



Flemington-Raritan School District Parent & Community Newsletter

April, 2022 Edition 9

Editor in Chief: Dr. Kari McGann, Superintendent of Schools kmcgann@frsd.k12.nj.us
Co-Editor: Mrs. Laura Bruhn, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent lbruhn@frsd.k12.nj.us

SPRING HAS SPRUNG!

Spring has sprung and preparations are underway for the end of the school year. School activities planned are in full bloom to support students and families. The month of April was a busy month around the campuses of Flemington-Raritan Regional School District. School PTOs were supporting schools through multiple activities including spring flower sales at various schools in the District. The PTOs hosted multiple "Dine Out Nights" for families. "Dine Out Nights" are scheduled evenings where area restaurants donate part of their proceeds to a school PTO. For example, Copper Hill Elementary PTO held a "Dine Out Night" at Blue Fish Grill and Humdoo ice cream shop. Barley Sheaf PTO hosted a "Dine Out" in our community's new Chipotle restaurant.

Other activities were planned this month by the PTOs to bring families together. Robert Hunter PTO hosted a roller skating night for Robert Hunter families and students. Francis A. Desmares hosted a successful painting event. Reading-Fleming PTO organized a virtual Game U night, a free event for students. J.P. Case Middle School provided the opportunity for families to order Duck Donuts. Yum! All in all, our schools blossomed with festivities both during school hours and into the evenings.

I hope all families had the chance to enjoy the spring recess. We are looking forward to a jam-packed month of May beginning the month with Teacher Appreciation Week, more Dine Out evenings, orchestra and symphony concerts, cultural diversity events, basket auctions, and more. Please take notice that May 27th will be a school day for students. May 27th was originally planned as a school closure, but due to the snow closing on January 7, the day needs to be a school day in order to meet the 180-day New Jersey Department of Education student day requirement. Find out all the activities planned for May at the District activities calendar [here](#).

April 18-22 marked Public School Volunteer Week. We commend and thank our dedicated PTO officers and members, Education Foundation officers and members, homeroom parents, and all those who give of their time and energy to support every student, every day and every opportunity. We are grateful for all that you do, including coordinating and sponsoring fundraisers, school-wide events, student activities, author visits, family nights, specific purchases, building



enhancements and so much more! Your contributions are countless, priceless and endless! You are all appreciated.

TEACHING AND LEARNING STATE STANDARDS

During the month of April the State of New Jersey provided clarification to school districts regarding the 2020 New Jersey Student Learning Standards, specifically the Comprehensive Health and Physical Education standards. Family and community engagement is critical to the success of student learning. Flemington-Raritan Regional School District wholeheartedly promotes the engagement of parents and community members in the decisions that affect students. The New Jersey Department of Education does not "review, approve, or actively endorse instructional materials such as sample lesson plans, textbooks, software, or video in any content areas." According to the Department of Education, they do not mandate curriculum and material adoption is a local school district decision, based on local curriculum development.

The New Jersey Department of Education does require student learning standards be taught and teaching and learning are aligned to state standards. This requirement is reviewed through a New Jersey Department of Education process called the "NJQSAC," or New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum. The "NJQSAC" monitors and evaluates the compliance of a public school district's alignment to applicable state laws and programs. The system focuses on monitoring and evaluating a school district in five key components, one of which is instruction and program.

The Flemington-Raritan Regional School District curriculum documents are all available on the District website. You can access them by clicking [here](#). Parents can use the filter provided to locate curriculum documents by subject area or grade level.

Currently, our Health Curriculum is aligned to the 2014 standards, not the 2020 New Jersey Student Comprehensive Health and Physical Education standards. The State of New Jersey shared with school districts a reminder that the NJDOE recognizes and respects that some families prefer to have health-related and family-life topics addressed privately with their child and not through the school district. Flemington-Raritan Regional School District respects this opinion. Prior to implementation of new health standards taught, there will be communications with parents and caregivers to ensure they have an accurate understanding of what will be taught with

new standards required by the New Jersey Department of Education. In addition, as has been our practice for years, parents will be provided the opportunity to opt their child out of family life topics.

TALK-a-LATTE EVENT WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT

The next "Talk a Latte" Superintendent's Roundtable Discussion will be held on May 31, from 6-7:30 p.m. at Copper Hill Elementary 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.](#)

At the Talk-a- Latte event held at Francis A. Desmares Elementary School 12 parents/community members attended. Community members and the Superintendent talked about field trips, redistricting, and virtual learning. Parents that were present advocated for field trips returning to the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District to contribute to the overall development of students.



CULTURE AND CLIMATE SURVEY

In this newsletter, parents and community members will find the opportunity to submit a Culture and Climate School Survey. Information gleaned from school surveys support the District's efforts to harness what has been learned over the past two years and build a foundation that creates schools of kindness, compassion, and support. The District uses Survey Monkey, a survey platform, to turn feedback into measurable information to drive growth and innovation. The District seeks to gain feedback and insight to better serve students and their families.



Over 1700 companies used Survey Monkey to gather feedback from their customers. Companies such as Toyota, Honeywell, Headspace, Yeti, and others. Receiving feedback from families allows the District to easily measure staff, faculty, student, and families' satisfaction and experience. Responses are completely anonymous unless the survey responder wants to identify his/herself in the comments section.

The School Culture and Climate Survey was developed by the New Jersey Department of Education¹ who encourages schools to use the new and enhanced, comprehensive instrument developed in collaboration with the Rutgers'

¹<https://www.state.nj.us/education/students/safety/behavior/njscls/>

School Climate Transformation Project team. The survey will not only help schools to understand school climate needs and strengths from the perspectives of students, families, and staff, but will also provide insight into a school community's relationships, safety, sense of connectedness, teaching and learning, and measures of an equitable and supportive learning environment, including supports for social and emotional learning.

The School Climate Survey is a comprehensive instrument designed to help schools identify school climate strengths and needs, and use these data to create strategic plans to improve conditions for teaching and learning.

- Students are surveyed about their sense of belonging and connectedness to the school community. Students in elementary grades, K-6, are encouraged to complete the survey. A separate survey is available for students in grades 7-8, which is different than the survey for students in grades K-6. All students are encouraged to complete the survey with the assistance of a parent or caregiver.
- Faculty and staff are surveyed about responsive and affirming administration, supports that promote positive relationships, cohesion, and trust at work.
- School and district-level structures (e.g., policy, procedures, time) and supports (e.g., resources and professional development (that promote productivity and performance at work) are surveyed to ascertain information.
- Families are surveyed to understand if they feel supported and engaged and the quality of relationships between staff and parents/caregivers.

Research has consistently shown the importance of promoting a positive school climate*. As the central aim of schooling, it is important to note that positive school climate is related to student academic achievement. Positive school climates foster the physical, psychological, and social and emotional well-being of both students and staff. Promoting the overall well-being of all students and staff creates the conditions for effective teaching and learning and supports stakeholders' emotional growth².

In the past our school surveys have provided input on homework, the culture in our buildings, student learning, and more. Your feedback is important to us! 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 continuously improve student achievement,

² Bohanon, Flannery, Malloy & Fenning, 2009; Brand, Felner, Seitsinger, Burns & Bolton, 2007; Cohen, McCabe, Michelli & Pickeral, 2009; Hosford & O'Sullivan, 2016; Kutsyuruba, Klinger, & Hussain, 2015; Thapa, Cohen, Guffy, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2013; Wang & Degol, 2015. <https://njschoolclimate.org/>

the working environment, and professional opportunities provided to the staff. [Reference Board of Education Policy 9128- Climate Surveys](#)

Please take a few minutes to fill out the survey and provide your comments and suggestions. Surveys are available for parents, staff members, and students to complete by clicking [here](#). One student survey is for J.P. Case Middle School students (Grades 7 and 8) while the other student survey is for students in the elementary schools as well as Reading-Fleming Intermediate School (Grades K-6). Responses are due: May 17, 2022.

- [2021-2022 Climate Survey for Middle School Students](#)
- [2021-2022 Climate Survey for Elementary through Grade 6 students](#)
- [2021-2022 Climate Survey for Parents and Guardians](#)

REDISTRICTING UPDATE #4; **ENROLLMENT TRENDS AND** **RESIDENTIAL CONSTRUCTION UPDATES**

The Superintendent’s Ad Hoc Equity 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.

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

- | | |
|----------------------|--------------------|
| Jessica Alonso | |
| 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 Penalaza |
| Marie Corfield | Jessica Alonso |
| Dawn Hlavsa-Suk | Julia Whitley |
| Katherine Rayburn | |

My sincere appreciation to the members for their powerful thinking! This Ad Hoc Committee is a diverse group of

individuals representing many facets of our community. The committee has representation from the Board of Education, Raritan Township Committee, Flemington-Raritan Regional School District Administrators Association, PTO presidents, parents, faculty members, building administrators, Flemington-Raritan Education Association leadership, and District Diversity, Equity and Opportunity Coordinators.

The group participated in some heavy lifting diving deep in data on multiple evenings for hours at a time. While there was productive agitation on some evenings, the group analyzed carefully variables to drive toward previously established goals. They used data on housing developments, school enrollment, capacity percentages, and economically disadvantaged variables to develop proposals. Proposals were then analyzed again this week to provide strengths and challenges for each redistricting proposal.

Each proposal developed was analyzed with the capacity disparities in school enrollment that have been fueled by the growing new construction in the northern end of the community. Housing developments in the northern section of our community are already impacting our district enrollment and school total enrollment. Revisions in catchment areas, boundary lines in the community that designate where students attend school, are planned for September 2022. 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
- 7) Liberty Village.

(A Flemington Borough 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. Other developments planned for the future by community leaders are the Union Hotel and Liberty Village. Both of these planned developments were considered by the committee. The committee reviewed multiple proposals at the Equity Ad Hoc Committee meeting on Thursday, April 28, 2022.

The Superintendent’s Ad Hoc Committee recommended redistricting to address growing disparities in enrollment and building capacity issues, especially at Francis A. Desmares Elementary School. 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 Elementary 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.

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 adjustment the District must make, the [December](#) and [January](#) and [March](#) issues of the Community Newsletters featured information on enrollment trends and residential construction. [A link on the District’s website](#) is also available to provide information.

Specific information will be shared with affected families in early May.

TRANSPORTATION WOES DUE TO DRIVER SHORTAGES AND FUEL COSTS

Finding school bus drivers has been a longstanding problem for districts, but it’s been exacerbated by the pandemic and the widespread return to school. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, the National Association for Pupil Transportation, the National Education Association, and Education Week, the job opening rates for state and local



education has increased 168% between July 2020 and July 2021. The Federal Bureau of Labor Statistics’ monthly tracking of job openings in public education reports more than 446,000 jobs were open in June, and 460,000 in July, compared with less than half of those figures at the same point last year. Education Week reported this information in a recent article focusing on schools’ staffing shortages.

In a survey taken in March by HopSkipDrive,³ nearly four-fifths of school transportation professionals including superintendents, directors of transportation, and school transportation staff said the bus driver shortage was a problem for them. According to HopSkipDrive, “As one of the backbones of education, school transportation enables access to learning for all students. Transportation, much like the education system, is heavily affected by budgets and operational challenges.”

The cost of fuel is also a challenge for school transportation. Our school buses use diesel fuel. According to Statista reports or petroleum and refinery, “one gallon of diesel cost an average of 5.11 U.S. dollars in the United States. That was a price increase of over one U.S. dollars compared to the previous month and the highest average monthly price in decades.”⁴

Diesel prices have steadily increased since October 2020, with the latest surge seen as the world reacted to the Russia-Ukraine war. Statista references that the energy supply shortage and further fuel constraints are due to the Russia-Ukraine war. Data shared shows that diesel fuel retail prices per month in the U.S. from 2020-2022 show a sharp incline since the beginning of the 2022 year.

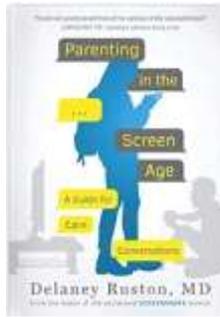
The District federal budget for the 2022-2023 anticipates budget stress in the area of transportation. The cost of route renewals, driver shortages, and fuel increases are all anticipated to increase line item expenses in the 2022-2023 budget.

BOOK CLUB INTEREST?

I am reading a book titled, [Parenting in the Screen Age](#), by Dr. Delaney Ruston, MD. The book features information on the impact of technology on students lives, specifically their health, happiness, and development. You can read more about this book [here](#).

³ <https://www.hopskipdrive.com/school-transportation-2021/>
⁴ <https://www.statista.com/statistics/204169/retail-prices-of-diesel-fuel-in-the-united-states-since-2009/#:~:text=Diesel%20fuel%20retail%20prices%20per%20month%20in%20the%20U.S.%202020%2D2022&text=In%20March%202022%2C%20one%20gallon,average%20monthly%20price%20in%20decades.>

The book is divided into chapters that focus on difficult issues like online social cruelty, sexting, and mental health. The author takes readers through scenarios and provides suggestions to talk to our children about tough topics and seeks to assist parents to talk with their child to create boundaries around Netflix, video gaming, and social media. The authors suggest that this book will help readers “lead your child to become more tech-wise and life balanced — empowering them to build a healthier relationship with our digital world, now and into their future.”



If you're interested in reading the book and gathering together with other interested readers to discuss topics featured in the text, please contact Mrs. Laura Bruhn at lbruhn@frsd.k12.nj.us to share your interest. Once we have a list of interested community members we will decide together in the format to meet, virtually or in-person, and our first meeting date.

SCHOOL BUDGET PRESENTATION 2022-2023

At the May 2nd Board of Education meeting, I will share the 2022-2023 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 will focus on addressing learning regressions, mental health supports, professional development for teachers, strengthening student learning, and creativity and ingenuity to continue to build innovative thinkers.



During the Board meeting, a public hearing on the budget will be held. The meeting is at 7 p.m. at J.P. Case Middle School. A final adoption of the budget is anticipated.

TEACHER APPRECIATION WEEK



Next week, May 2-6, is Teacher Appreciation Week. If you have a chance, please pause and take a minute to thank a teacher(s). We are committed to delivering the very best education possible.

SUPERINTENDENT'S LUNCH BUNCH

I had the pleasure of having lunch with a group of students from Reading-Fleming Intermediate School during April. We talked about our guests and what they did for the community. The group was joined by Raritan Township Deputy Mayor Robyn Fatooh, Sergeant Tim Nemeth and Police Chief Al Payne. The students shared that they are so happy to be in school and enjoy seeing their friends every day. The Reading-Fleming students shared that they enjoy school; specifically gym, recess, and math. A student shared that the thing she enjoys most about her school is the teachers. She shared that her teachers are very nice and she learns a lot!



SUPERINTENDENT'S SPECIAL SURPRISE

The McGann family recently welcomed a new addition – a Border Collie puppy! I was delighted to bring Andes (we call her Ann) to campus to visit students prior to the start of Spring Break. She certainly enjoyed the love and attention!

