SCARSDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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'Dale Dispatch: District e-Newsletter

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From Dr. Thomas Hagerman

Superintendent of Schools

Progress on Policies?

Promising!

A historical cornerstone of democracy in the United States includes citizen oversight of local government, including its institutions of learning. School board members, specifically, are locally elected public officials entrusted with governing a community's public schools. The role of the school board ensures that school districts are responsive to the values, beliefs, and priorities of their communities. This is accomplished through five major areas of responsibility: (1) Serving as leaders and representatives of the community and as advocates for students and the school district; (2) Establishing the vision and goals of the school district; (3) Hiring and evaluating the district's superintendent; (4) Adopting an annual budget that is aligned with the vision of the local school district; and (5) Setting policies that help improve the district and its schools.

While most people readily understand the first four responsibility areas, policy development and implementation can be somewhat confounding. Let's try to demystify this a bit, and begin with the question, what is school board policy?

Board policies are statements that set forth expectations and purposes, and prescribe in general terms the organizational structures, guiding principles, and logistics of a school system. Said another way, they are guidelines adopted by the Board to govern the District. They are important to the extent that they help provide consistency, stability, and continuity; clarify expectations and accountability measures; and comport with NYS regulations and State and federal laws.

It should be noted that school board policies are different than administrative regulations, which provide more discrete details for carrying out and enforcing policies, including, at times, step by step procedures, and assigning specific responsibilities to various individuals. Said another way, policies are "the what" and regulations are "the how."

Since the fall of 2018, the Scarsdale School Board has been engaged in the process of reviewing its policy manual. This work was initiated when the District contracted with the New York State School Boards Association (NYSSBA) to conduct a comprehensive review of the Board's policy manual and to develop a draft policy manual of "essential" policies containing relevant legal references and annotations to guide the Board. Essential policies are those that relate solely to the Board's governance function and include Required Policies - policies the Board is explicitly required under State or federal law to adopt; Local Policies - customized policies codifying Board action on matters that are exclusively within the Board's discretion and reflect unique District approaches; and Notice Policies - concise summaries of statutory or regulatory responsibilities imposed on the Board that are designed to ensure that the Board, administration, staff, students, and the public are aware of these responsibilities.

In early 2019, the Board established Board Policy Review Committees (subcommittees comprised of Board Members and District Administration) to begin reviewing policy tranches. The complete policy manual includes series from 0000 - 9000 with each series representing numerous policies by topic areas, ranging from student matters to instruction to facilities to personnel issues. Once the first few committees were established, they were each assigned a policy series (0000, 1000, 2000, and 3000) to begin the review process.

In order to maximize transparency and the opportunity for community input, copies of the original policies, along with NYSSBA's suggested revisions and/or notations, were posted to the District website with a link for community members to add comments or suggestions prior to Committee consideration and revisions.

This work has been underway for more than a year at this point, and committee members are still hard at work, progressing through the various series. Part of this work has included providing updates to the full Board and the broader community via updates at regular Board Meetings. To date, the 3000 policies (District Administration) were submitted to the Board for the first and second readings and adoption in December. The 0000 policies (Mission Statement and Board Governance) will be submitted to the Board for the first reading in March. Review of the 1000 series (Community Related Policies) and 2000 series (Board of Education Operations) continues with the expectation that they will be presented to the Board for adoption by the end of this school year. It is anticipated that the review of the 4000 (Instruction) series will commence within the next few months. It is likely that the 5000-9000 policy series reviews will continue into the 2020-21 school year.

While this work is taking some time to complete, it is important to acknowledge that each policy is being thoroughly considered in its own right, along with its current application and function within the District, and its coherence and consistency with other policies. In the wise words of Paul J. Meyer, "Productivity is never an accident. It is always the result of a commitment to excellence, intelligent planning, and focused effort."

Books, Books, Everywhere!

By Dr. Edgar McIntosh, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, and Co-Director, Center for Innovation

"Reading should not be presented to children as a chore or duty. It should be offered to them as a precious gift." - Kate DiCamillo, Newbery Medalist Author

The importance of reading -- and reading well -- is not in question. As a universal measure, reading skill corresponds to access, opportunities, and improved quality of life. In addition to being an essential method for communicating knowledge, there are strong cognitive benefits. Neuroscientists have found that reading increases both empathetic responses and brain connectivity. Research has also shown that reading improves vocabulary, verbal skills, and analytical thinking, and develops declarative knowledge even when accounting for previous cognitive ability. Educators recognize more and more that reading is a skill that impacts every single content area of learning.

And to be clear, it's not just about doing the school-assigned reading. Reading for enjoyment has shown equally strong benefits. Studies on pleasure reading have linked it to educational attainment, social mobility, critical thinking skills, and overall cognitive development.

You need only to stroll through any of our Scarsdale school libraries to see books beautifully displayed; inviting students to discover something new, lose themselves in a story that is familiar, or transport them to a world and perspective different from their own. Our Library Media Specialists have thoughtfully curated books and digital materials that reflect our students' interests and research needs, and that feed their burning curiosity to find out -- reading material that gets them to flip those pages, click that e-reader, or stop what they're doing to get to the end of that audio chapter.

Ongoing research shows that wide text access - digital and print - is key to students reading for pleasure. Not just any texts, though. Students tend to read for fun more if they can choose from collections with variety and diversity, in and out of the classroom. Students who had access to a well-stocked, well-organized and current classroom library read 50-60 % more than students who don't have that access.

These studies are inspiring our teachers to review, cull, and revitalize our classroom libraries at the elementary level - and explore ways to expand text access, choice, diversity, and variety at the secondary level. I will be discussing this as part of the upcoming March 23rd educational report focused on Scarsdale reading. Please join us, virtually or in person, to learn the latest about how we are supporting, engaging, and inspiring our students to read voluminously and passionately.

Recruitment Season

*By Dr. Drew Patrick, Assistant Superintendent
for Human Resources and Leadership Development*

As spring approaches, our attention turns toward the teaching vacancies anticipated for the 2020-21 school year. The result of a combination of retirements and proposed additions, recruiting for these positions requires coordination, collaboration, and stamina. As I have noted before, our District has no problem attracting an immense quantity of applicants. Rather, our challenge is to continue to hone and refine our screening, interviewing, and selection processes to ensure that we identify the very best from among those numbers.

So how do we identify quality talent? A framework I have found helpful in organizing the information we uncover during the hiring process was developed in the early 1970's by the Gallup Organization. After engaging in an in-depth examination of the qualities and characteristics of exceptional teachers, Gallup generated what has become one of the most frequently used interview questionnaires, the *Teacher Perceiver Instrument*. While this assessment tool is not something we use in Scarsdale, concepts identified in the underlying research endure, and are useful for understanding what characteristics predict quality teachers and leaders.

The Gallup work organizes twelve themes across three categories--intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal. Themes such as *mission, investment,* and *focus* characterize the intrapersonal category. A candidate exhibiting strengths in this area demonstrates a belief that all students can learn and grow, sees their professional goal as making meaningful contributions to this growth, and derives satisfaction from this kind of achievement. However, with the increasing emphasis on the importance of collaboration as a vehicle to problem-solving, strengths in the interpersonal domain are also critical. Gallup characterizes the themes of *empathy, rapport drive,* and *listening* as critical interpersonal attributes. Thus, we look for evidence of a candidate's ability to accept and incorporate the state of mind of others in their work, and connect with each student on an individual level. Finally, extrapersonal themes such as *innovation, input drive,* and *individualized perception* describe the importance of creativity and risk-taking in generating a learning environment that challenges all students, and a commitment to constantly searching for new ideas to make learning an individual experience for each student.

Highly talented educators with potential for growth are our most valuable resource when it comes to student learning. As a result, we take the responsibility of recruiting seriously, and approach it with as much thought and consideration as we can. In addition to excellent training and appropriate certifications, teachers who are "Scarsdale material" will demonstrate strength in the important intrapersonal, interpersonal, and extrapersonal themes. We look forward to introducing the recruitment class of 2020 to the community later this spring.

Spring is Coming: So Are Annual Reviews

By Eric Rauschenbach, Director of Special Education and Student Services

Spring heralds the beginning of our annual review meetings for special education students. This also means that it's time for the annual guide to Committee on Special Education (CSE) meetings *'Dale Dispatch* article...

There are a number of websites and articles one might access that give advice on preparing for a CSE meeting, but here are a few suggestions to make these meetings productive, collaborative, and effective.

First and most important, please ask questions before, during, and after your meetings. The special education staff is always willing to hear your concerns and explain their point of view. Please bear in mind, however, that our staff conducts over 450 meetings in a span of three months, and we sometimes fall into the habit of speaking in acronyms, or making assumptions about what you know about our programs. If during a meeting you feel unsure or don't understand a program, term, or plan, please ask. Often, CSE meetings are packed with information and it can be hard to digest everything you are hearing in a relatively short period. Do not hesitate to call the special education teacher or chairperson after the meeting to clarify or double-check what you heard.

Second, please keep in mind that these are working meetings, and everyone brings a different perspective to this collaborative process. Everyone in the room may not agree with every perspective, but it is important to note that all viewpoints bring valuable information to the table. Everyone on your child's team wants your child to succeed, but might see your child in a different setting and come to different conclusions as a result. We all strive to remain respectful and engage in active listening, but please don't be shy about questioning points of view or delving deeper into the reasons why someone might feel the way they do. Our goal at each meeting is to find common ground, clarity on the issues, and determine what is best for your children and our students.

Finally, the goal of special education is to help students become independent learners who not only understand the concepts being taught, but also understand and feel confident about their abilities. The CSE's primary responsibility is to provide enough support to help your child make progress and access the general education curriculum. However, the CSE is also required to look at how to enable your child to become more independent, and decide when it would be appropriate to reduce support in order to foster that independence. This is especially true through the secondary years of middle and high school, when students are preparing in earnest to enter the next phase of their lives (which is both a challenging and an exciting time for parents as well as their children).

CSE meetings bring caring professionals and invested parents to the table; these meetings are an effective way to summarize, analyze, and plan in a collaborative way. Our special education students have outstanding outcomes, which are made possible through this collaboration and discussion. We look forward to working with all of our parents over the next few months and planning for your child's educational journey.

Budget Planning

By Stuart Mattey,

Assistant Superintendent for Business and Facilities

Planning for next year's school budget always gets underway at the beginning of the current school year. Starting in the fall, principals and other administrators work with their teams to develop budgets that support the continuation of their work, and any new initiatives that may require additional staffing or funding. Meetings are then held in October and November with District-level Cabinet members, when staffing and other significant funding requests are presented and discussed, taking into account District-wide instructional consistency and financial impact.

In the business office, projections of current year spending are prepared, taking into account current staffing levels and both current year and historical expenditure trends. This year, the Board of Education held a public forum on November 14, at which it invited community input on 2020-2021 budget priorities. On December 16, the Board heard a detailed presentation on financial projections, long-term budget projects, and 2020-2021 budget assumptions.

Formal budget presentations to the Board of Education and community continued in January and early February with a presentation on staffing recommendations on January 13, and budget study sessions on February 3 and February 10, at which departmental budgets were discussed in detail.

Additional budget discussions are scheduled into early spring, leading up to the statewide school budget votes on May 19th. The schedule for these remaining budget presentations and discussions is as follows:

March 9th -- Budget Plan Update, and Full Budget Review, including Revenues and Tax Projections.
March 17 - League of Women Voters of Scarsdale Budget Information Session (at Scarsdale Village Hall)
March 23rd -- Budget Forum: Board receives written statements from community groups and hears community comments
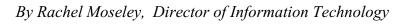**April 20th --** Board of Education adopts 2020-21 Budget
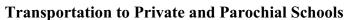**May 19th --** Budget Vote and Board of Education Elections

All of these discussions can be viewed on the District website in the Scarsdale TV section/Board of Education VOD (Video on Demand), at www.scarsdaleschools.k12.ny.us/Page/18030.

The complete Preliminary Proposed Budget Book for 2020-2021 was released at the February 3 Board meeting, and an updated version will be presented on March 9. It is available on the District website under Board of Education/Budget-Financial Information/2020-2021 Budget Documents, at www.scarsdaleschools.k12.ny.us/Page/28285

We invite all community members to participate in the discussion by providing comment at the Board of Education's meetings or e-mailing the Board at boardofed@scarsdaleschools.org.

Online Tools for Parents

By Rachel Moseley, Director of Information Technology

Transportation to Private and Parochial Schools
Requests for transportation to private and parochial schools for the 2020-21 school year must be received by the District no later than April 1, 2020. All requests have to be submitted via the Campus Parent Portal online registration system.

Please visit www.scarsdaleschools.org/TransportationRegistration for instructions on how to request transportation. If you have questions about transportation, please visit the District's transportation website at www.scarsdaleschools.org/Transportation.

The Campus Parent Portal is a confidential and secure website which allows authorized parents and guardians to access information about their children in real-time. It also allows parents and guardians to update contact information in order to receive notifications about school closings and delays. More information about the Campus Parent Portal may be found in the dropdown menu under Parents, here.

Kindergarten Registration
While the official kindergarten registration window closed on January 31, the registration system remains open for new families, as well as for those who missed the deadline. Please visit www.scarsdaleschools.org/PublicSchoolRegistration for instructions on how to register online.

Children whose fifth birthday falls on or before December 31, 2020, may be registered for the 2020-2021 school year. Parents who have not yet registered their child are encouraged to do so as soon as possible to ensure a smooth screening and placement process.

For questions, please call the District Registrar, Nunzia Mauro, at (914) 721-2444, or send an email to registrar@scarsdaleschools.org.

Funding our Instructional Technology Program

By Jerry Crisci, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and Co-Director of the Center for Innovation

The annual budget planning process provides an opportunity for the technology team to share our funding priorities with the Scarsdale community. Rachel Moseley and I collaborate on reviewing our technology goals and establishing budget priorities, informed by conversations with the rest of our departments.

The instructional technology budget is guided by the District's new Strategic Plan, as well as the Technology Plan adopted by the Board and approved by the New York State Education Department. The Instructional Technology budget supports the four-year computer

replacement cycle and hardware purchasing projections outlined in the Technology Plan.

The hardware budget includes funding for:
* Elementary: Chromebook 1:1 program in grades 3-5, as well as K-2 iPads.
* Middle School: 1:1 iPad program in 6th and 7th grade, and expansion of the program to 8th grade next year.
* High School: Technology upgrades as specified in the four-year hardware replacement cycle.
* Districtwide: Upgrading wireless access over two years.

We are able to complete these projects while maintaining a flat hardware budget. This is the third year in a row that our hardware lease/purchase budget had a 0% increase.

In addition to hardware, the Technology budget also pays for software and online services, and mandated and essential services, our District website, and website support packages such as closed captioning for Board and PTA videos, website ADA file compliance, and mandated Internet Filtering on District-housed devices and 1:1 mobile devices. The budget also pays for our library book circulation system and other library support services. Finally, the budget funds technical support services required to maintain our hardware.

We are fortunate that the Technology budget is partially funded by New York State. For example, some of our library subscription databases are supplemented by free offerings that are provided to all schools in New York. In addition, the State funds a significant number of classroom Smart Display purchases through the Smart School Bond program.

By combining all of these resources, and focusing on efficiency, we can provide enhanced technology offerings while controlling costs. We always appreciate the support of the Board and the Scarsdale community as we move forward with our technology purchasing plans.

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