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## A LOOK BACK AT APRIL...

The month of April was one like we have never seen before in education. The pandemic continues to chip away at life as we know it. The lack of connections, required social distancing, and fears we have about those we love, continue to have such a tight hold on our lives. Despite the worry and challenges that so many are facing, there were many celebrations during the month of April. Earth Day, Arbor Day, World Book Day, and various school spirit days were opportunities to continue to shine a light of hope and positivity for our students and families.

Meal distribution continues on a Monday-only schedule. A five-day supply of food was available for each eligible student. On April 20<sup>th</sup>, we distributed 990 meals, including breakfast and lunch meals. Pick up was available again this past Monday, April 27<sup>th</sup>. A total of 2,290 breakfast and lunch meals were distributed.

There is still work to do and hurdles to jump before we cross the finish line. We await the governor's announcement concerning the remainder of our school year, so stay tuned over the next few days. I have heard that he will make an announcement earlier than May 15<sup>th</sup>.

Today, Governor Cuomo of New York announced that New York City Schools would be closed for the remainder of the school year. Despite any notification from our governor about when our school doors will reopen, we are developing plans for re-entry with multiple scenarios; late-spring, summer, and fall. Any re-entry will follow Governor Murphy's Executive Orders.

I don't yet know if we will have to wear face coverings. I don't know if we will have to take temperatures before entering the building. I don't even know if we will be able to resume our regular routines. Despite the unknowns, we are planning for the worst and hoping for the best. We are taking steps to ensure our schools are clean and safe for everyone when the time comes for us to return and be together. I cannot wait for that day. It will be a celebration like no other.

## CONNECTIVITY

This month I facilitated a call with STEM Ecosystem leaders, Congressman Tom Malinowski, and Verizon leaders (i.e., Public Policy Law and Security leader, State and Governmental Affairs Verizon leader, the Northeast Regional Manager leader, to name a few) regarding digital equity and supporting economically disadvantaged students. This call

was very successful in that Verizon reduced the monthly access per line to the lowest amount available, \$34.99 per month. They also agreed that the school district could cancel the 12-month contract at any time. I am proud of this agreement and successful partnership.

A larger benefit in the partnership facilitation that occurred was the deeper conversation with Verizon leaders and that of our National STEM Ecosystem partners. Without the District's involvement in the STEM Ecosystem consortium, conversations with Verizon on a grander scale would not have occurred. The STEM Ecosystem partnership connected me with Vint Cerf from Google and Samantha Schartman-Cycyk from the Marconi Society and other global leaders to support our nation, and perhaps the globe on solutions. Our partnership with the STEM Ecosystems brought to the call a national advocacy for students. Conversations are just a beginning. However, I am hopeful that things will progress quickly.

As a reminder, there are a total of 89 ecosystems worldwide; we are one of the 89. It is my hope that partnerships with Internet providers, such as the one with Verizon, will support connectivity for all students. The link to the STEM Ecosystem website: [www.stemecosystems.org](http://www.stemecosystems.org) Here is a map that lists the STEM Ecosystems locations:  
<https://stemecosystems.org/ecosystems/>

## FACILITIES AND OPERATIONS AND REFERENDUM PROGRESS

The District continues to problem-solve and provide support to families during remote learning. You may see vehicles in school parking lots over the next week or so. Staff has been granted permission to enter buildings to retrieve additional materials in a safe and secure manner now that schools were closed through at least May 15<sup>th</sup>. The building principal manages access through a set schedule, and is on-site, monitoring interactions to comply with social distancing protocols. Our Director of Educational Facilities and Operations will be assisting in managing facility access.



Referendum work continues despite school closures. This week began tree removals from Robert Hunter Elementary School and Barley Sheaf Elementary School. Originally tree removal was scheduled for the week of spring break, but due to crane operator scheduling difficulty, the work was moved to last week.



A few photos of the tree removal proved to be somewhat nail-biting as the large branches swung precariously overtop Robert Hunter Elementary School. Nonetheless, Paul Graebener, (pronounced Gray-bener) Project Manager of the referendum work, was on site along with Mr. Shumate, and members of the team. Paul Graebener's office is located in the lower-level of Reading-Fleming Intermediate School.



Both courtyard trees were removed from Robert Hunter, and stumps are being ground away. Replacement trees, much smaller in size, were planted. In the rear of Robert Hunter, restoration of the site with new sod was completed and three new trees were planted. Robert Hunter Elementary School looks beautiful!

One exterior tree was removed from Barley Sheaf Elementary School and one tree in the courtyard as well, for a total of two trees removed from Barley Sheaf site. Two trees in the courtyard were pruned away from the roof, all supported by the referendum passing!



### Zoom Use Challenges for Schools

Schools across the country are using Zoom as a videoconferencing tool. [According to CNBC](#), Zoom reports usage is up and has added more videoconferencing users this year than in all of 2019. "The company added 2.22 million monthly active users in 2020, while in 2019 it added 1.99 million," according to the author, Jordan Novet while referencing Bernstein's estimates.



This week it was reported on [nj.com](#) that a New Jersey school district in Burlington County temporarily halted using Zoom due to a Zoombombing attack. I spoke with Superintendent Langowski, who shared the attack was a result of a student posting the classroom credentials on the social media site, Tik Tok.

On [April 14th, in a letter](#) to the community, I shared about an incident of Zoombombing at our April 6th Board of Education meeting. To date, we have zero incidents of our teachers' Zoom sessions being attacked. It is critically important that our students not share their classroom credentials with others outside their own classroom. I cannot minimize 100% of the risk for Zoombombing. I can only decrease the risk as low as possible. Reducing the risk of a Zoombombing attack requires that everyone adhere to strict safety guidelines and not share classroom credentials.

As the Superintendent of Schools, I will uphold all District policies regarding hate crimes and bias-related acts. If future incidents of Zoombombing occur and are deemed threatening or in violation of local, state, or federal law, the technology team, along with my office will work with the local police and the Hunterdon County Prosecutor's Office to further investigate the incident. Disruptive and offensive behavior is neither condoned nor tolerated in our schools, during remote learning, or while our school doors are open for traditional education.

To support our teachers, this week, our technology integrationist specialists (TIS) and our technology team are meeting with each teacher individually to double-check security settings. Our TIS team and technology team have met personally with over 200 staff members. Meetings will continue next week with staff to provide support for all Zoom settings. Initial reports from the technology team and our TISs are that our teachers are maintaining recommended Zoom security settings. Settings that do not present high-security risks, such as "private chat" are disabled during meetings so that students cannot privately message each other. Even this simple setting to allow students to private message each other or change their virtual background has been turned off. Please

talk with your children about the importance of privacy for all classroom credentials. The safety settings are enabled for everyone's protection.



### COVID-19 UPDATES

There have been many legislative updates regarding COVID-19 over the past five weeks. I have kept the District updated through my weekly updates and newsletters to include information about

standardized assessments, student attendance, board meetings, the length of school closures, and free and reduced food distribution.

I acknowledge that continued school closures are difficult for students, staff, families, and our entire community. The continued closure of schools is disappointing news for all of us: students miss their friends and teachers, and we miss our students.

Our prolonged closure raises questions for students and families. Will we reopen during the current school year? Can we return in the fall? Will we remain closed and continue remote instruction? Will we have a combination of both?

As we await the governor's decision regarding school closures for the remainder of the year, we are working to answer your questions as soon as possible. Our entire administrative team is working diligently to plan for a variety of scenarios, not only for the remainder of this school year but also for the summer and looking ahead to next fall.



### TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK

Next week, May 4-8, is Teacher Appreciation Week. If you have a chance, please pause and take a minute to thank a teacher(s). We also want to celebrate our fabulous, dedicated teachers and are going to solicit and post via our district Facebook page student messages of appreciation for teachers.

If you would like to participate, please email [lbruhn@frsd.k12.nj.us](mailto:lbruhn@frsd.k12.nj.us) a very short video of your child thanking a teacher or a photo of your child holding a sign expressing their sentiment. Feel free to include your child's first name only and the teacher's name in the body of your

email or in the video and submit your appreciation email by noon on May 8th.

We continue to support our students and families during this difficult time. We are committed to delivering the very best education possible in these unprecedented circumstances, and to doing all we can to support students' well-being. We are a strong community, and we will get through this together.



### 2020-2021 SCHOOL BUDGET PRESENTATION & PUBLIC HEARING

At the May 4th Board of Education meeting, I will share the 2020-2021 district budget. This budget makes an investment in Flemington-Raritan Regional School District students. As Superintendent of Schools, I am 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.

The Board of Education meeting is a public hearing and will be held virtually via Zoom. You can find the link to join the meeting [here](#). A final adoption of the budget is anticipated.

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*"In biology, nothing is clear, everything is too complicated, everything is a mess, and just when you think you understand something, you peel off a layer and find deeper complications beneath. Nature is anything but simple. To mess around with Ebola is an easy way to die." ~ Richard Preston from the book The Hot Zone, 1995. I'm not certain if this was the best time to reread this book. It's an oldie, but goodie, but sure has caused me to dream some crazy dreams!*

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