



# Flemington-Raritan Regional School District Parent and Community Newsletter

October, 2021 Edition 3

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Hello, parents and Flemington-Raritan Community!

October is a beautiful time of year in Hunterdon County. The weather is mild, with cool evenings and just a hint of changing leaves. This is the time of year when I pull out my crock pot and forage for recipes that can simmer all day long. As we conclude our first full week of school last week, I want to take a moment again to share my appreciation on the marvelous response from our students and our staff on the return to school. Our teachers have created a climate of warmth, inclusion, and safety while also helping students get reacquainted with their classroom and school environment. The students are genuinely happy to see their friends and to engage with academics.

With the opening of school underway, students are settled into their school routines and instruction is humming along. Sports practices and games are giving our student athletes a chance to demonstrate character and strength. Thank you for your support and your trust as we near the end of September and celebrate a great beginning to our school year.

## **EXECUTIVE ORDER 253: SCHOOL EMPLOYEE VACCINATION REQUIREMENTS**

On August 23, 2021, Governor Murphy signed Executive Order 253 requiring all public school districts, charter schools, parochial schools, and private school employees to be fully vaccinated or submit to COVID-19 testing at a minimum of one or two times per week. Executive Order 253 is effective October 18, 2021.

[Executive Order 253](#), requires all public, private, and parochial preschool programs, and elementary and secondary schools, including charter and renaissance schools (“covered settings”), to maintain a policy that requires all covered workers to either provide adequate proof to the covered setting that they have been fully vaccinated or submit to COVID-19 testing at minimum one to two times weekly. This requirement shall take effect on October 18, 2021, at which time any

covered workers that have not provided adequate proof that they are fully vaccinated must submit to a minimum of weekly or twice weekly testing on an ongoing basis until fully vaccinated.

According to the Executive Order, “For purposes of this Order, “covered workers” shall include all individuals employed by the covered setting, both full and part-time, including, but not limited to, administrators, teachers, educational support professionals, individuals providing food, custodial, and administrative support services, substitute teachers, whether employed directly by a covered setting or otherwise contracted, contractors, providers, and any other individuals performing work in covered settings whose job duties require them to make regular visits to such covered settings, including volunteers. Covered workers do not include individuals who visit the covered setting only to provide one-time or limited duration repairs, services, or construction.”

Notice on the Executive Order that “covered settings” includes volunteers.

The Board of Education and Superintendent’s Office have developed Policy Guide 1648.13 that satisfies the vaccination and testing policy requirement in Executive Order 253.

Policy Guide 1648.13 must be supplemented by protocols to be developed by the district and included in Appendix A of Policy 1648.11 - [The Road Forward COVID-19](#) – Health and Safety. These protocols include, but are not limited to, the vaccination verification process, testing intervals, the testing confirmation process, and other protocols the district needs to include in Appendix A of Policy 1648.11.

The State may provide additional guidance on these requirements and if so, the Board of Education will revise Policy Guide 1648.13, if needed. A school district is required to comply with the provisions of Executive Order 253, therefore Policy Guide 1648.13 is a mandated policy.

At the October 11 Board of Education meeting, Policy 1648.13 with appendices will be presented for a first reading. A second reading and approval are anticipated at the October 25 Board meeting. Information from [The Road Forward](#) and the [New Jersey Department of Health Recommendations for K-12 Schools](#) both served as reference documents for the policy.

## SUPPORTING IN-PERSON LEARNING

We will continue to do all we can to ensure a safe school year. Strong masking and vaccination protocols, in tandem with other safety measures, are our best consolidated tool for keeping our schools open for full-time, in-person instruction. That is our united effort. The district supports measures that help to ensure the health and safety of our students, staff, and faculty in our united effort to keep students in school for full day, in-person learning

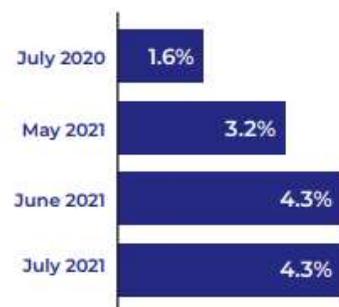
Governor Murphy announced his administration's plans to help school districts comply with the recently issued Executive Order 253 requiring all school district staff to be fully vaccinated for COVID-19 or be subject to regular testing for the virus. To assist school districts with this new requirement, the Murphy Administration will be utilizing funding provided through the federal American Rescue Plan, enacted earlier this year, to implement a free testing program that all school districts have the ability to take advantage of. The requirement goes into effect on October 18. A \$267 million grant has been made available through the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Using federal funding, the NJDOH is offering COVID-19 screening support to K-12 local education agencies (LEAs) and non-public schools (e.g., private, independent, parochial, or charter schools) for testing. In our effort to continue to support safe, in-person learning we are partnering with the New Jersey Department of Health (NJDOH) to receive federal funds for the testing program.

The testing program is designed to support school districts with maintaining in-person learning. This includes, but is not limited to, teachers, environmental and building service workers, substitute teachers, bus drivers, cafeteria workers, athletic coaches, or other adults in PreK-12 school buildings who regularly interact with students and have a contractual relation with the school or non-public school. Testing of students, with parental consent, may also be conducted under this program to assist families with testing services. Students will not be tested without parental consent.

### LABOR STATISTICS

#### Job Openings Rates For State and Local Education



Over 500 New Jersey school districts signed up for the program. The state is in the process of connecting school districts to testing vendors.

We continue to focus our efforts to keep students and staff healthy, and maintain in-person instruction in the Flemington-Raritan Regional Schools.

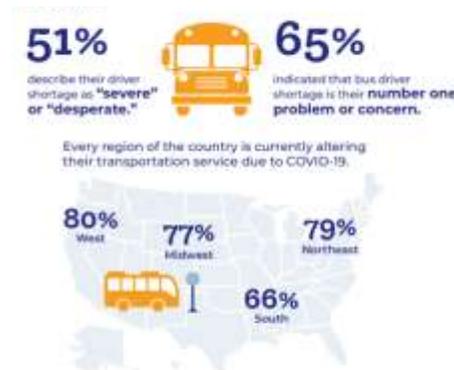
## SCHOOL STAFFING SHORTAGES

Throughout the summer, Flemington-Raritan hired staff and faculty to fill vacated positions due to retirement, medical leaves of absences, and resignations. This summer we interviewed hundreds of applicants and hired over seventy-five new staff and faculty members to fill open positions. We continue to have positions that remain unfilled such as cafeteria aides, substitute teachers, English as a Second Language teachers, health & hygiene team members, special education teachers, and teacher assistants, to name a few.

Staffing shortages are nationwide, not just in the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District. You may have heard about the national bus driver shortages and how this challenge is affecting school districts throughout the country. 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](#).

The bus driver shortage is affecting our community. Flemington-Raritan Regional School District has a shared transportation agreement with Hunterdon Central Regional High School. We have drivers that are hired for our Hunterdon Central/Flemington-Raritan school busses and we contract with bus companies to fill routes, for both in-district and out-of-district transportation routes.

Our transportation department is affected by the national bus driver shortages. At the beginning of the school year, one of our bus companies was still six drivers short for local routes. Six might not seem like a big number, but it affects hundreds of students and families. On the first days of school, transportation needed to pull phone operators from the transportation office to fill in for drivers. The Hunterdon Central and Flemington-Raritan Boards of Education, in partnership with both Superintendents, are putting in place recruiting and retention plans to support the transportation department. We need our bus drivers!



This week I was on a call with the Commissioner of Education in which we discussed school staffing shortages and what the New Jersey Department of Education is doing to support school districts. They are working on the driver shortage and

putting in place steps so that school districts aren't working against each other to obtain bus drivers.

As the Superintendent of Schools, I ride a school bus once a month on either a morning or afternoon route. On "Superintendent Rides the Bus Day" I build relationships with our bus drivers, listen to them about their concerns, talk with students about how their school days are going, and greet parents at the bus stops. On the first day of school I rode bus #30 on a J.P. Case Middle School and Barley Sheaf School AM bus route and spoke with bus driver Tim, otherwise known to our students as "Mr. T." I'll be on another bus on October 15<sup>th</sup> for an AM route for Francis A. Desmares Elementary School.



As our longtime bus drivers retire or decide they don't want to continue working, students lose out on starting the morning with a friendly, familiar face. We want to keep our bus drivers employed with Flemington-Raritan Schools and celebrate the value they bring to our community.



**SUPERINTENDENT  
ROUNDTABLE  
TALK-A-LATTE CHATS**

The next session is scheduled for October 12, from 6-7:30 p.m. at Barley Sheaf School. The full schedule is outlined below:

Date	Time	Location
August 31	6-7:30 p.m.	J.P. Case Cafeteria
October 12	6-7:30 p.m.	Barley Sheaf Cafeteria
December 1	6-7:30 p.m.	Reading-Fleming Cafeteria
February 2	6-7:30 p.m.	Robert Hunter Cafeteria
April 7	6-7:30 p.m.	Desmares Cafeteria
May 31	6-7:30 p.m.	Copper Hill Cafeteria

\*To support our families whose native language is not English, translators will be provided at meetings that are scheduled for Robert Hunter Elementary and Francis A. Desmares Elementary Schools. Information about topics discussed on August 31 at J.P. Case Talk-A-Latte was included in the September newsletter and can be found [here](#) on pages 2-3.

**BACK-TO-SCHOOL NIGHTS**

In person Back-to-School Nights were held at five of our six schools last week. I share a very special thank you with our faculty and staff members for the work they achieved to prepare for an exceptional in-person evening. Robert Hunter



School had to postpone its event due to electrical issues that were caused by the heavy rainfall that afternoon. A new date will be announced to Robert Hunter families. I'd like to extend my deepest gratitude to the parents who attended the open houses. Their cooperation with regard to the District's masking protocols, distancing and one-parent-per-child attendance limit helped to make each Back-to-School Night a positive and successful experience. It was wonderful to see our teachers meeting parents and making meaningful connections between school and home.

**REFERENDUM UPDATE**

Work continues throughout the District toward completion of referendum upgrades and improvements. Painters have been on site at Reading-Fleming Intermediate School as fresh coats of paint on the exterior of the building are nearly complete. RFIS stucco and refinishing work are more than 75% completed. The HVAC contractor and commissioner are working on trouble-shooting unit ventilator issues for rooms with reported high or low temperatures. The trouble-shooting work is progressing and on-going. Our temperature air-conditioning units require regular monitoring for performance. Some metal work continues at Francis A. Desmares Elementary School and Reading-Fleming Intermediate School to install on multiple areas on the roof. Moreover, new landscaping to conceal the grade-mounted HVAC equipment on the RFIS Bonnell Street lawn and additional landscaping around the front of RFIS are in the works!



**STRATEGIC PLANNING: CALL TO SERVE**

The District is forming a Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Committee as the current five-year plan expires in the 2022-2023 school year. Strategic Planning is a process by which school districts identify strengths and challenges, define a vision, set objectives and goals, and establish action steps. The Board of Education is evaluating proposals to complete the strategic planning process from the New Jersey Schools Boards Association and from Hazard, Young, Attea and Associates. As part of the process, the District will engage employees, residents, and volunteer representatives of our community in the process through committee work. If you are interested in serving on the Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Committee, please email [lbruhn@frsd.k12.nj.us](mailto:lbruhn@frsd.k12.nj.us) with your contact information.



**LUNCH WITH THE SUPERINTENDENT**

On Wednesday I had the pleasure of eating lunch with a group of first and second graders at Francis A. Desmares School. Together we talked about the following topics:

- Indoor recess (it was a rainy day on our lunch day)

- Poison ivy (my arm was bandaged due to poison ivy which brought about our next topic...)
- Boo-boos
- Pets (they make us feel better when we have boo-boos)
- Brothers and sisters
- Learning to read words like look, the, a, I, and, come, go, let, read.
- Favorite foods like Lunchables and vegetarian dishes
- Words and phrases we can say in Spanish.

A second grader told me all about the favorite book he was reading in his class, a popular series titled, *Dog Man* by author Dav Pilkey. This series features a hero who is part dog and part man. It has “pawed” its way into Casey’s favorite books. Thanks for sharing a great book choice, Casey!

### SUICIDE PREVENTION

These last 18 months have been extremely challenging for all of us. A return to the normalcy of school doesn’t mean that everyone’s struggles will disappear. September was National Suicide Prevention Awareness Month. Every month we must work together to help reduce the risk of suicide by paying attention to those around us. If a loved one displays any warning signs, such as displaying extreme mood swings, talking about feeling hopeless, having no purpose or being a burden to others, especially if there is a change in behavior or a new behavior, get help immediately. Our local NAMI organization provides mental health support classes. Parents and community members may find tips and suggestions on Back-to-School anxiety during COVID-19 at this link [here](#).



### HUNTERDON COUNTY NAMED 15TH HEALTHIEST COMMUNITY IN THE NATION

Hunterdon County has been named one of the top 500 Healthiest Communities nationwide in 2021 by U.S. News and World Report. Ranking #15 overall, Hunterdon County earned high marks among the categories evaluated, which include population health, equity, education, environment, economy, housing, food and nutrition, public safety, community vitality and



infrastructure. To learn more and to view Hunterdon County's profile, please click this link: <https://www.usnews.com/news/healthiest-communities/new-jersey/hunterdon-county>

### EFFECTIVE SCHOOL SOLUTIONS: PARENT WORKSHOPS – OCTOBER 5 & JANUARY 11

Through a partnership with Effective School Solutions, parents and guardians are invited to attend an in-person workshop on Tuesday, October 5, at 7 p.m. at J.P. Case Middle School. The topic is: *Navigating the Challenges Parents and Caregivers Face in Response to COVID-19*. Please note that childcare is not available and the session

will not be held virtually. The flyer is pictured below:

### Effective School Solutions

#### Navigating the Challenges Parents and Caregivers Face in Response to COVID 19

As students continue to be in a constant state of educational transition in response to the ever-changing safety needs of COVID 19, parents and caregivers are faced with the challenge of dealing with their child's heightened states of fear and anxiety. In this presentation, participants will gain an awareness of the potential traumatic impact of COVID on children, along with tips that parents/caregivers can use to help offset their child's fears and anxiety in and out of the classroom.

10/5/2021 7:00 – 8:00 PM

Presented By: ESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STAFF  
JP CASE Auditorium

In addition, ESS will provide a winter workshop on Tuesday, January 11, 2022 at 7 p.m. at J.P. Case Middle School. The topic will be: *How to Talk to your Child and Survive*. A snow date is schedule for January 25, 2022. The flyer is pictured below:

### Effective School Solutions

#### How to Talk to your Child and Survive

Raising a child is probably the most gratifying job any of us will ever have and, also, one of the toughest. In large part, that's because times have changed. We live in an increasingly complex world that challenges us every day with a wide range of disturbing issues that are difficult for children to understand and for adults to explain. The presentation will focus on how we can talk to our kids and survive as parents and caregivers.

1/11/2022 7:00 – 8:00 PM

(Snow Date: 1/25/2022)

Presented By: ESS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT STAFF  
JP CASE Auditorium

### COMMUNITY VOLUNTEERS NEEDED

Community service hours are available at Raritan Headwater’s SHEDFEST event on Sunday, October 3, 2021! The event will be held at Fairview Farms in Gladstone and will run from 12-5 p.m. For details, please click here:

<https://www.trackitforward.com/site/370717/event/609178>.

