic experiences where they feel connected, positive, and safe. Through SONJ funding, J.P. Case can provide educational, social and leadership opportunities for students through a Unified Club. The goal of the club is to increase acceptance of all students, and to raise awareness of the uniqueness of individuals. Funds will be used to purchase t-shirts for club members as well as board games and sports equipment. In addition, the teachers of

the Autism and Life Skills program are coordinating a disabilities awareness event and will use funds to purchase materials for event activities.



VIRTUAL JOB FAIR

On March 23, our District participated in a virtual job fair held in partnership with the Central Jersey Program for the Recruitment of Diverse Educators. Our administrators and human resources team connected with 75 interested applicants who are seeking employment in our schools. Our virtual booth featured student photos, school and district links, online resources and a list of anticipated job postings for next school year. Our staff interviewed candidates, managed chat rooms and answered applicant questions throughout the evening.

