



SCARSDALE
PUBLIC SCHOOLS

'Dale Dispatch: District e-Newsletter

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From Dr. Thomas Hagerman
Superintendent of Schools



Dear Parents, Colleagues, and Community Members,

Two weeks ago I wrote an email to our school community that no superintendent ever wants to write, and no parent or teacher ever wants to read. We lost a beautiful spirit with the passing of our 5th grade, Greenacres student, Paul Jimenez. Our thoughts and prayers have been and continue to be with Paul's immediate and extended family, as well as his school family, all of whom feel the gravity of this tremendous loss.

As our community mourns and we, as adults, struggle with our own emotions, it is important to remember our individual and collective role in supporting our students and children through this difficult time. As much as we would like to try, these sad times remind us that we cannot always protect them from having to cope with difficult issues. Perhaps only a small solace, but we can help them navigate emotional challenges by maintaining good communication and engaging in clear, open discussion.

Over the past weeks, many have come forward wondering exactly how to do this. While it is important to consider the age and developmental level of your child during these conversations, it is my hope that you might find the following tips from the New York University Child Study Center to be helpful:

- Be extra aware of your child's emotions. Does your child seem distant, uncommunicative, or more anxious than usual? Invite open-ended discussions.
- Be aware of your own emotional state. Children will pick up on tone of voice, body language, and conversations you have with other adults. If you can be calm while discussing the news with your child, it will help to reassure him or her.
- Find out how your child is feeling by asking a direct, open-ended question and convey sincere interest in hearing your child's answer.
- Find out what your child has seen or heard. Once you know your child's specific fears, you are in a better position to be reassuring.
- Be sympathetic and non-judgmental about children's reactions and feelings. There is no right or wrong way to react to traumatic news.
- Don't provide unnecessary details. While you don't want to shield your child from the truth, keep in mind his or her age and what is appropriate.
- Don't avoid the subject. Children often are exposed to more than parents are aware, and a child's fears can grow out of proportion if there is no opportunity to address them.
- Be honest. If you're scared, say so, but try to be as calm and reassuring as possible. It's also okay to say you don't know the answer to a question.
- Be reassuring. Feeling safe and secure is very important to children, especially young ones. Even if you're afraid or sad, make sure they know you will do everything you can to keep them safe.
- Don't minimize your child's fears. Avoid trying to cheer him or her up by saying it's not so bad. Children can feel embarrassed or criticized when their fears are minimized.

The Scarsdale School District endeavors to build not only students' academic knowledge, but their social-emotional skills as well. In partnership with families, we can help children become self-advocates, to recognize when they need to ask for guidance, and to provide an environment where they feel comfortable asking for assistance.

We recognize that parents also have questions, and that students often will take emotional cues from their parents. If you ever have questions or concerns with which you feel you need assistance, we have very capable staff at each of our schools, including youth outreach workers, certified social workers and psychologists. Moreover, we have an extensive list of referral services available for a variety of issues.

Feel free to contact your building principal for additional information or, at the District Office, you can contact our Director of Student Services and Special Education, Eric Rauschenbach.

With a heavy heart,

Dr. Thomas Hagerman



New Elementary Report Cards Introduced

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

A newly re-formatted elementary report card has been implemented this year, following intensive work by teams of teachers and administrators. Report cards, in tandem with parent-teacher conferences, are two prime feedback mechanisms for classroom teachers to convey important information to parents about their child's progress..

Each grade level's report card is designed to provide clear and concise feedback for parents. Progress is reported based on curriculum goals using consistent language from kindergarten through fifth grade.

The new Scarsdale elementary report cards include:

- Holistic scoring, which gives students a single, overall progress rating for each major curriculum goal as a whole, without assigning a specific rating to each sub-descriptor listed. Holistic scoring by major skill area reflects a developmental learning approach.
- Streamlined descriptors that create a clear and concise report for parents, featuring consistency in language throughout the report cards. Consolidated descriptors allow room for the addition of a comment narrative space, allowing teachers the option to write a more detailed and descriptive narrative.
- Behaviors that Promote Learning, a new category that synthesizes Personal/Social Development with Work Habits. Many student work habits are influenced by where students are developmentally in their personal and social growth.
- Progress Scales based on curriculum expectations, replacing the previous 1-4 scale with developmental descriptors (see below)

K-2

S	Satisfactory: Consistently meets expectation
P	Progressing: Progressing toward expectations
NI	Needs Improvement: Not yet meeting expectation
NTY	Not Taught Yet

Gr. 3-5

E	Consistently exceeds curriculum expectations
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M	Meets curriculum expectations
P	Progressing toward curriculum expectations
N	Not yet meeting curriculum expectations
NA	Not Applicable

Increasing Services at the High School for Students with Emotional Disabilities

By Eric Rauschenbach, Director of Special Education and Student Services

On January 13th, I presented a formal proposal to The Board of Education to start a program for emotionally disabled students at Scarsdale High School. This program is designed to help students maintain their emotional health, retain the benefits of a Scarsdale curriculum, and lessen the need for out-of-district therapeutic placements. It proposes a combination of academic and psychological supports for our children who are dealing with significant emotional and psychological challenges. This program would be open to students classified under IDEA (the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act) and whose primary disabling factor is social or emotional in nature.

The District and Region have seen an increase in the number of students diagnosed with Generalized Anxiety Disorders, Specific Anxiety Disorders, Depression, and Mood Disorders. The number of students being classified as Emotionally Disabled has increased significantly in the past four to five years. Due to an increasing need for intensive psychological support, more of our students have needed out-of-district, therapeutic day and residential placements. These students tend to leave the District between 8th and 10th grade and many do not return to the District prior to graduation. Further, these outside placements are becoming less available and more expensive. In examining these factors, we decided to explore the possibility of developing a program for students within the District.

Although these students range widely across academic levels, including Advanced Topics (AT), and have individual strengths and challenges, they have in common a difficulty in controlling their emotional responses. These responses can include withdrawal, acting out, over-compensating, and/or avoiding. Their reactions can seem irrational or disconnected from the situation. Many also have difficulty forming positive relationships with parents, adults and/or peers. Our goal is to create a program that provides an environment where these students can feel safe and valued for their strengths while at the same time being taught to understand and overcome their challenges.

In this new program, enrolled students will receive multiple sessions of group counseling each week as well as an academic support period. A full-time psychologist, a special education teacher and an educational aide would support the students. A separate classroom space in the High School would serve counseling and academic support needs.

This is an opportunity to serve a growing population of students within the community they live. I encourage everyone to view the presentation posted on our District website ([here](#)).

Personnel Update: Probationary Teachers

By Dr. Bernard Josefsberg, Interim Assistant Superintendent for Human Services and Leadership Development

Probationary employees working toward a tenured appointment account for approximately 15% of Scarsdale teachers and student support personnel. The high stakes associated with granting or denial of professional tenure makes the performance review process especially consequential --for the individual, certainly, but also for the District's continued excellence.

By definition, a probationary employee is "auditioning" for a permanent appointment. Over the next several months, panels of administrators, principals, and supervisors will be convened to individually appraise the performance of 63 probationary employees. For those in their first or second years, the question is whether or not to extend probationary status. But for 21 teachers and student support personnel who are completing their probationary period, the question is whether or not they will be entrusted with tenure.

Parents have a role in this process, too. Earlier this month, the District sent emails to parents of current and former students of probationary teachers. Parents were invited to offer their views on the teacher's effectiveness via a survey jointly designed by the District and the leadership of the Scarsdale Teachers Association. Soliciting parental feedback as part of the tenure review process is not unique to Scarsdale; however, teachers joining administrators in soliciting that feedback most certainly is. That blended voice speaks to a singular interest in reserving tenure for only the most deserving. Scarsdale has always set the bar high, and will continue to do so.

Personnel Update: A Remarkable Testimonial

By Dr. Bernard Josefsberg, Interim Assistant Superintendent for Human Services and Leadership Development

If young students are to sustain engagement in learning and if their teachers are to seriously explore fundamental changes in practice, each needs the support and challenge provided by a caring community. A caring community communicates a vision of human dignity and the public good that transcends the pursuit of individual interest. - Fred Newmann

Now a professor emeritus at the University of Wisconsin, Fred Newmann is a progressive educational reformer of some repute and one of the founders of the

Center for Authentic Intellectual Work. He argues that learning is deepest when students are taught how to construct knowledge through the "disciplined inquiry" that characterizes high-value work in "real world" contexts. He wrote the above words about the educational importance of a "caring community" twenty-two years ago -- or just about the time when the teachers who are retiring at the end of this year from the Scarsdale schools were in the prime of their careers.

I'm the one who receives their formal letters of retirement, which means that I'm the one who has enjoyed some wonderful conversations with them about their Scarsdale careers. To a person, Newmann's notion of a "caring community" resonates in their appreciative reflections upon what it means to be a Scarsdale teacher. At this historical moment, too many of the nation's teachers have cause to lament the conditions in which they work. In contrast, Scarsdale's soon-to-be-retirees clearly understand how this community's educational vision has distinguished them among their professional peers. Their gratitude is a remarkable testimonial to what continues to be possible in Scarsdale.

Bond Project Planning Update

By Stuart Matthey, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Facilities



The District is currently engaged in planning many exciting construction projects. In December 2014, the voters of Scarsdale approved a bond referendum authorizing the District to borrow funds for improvements to many of its buildings. This work included the now completed roof replacement at Quaker Ridge School and upgrades to the District's technology infrastructure.

Detailed plans for the remaining scope of items were submitted by our architects to the State Education Department; we are awaiting their review and approval to proceed. Once that approval process is complete and bids are awarded, the construction process will begin. We are hopeful that these projects will proceed as anticipated with construction starting this coming summer. Highlights of the remaining work to be completed as part of this project include:

- Edgewood - renovation of the school library and office;
- Heathcote - addition of a new multi-purpose room;
- Middle School - addition of a new music/multi-purpose room; and
- High School - renovation of gyms A/B to create the Learning Commons, renovation of the old auto body shop to create a Design Lab, and renovation of existing storage space to create a new fitness center.

The District is also in the early planning stages for a bond referendum which would be put forth to voters in May 2017.

The District's architects have completed a preliminary analysis of all District buildings as part of the State-required Building Condition Survey, which was presented at the Board of Education meeting on January 13th ([here](#)).

The Building Condition Survey will be the District's planning guide in developing a five-year Master Plan for facilities. That will proceed in conjunction with the work of building-level committees as they study how capital improvements may better support collaborative learning and creative problem-solving, important components of a 21st century education.

As part of the planning for a 2017 bond referendum, the District continues to study options to resolve significant issues of both aging infrastructure and educational adequacy facing the Greenacres School. To assist with this process, a re-convened committee of staff and community members met throughout the fall to further discuss and prioritize issues, and explore options that would resolve these issues. Their completed report was presented at the Board of Education meeting on January 13th and is available on the District's website [here](#).

Important steps in the planning for this prospective bond project are as follows:

- Public Forums with a focus on Greenacres, scheduled for Thursday, March 3rd at 7 p.m. and Tuesday, March 15th at 9 a.m.
- Building-level Master Plans to be forwarded to the Board of Education in May 2016
- District Facilities Steering Committee to be formed.
- District Facilities Steering Committee to study Building-Level Master Plans in support of the development of a District-Wide Master Plan.
- Board of Education receives final report and recommendations from the District Facilities Steering Committee in November 2016.
- Board of Education approves plan for final project scope in January 2017.
- Public Vote in May 2017.

New Approaches in Physical Education, Health, and Athletics

By Ray Pappalardi, Director of Physical Education, Health, and Athletics

As the new Director of Physical Education, Health, and Athletics, I have been focusing on the factors that enable and limit our students' experiences within the curricular and extracurricular areas for which I am responsible. In my presentation to the Board of Education in December, I outlined my activities over the past six months gathering information about our programs, staff, community, and facilities.

As my title suggests, I am responsible for three areas: physical education, health education, and interscholastic athletics. I have been gathering data to describe these programs, our staff, the Scarsdale community, and the facilities that support our programs.

Early lessons have revealed gaps in daily and seasonal operations, lack of systematic approaches, and a strong sense of and need for autonomy. Often, solutions have emerged collaboratively through interactions with students and parents. This give and take is reflective of the type of partnership that I hope to reinforce.

Daily operations reveal that modes of communication have been ineffective and inconsistent. Infinite Campus Messenger will now be used to communicate periodic messages to families, while school-based email will be used to communicate with students. In addition, processing athletic exemptions and registration/clearance for sports participation require automation; technological solutions will be tested and employed in the near future.

Several other areas require a systematic approach. Recruitment and retention of staff, including training and evaluative activities, require establishing professional norms of behavior consistent with community expectations. A model is being developed for bringing families and staff together as allies in the development of coherent processes vital to finding and developing qualified staff (specifically coaches). Similar approaches may be used for program development. In addition, a greater focus on student fitness development must be implemented, in contrast to the predominant model of talent identification and selection.

I have been working with my departments to define common experiences, expectations, and outcomes. In November, my staff of 32 physical and health educators and I came together to define our work under the umbrella of wellness. We organized our ideas into three categories: family and social health; mental and emotional health; and physical health. As a culminating activity, we identified exemplars of wellness and began to develop our mission. Since then, my leadership team has developed a spring semester STI course to provide a structure for continuing our work. Follow-up activities will take place on our next Superintendent's Conference Day on March 24th.

I am excited and encouraged by my interactions every day. I am finding more exemplars within our programs, identifying limitations to student success and working on collaborative solutions to minimize those limitations and enable students' positive, healthy experiences.



Technology Update

By Jerry Crisci, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation, and Rachel Moseley, Director of Information Technology

Our K-12 Technology Committee is working on a new District Technology Plan that will be presented to the Board and the community at the end of this school year. A highlight of the plan is the description of student technology expectations, which are based on a document called the NETS standards, the National Educational Technology Standards for students.

Because the current version of the NETS document does not explicitly include goals for making and design, the District K-12 Technology Committee and other groups are also planning a K-12 STEAM sequence and a document that also outlines our program for K-12 coding. This is another one of our transition plan goals.

One of the challenges of creating standards-based document is that the standards are constantly changing. For example, on January 7th, a new draft of the NETS standards was released. This new version, includes new roles for students that are very different than the ones described in the current standards document. The new student roles have titles like "innovative designer/maker," "computational thinker," and "empowered learner." We are pleased that the national standards are now reflecting the kind of education that we value in Scarsdale.

This is a very exciting time for instructional technology, and we look forward to sharing our work as our new expectations are developed.



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