



SCARSDALE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

'Dale Dispatch: District e-Newsletter

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From Dr. Thomas Hagerman

Superintendent of Schools



Gifts

Coming off the holiday season, gift giving is still likely top of mind for many, whether it's the guilt associated with not quite getting those thank you cards finished and mailed, the "oh, you shouldn't have" gift that hasn't quite found a niche in your home, or the realization that the holidays can be quite costly.

With this context in mind, I was quite caught off guard our first week back from Winter Break by a conversation with Marina Mori from Reggio Children (Reggio Emilia, Italy). Marina was visiting Scarsdale through a collaboration of the *Scarsdale Teachers Institute*, *Center for Innovation*, and *Little Scholars Early Development Center* in order to work with teachers and administrators on how to think about building community through a Reggio-inspired approach. During the first day of her visit, several teachers and administrators attended a luncheon to learn more about this tradition of cooperative work. Marina was clear from the beginning that the Reggio approach is a philosophy and not a particular methodology or curriculum, and, as such, is open to wide interpretation around implementation.

During our time together, Marina walked us through a variety of constructs that influence teaching and learning such as *teachers and children as partners in learning*, *the role of space*, *amicable*

schools, the role of parents, and several others. It was clear from the onset that much of this resonated as much with the rest of the audience as it did with me, and it certainly seemed aligned with many of the core values and beliefs we hold in our schools and classrooms.

But, then came a moment I wasn't quite expecting. Marina was discussing a construct she referred to as the *image of the child*, which describes children's innate curiosity, predisposition to create and recognize patterns, and uncanny ability to "negotiate" with the environment around them. As an example, she explained a preschool class that she once observed wherein children were playing the Italian version of *ring around the rosie*. When finished, their teacher asked the children to draw a picture to explain the game. In response, most children drew stick figures in a relatively straight line while holding hands. One child drew a similar picture as the others, but when she handed the assignment to the teacher, she said, "you must hold it like this," turning the paper end to end, so that it created a round shape, with the circle of children, holding hands in a loop, much as the game looks in real life.

Marina explained to us that she views these types of exchanges as "gifts," or moments of discovery and communication that transcend typical expectations and have the potential to create a new type of connectivity that is often more complex than a child may have the vocabulary or understanding to otherwise communicate. She went on to explain that these interactions can happen countless times between children and their teachers, parents, and others. A child may offer up a handcrafted picture, a flower, some other found item, or a story or experience they remember. Each of these being small, but sincere attempts on the part of the child to demonstrate their care, effort, or loyalty. Sometimes, these acts are noted and appreciated in the moment, serving to deepen the bonds between child and adult.

At other times, however, that picture may manifest on your freshly-painted, bedroom wall; the flower plucked from your prized rose garden; or the story revealing a personal anecdote that you would rather not have been shared with the entire family during say, a Thanksgiving meal. In these cases, not only will children not be recognized for their efforts, but, in fact, likely be admonished for their lack of propriety. While the last scenario is certainly difficult in the moment, the more evolved parents and educators among us will inevitably use this as an opportunity to discuss expectations and to find more appropriate venues for children to demonstrate their appreciation and creativity.

Unfortunately, from a child's standpoint, perhaps the worst and most frequent response, is simply none at all. Clearly, this is not a deliberate act on the part of adults, but rather, it likely stems from personal or professional distractions, or, perhaps, a lack of deep noticing. Nonetheless, for children, the results can be devastating. I was chatting with a High School English teacher recently about this very issue. We were talking about the inadvertent harm we do, when a student hands in an assignment, noting that she worked really hard on, for example, "#3," and the response back is, "but you didn't do #6 at all...you need to continue working on that until you finish." While the response is understandable within the confines of established expectations and a busy classroom environment, in isolation, it also communicates an unequivocal message to the student, that completeness outweighs quality or thoughtfulness, or that sharing pride in one's work is only appropriate when work is in its final form. As we know, when children receive these types of messages over time, they become discouraged, and lose interest in sharing special moments and personal insights. It is not uncommon today that, by the time many students are in High School, they feel that they are "doing school," rather than engaging in any meaningful way, and developing their true academic, artistic, and athletic passions.

In the Scarsdale Schools, we pride ourselves on a classical education taught in a progressive fashion. For us, we recognize that learning should not be rote, textbook- or worksheet- driven, or taught in isolation from student interest and without real world application. By providing students with authentic and meaningful tasks, by giving students choice and agency in how and what they study, and by cultivating appropriate and timely feedback, we allow students to demonstrate both what they know, and how they know it, building their "gifts" of relationships and connectedness into the very fabric of classroom and school life each day.

As parents and educators, I encourage all of us to acknowledge and recognize the gifts we receive each day from our children and students, even those that may take an imperfect form. Unlike those that may be attached to the holidays, these gifts always give us more insight into the hearts and minds of our young learners.



Well-Being

By Lynne Shain, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Assessment, and Instruction

Well-Being, also referred to as Wellness, is the focus of this year's District's Compact Committee, which supports an emphasis on The Whole Child in Scarsdale's Education for Tomorrow 2.0. Through this initiative, parents and teachers explore concepts in social emotional learning, self-care, and stress reduction that build greater resilience in children, support their ability to reach their individual potential, and develop their true talents and interests while achieving their optimal well-being.

It is a given here that students, parents, and faculty recognize the high level of academics associated with a Scarsdale education. For some students, this intensity is motivating and fosters superior work and performance. For others, a Scarsdale education causes unhealthy stress levels, according to research conducted in Scarsdale by [Challenge Success, Stanford University](#).

How do we define well-being?

According to Dr. Martin Seligman, a leader in the field of positive psychology, the five critical factors that underlie well-being are:

- Positive Emotions (pleasurable activities and other experiences that elicit positive feelings, such as expressing gratitude)
- Engagement (involvement in tasks that are well matched to our deepest interests and character strengths)
- Relationships (having positive relationships)
- Meaning/Purpose (being a part of something meaningful, usually bigger than ourselves)
- Achievement (experiences that allow us to reflect back on our mastery and accomplishments)

Positive Psychology aims to uncover people's strengths and promote their positive functioning and optimal well-being. There are many approaches to well-being under the umbrella of Positive Psychology that are being studied by parents and educators as part of the District Compact Committee Initiative, such as:

Positive Psychology Umbrella



Next steps include a Tri-State Consortium Consultancy Visit on April 19-20, 2017 during which colleagues from peer districts will benchmark our approach in raising awareness about the importance of well-being, exploring the connection between well-being and academic achievement, and planning programs that foster well-being for students. The Visit will be followed by a report with commendations and recommendations, expected by June. In addition, the Compact Committees in each of our schools, will be sharing their progress and recommendations for further work by the end of the school year.

Professional Renewal

*By Drew Patrick, Assistant Superintendent
for Human Services and Leadership Development*



As of the writing of this article, the collective experience of the sixteen educators retiring at the end of the school year totals a staggering four hundred and thirty one years! Over that time, thousands and thousands of Scarsdale students have had the opportunity to connect to a "just right" book, discover imaginary numbers, lose themselves in a classic piece of literature, receive individualized and program-level special education support, engage in truly unique life experiences as part of the Scarsdale Alternative School, apply historical understandings to contemporary social issues and concerns, experiment, problem-solve, benefit from college, social, and emotional counseling, and on and on. The experience and perspective these individuals have brought to our students, schools, and community over the years is as exceptional as it is awe-inspiring!

Being so new to the District, I have felt a conflicted set of emotions sitting across from these giants of our profession during exit interviews. On one hand, I feel inadequate and apologetic, and have expressed the belief that this group deserves someone more knowledgeable than I to discuss the many contributions they have made over the years. On the other hand, I feel enormously fortunate to learn all about the opportunities and experiences they valued most during their careers in Scarsdale.

Through these conversations, two things are abundantly and universally clear. First, to a person, the experience of working in Scarsdale is described as a privilege, an opportunity of a lifetime, full of challenges, and engaged and engaging students, all rooted in a community that deeply values quality education. Second, spending a career in Scarsdale brings both the expectation of, and opportunity for, new learning on a near-constant basis. The Scarsdale Teachers Institute is the most often cited example of the resource that fostered ongoing professional renewal across the arc of their careers. More than taking classes and courses, these retiring educators express how they have valued leading adult learning, presenting at national conferences, representing Scarsdale in regional, State and national professional organizations, and finding just the right learning opportunity at just the right time to revisit, revise, and reimagine what they teach and how they teach it. Simply put, the dedication to continued learning is one of the most important *shared* values of this institution.

Even as we approach spring, and the many Scarsdale traditions that honor our retirees, we begin looking for the next generation of educators willing to adopt and sustain that which we value. So, while a deep knowledge of kids and content, and a robust command of planning and pedagogy, are essential characteristics our new hires will possess, we must also ensure that each projects a passion for learning, a spirit of inquiry, and a capacity for renewal and reinvention. That, it seems to me, is the legacy left by those who have come before us.



A Guide to CSE Meetings

By Eric Rauschenbach, Director of Special Education and Student Services

As we enter the long winter months and anticipate winter recess, we look forward to spring and all the promise it brings for new growth, warmth, light and... CSE (Committee on Special Education) meetings! Spring, otherwise known as CSE season to special education teachers and parents, is a time where we look at the year as a whole for each student and determine our direction forward.

There are a number of websites and articles available that give advice on preparing for a CSE meeting, but here are a few suggestions to make these meetings productive, amicable, 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. However, our staff conducts over 450 meetings in a span of three months. We can fall into the trap of speaking in acronyms or just plain 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 this is a working meeting and everyone brings a different perspective. You may not agree with some of these perspectives, but they all 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. I ask that everyone at the meeting be respectful and listen, but 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 the meeting is to find common ground, clarity on the issues, and to determine what is best for the student.

Finally, the goal of special education is to help students become independent learners who understand the concepts being taught, but who 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, but the CSE is also required to look at how to enable your child to become more independent, and determine 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.

CSE meetings bring caring professionals and invested parents to the table; emotions and assumptions are varied, and the discussions can be quite complex. However, they are an effective tool for summarizing, analyzing, and planning in a collaborative way. Our special education students have outstanding outcomes, and those are made possible through 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 career.

Construction Update

*By Stuart Matthey,
Assistant Superintendent for Business and Facilities*



Work related to the voter authorized 2014 Bond Project is now underway at both the Middle School and the High School.

Over the holiday break at the Middle School, trees that were scheduled for removal were taken down to make way for the new orchestra room addition. During the same time, contractors performed asbestos abatement. Foundation excavation also began, including formwork for new footings. A section of the new footings will soon be poured, with the foundation wall to follow.

At the High School, asbestos abatement was completed in the new Learning Commons area over both the holiday break and Martin Luther King weekend. Demolition in this area started last month and is continuing. Construction on the footings necessary for the new mezzanine area is scheduled to begin soon. Even with work occurring only after hours in order to maintain a quiet work and study space for students, very good progress has been made in transforming this nearly 100-year-old space into a 21st century learning, innovation, and collaboration area.

In the Fitness Center area of the High School, demolition work started last month and this portion is now substantially complete. Most of the work in this area to date has been related to readying the electrical and mechanical systems. This includes electrical roughing for new power, data, and lighting. Framing of new walls is scheduled to begin next week. In the meantime, work is being done to finalize design and purchase plans for outfitting all these new areas with furniture and equipment.

Please remember that for safety reasons all construction areas are off limits. If you have any questions regarding any of these projects please contact me at smatthey@scarsdaleschools.org.



Kindergarten Registration Going Online!

By Rachel Moseley, Director of Information Technology

Kindergarten registration will have a whole new look this year. The District now offers a registration system which allows parents/guardians to enter student information online.

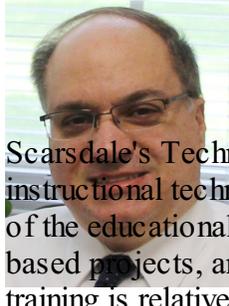
The registration window will open on **Wednesday, March 1, 2017**, and will remain open through **Wednesday, March 15, 2017**. Registration will remain open for new families. Before you register, please gather the documents you will need to upload on the online system. For further information about the documents you will need, and for access to the system, click [here](#). If you already have a child enrolled in one of Scarsdale's schools, please access Online Registration via the Parent Portal, as this will save you from having to enter household information that the District already has on file. But remember, wait until March to start the registration process, so we can be ready for you.

We launched the pilot program for the Online Student Registration system and Central Registration in December and have already received online registrations from 24 families. This week we opened the Online Registration system for transportation requests for families of private and parochial school children. For more information, click [here](#).

MySchoolBucks Store

For the past few years, we have used Infinite Campus Parent Portal Online Payments to collect various high school fees. Earlier this month, we launched a new system, MySchoolBucks Store, which has shopping cart functionality that Infinite Campus is lacking. We are piloting MySchoolBucks Store with parents of High School Seniors for the ordering of graduation attire. If this pilot program is successful, we will further expand the use of MySchoolBucks Store to other areas.

Technology Professional Development
for Teachers



By Jerry Crisci, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation

Scarsdale's Technology staff development program is an essential component of our instructional technology initiative. Our staff development offerings typically include a discussion of the educational rationale that supports using technology in the classroom and technology-based projects, and a discussion of classroom management strategies. While simple technology training is relatively easy to support, staff development is a complex process that involves a high level of engagement and ongoing conversations with teachers. For example, a teacher may be very comfortable using technology, but may need help to effectively integrate the use of iPads or Chromebooks in a classroom environment.

The primary agents of technology staff development in the District are each building's computer teachers. They conduct workshops and offer individual support for classroom teachers and specialists in their schools.

Technology professional development takes many forms:

- Individualized Training, where the computer teacher provides one-on-one direct instruction to the classroom teacher.
- Teacher Consultation, where a computer teacher meets with a classroom teacher to discuss options for a computer-based project, and recommends software or web-based resources, as well as suggesting strategies for managing the project.
- Collaborative Coaching, where a computer teacher collaborates with classroom teacher(s) to co-plan and co-teach a technology-integrated project. As in individual consultations, the computer teacher makes recommendations for software or online resources, and suggests instructional strategies, but also models lessons in an effort to help teachers improve student learning.

In addition, the Scarsdale Teachers Institute (STI) is an important element of our professional development program. A wide variety of technology STI courses are offered during the week, on weekends, and over the summer.

As technology evolves, and new technology-based learning experiences are available for the classroom, the technology department will continue to offer professional development for teachers that ultimately results in new learning opportunities for students.



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