SCARSDALE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

NON 1784 SIBI

'Dale Dispatch: District e-Newsletter

From Dr. Thomas Hagerman
Superintendent of Schools

Perceptions

I've had an experience all my life that, until now, I could not name. Here's the latest example: in a recent meeting, someone made a reference to the *Sword of Damocles*. Picture a sword dangling over one's head by a thread; it is a literary allusion to an ever-looming, potential hazard faced by leaders. For obvious reasons, I took note. I was quite surprised to hear the reference again the next day on a television show. Then, a few days later, in a casual conversation with a long-time friend, he mentioned it too. From something I'd never heard to three references in the span of less than a week--amazing! As it turns out, there is a name for this seemingly (but, not really) random occurrence: the *Baader-Meinhof phenomenon*.

To my recollection, I hadn't heard of the *Sword* before, but as an English major, bibliophile, and admirer of classical literature, this doesn't seem likely. Instead, it probably didn't register as a memory earlier due to the lack of relevance at the time and the singularity of exposure. According to Dr. Bernard D. Beitman, Professor of Psychiatry at the University of Missouri-

Columbia, our brains need order, and, when absent, they create it. As such, our brains are "predisposed to use coincidences to create or discover patterns." In turn, meaning results when we overlay personal biases on these newly-constructed patterns. Ultimately, we refer to this as "our experience," or how we think and feel about any given event.

Now, this might seem like a strange topic to introduce in June. But, it might make more sense when we recall that school endings tend to be a time when people pause and reflect back on their collective experiences. The more thoughtful among us even draw conclusions about the relative successes of the year. Dr. Beitman further explains that biases, in and of themselves, are inherently neither good nor bad; however, we should be aware of their effects in coloring our experience.

If it's been a while since your last psychology class, here are a few common belief and behavioral biases:

- *Bandwagon Effect*: The tendency to believe things because many other people do.
- *Focusing Effect*: The tendency to place too much importance on one aspect of an event.
- *Negativity Bias*: The psychological phenomenon by which humans have a greater recall of unpleasant memories compared with positive memories.
- *Optimism Bias*: The tendency to be over-optimistic, overestimating favorable and pleasing outcomes.
- *Recency Effect*: The tendency to remember the last events or issues more clearly than earlier ones.
- *Status Quo Bias*: The tendency to like things to stay relatively the same.

These and many other perceptions inevitably shape our thoughts, along with our corresponding feelings about them. For me, still living in the moment, it feels like we are coming off a somewhat frenzied year, one full of transition and change: many new people in different roles, ambitious goals, collective bargaining, sustainability efforts, construction planning, STEAM implementation, World Language deliberation, and so much more. Even as I type this, though, I recognize that this is a slanted and fairly one-dimensional version of recent history. It most assuredly does not encapsulate the full range of experiences, relations, and events of the past year in its entirety.

In moments of greater clarity, or when I successfully invoke my own *bias-correcting bias*, I am able to recall a myriad of teacher conversations, student interactions, and parent exchanges that have positively contributed to our vision of Scarsdale schools. Our common work, too, whether at the Board of Education, District, or building levels, has been markedly productive. In no small part, this can be attributed to active listening, open dialogue, thoughtful consideration, and decisive action (that reflects our mission and values). It is a year that may have felt disjointed at times, but, unequivocally, it has set us on a long-term course of stability, continuity, and growth.

This school year, like others before it, has been a string of loosely connected moments. The measure of the year, I would argue, is not all of the things we have accomplished together,

however impressive that list might be. Instead, it is what we have learned about ourselves, our students, our schools, and one another, along the way. As the 2015-16 school year comes to a close, it is my hope that each of you finds (or makes) time to ask and answer the questions about your own learning, and how you will use this insight to shape the new year ahead. The *Sword of Damocles* is but one of many perils that face all of us when we don't take time for introspection.

Enjoy the summer; I look forward to reuniting in the fall.

With warm regards,
Dr. Thomas Hagerman

Blending Traditional and Digital Literacies

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

Over the course of the past year our District has seen significant student progress in English Language Arts (ELA) as a digital focus has been folded into our ELA program. The ability to find, evaluate, utilize, share, and create content using information technologies and the Internet requires a blend of both traditional and digital literacy skills. This fusion of digital and traditional literacies should be no surprise, as the core competencies for both draw on critical literacy skills. Critical literacy encourages individuals to understand and question the attitudes, values, and beliefs of written texts, visual applications, and spoken words.

While Scarsdale teachers continue to develop an evolving 21st century curriculum, we can note many elementary classrooms where students are already curators of content. These children participate in class blogging, animating, coding, tweeting, and other multi-modal forms of literacy. This month, students in one first grade classroom launched their own website, *KidAdvisor*, which can be accessed here. Our young learners, equipped with student-made business cards, and hosting a Quick Response (QR) code for instant site access, shared their process of opinion writing and publishing on the web. In other classrooms across the District, student bloggers in several grade levels have been busy studying blogging as a genre and learning the essential skills of posting, commenting, and evaluating web logs. Digital literacy experiences like these are becoming more common in our classrooms as information gathering and communicating is increasingly multi-modal, hyperlinked, and social.

Today's networked literacy experiences are taking down the walls of the classroom and leading our students toward an understanding of global literacy. As educators, we prepare students by continually teaching them to be powerful consumers and producers of media. After all, the purpose of digital literacy is to not only to deepen student engagement, but also to help students develop habits of inquiry and skills of expression so they can become critical thinkers and effective communicators in today's world.

Swan Song

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

No bird sings when hungry or cold or suffering any other grief,
not even the nightingale ...
Nor do the swans ... they are foreseeing the good things
--- The Phaedo, Plato.

For me, this past year has been one of plenty -- of challenges, perplexities, wows, and wonders. I echo the gratitude that I heard in exit interviews from Scarsdale's retiring teachers who are experiencing this final month of this particular academic year with especially strong feelings. For an educator, time spent in Scarsdale -- whether a paltry one year or a voluminous fifty -- is eye-opening.

The District's reputation derives from associations with national and international standards of the highest quality. Those associations entice parents to entrust the educational welfare of their children to the District's teachers and administrators. Actually attaining those standards with their individual students animates the work of individual educators who prize their membership in a public school system that not only "foresees the good" but seeks to enact it in all of its forms. The experience is often exhilarating.

Very shortly, my Scarsdale experience will be in retrospect. But in the spirit of a Swan Song, I foresee it yielding enduring feeling.

The End of the Cycle and the Beginning

By Stuart Mattey, Assistant Superintendent for Business and Facilities

It is June and that means the school year is coming to a close, not only for students but also for our fiscal year.

Let me take you behind the scenes for a glimpse of the details that go into keeping a school district running smoothly. With the fiscal year ending on June 30th, the District's business office has already begun to close out the current year and is turning its focus to the upcoming year. The closeout process involves many procedures, including the review of all open purchase orders, accounts receivable and payable, fixed asset inventories, and payroll reconciliations.

Once the current year is officially closed we focus on preparations for the external audit, which will take place in late summer. The external audit is performed by outside auditors who thoroughly review the District's financial statements and provide their professional opinion. These audited financial statements will be received by the Board of Education in the fall before finally being submitted to the State Education Department and State Comptroller. The business office must also prepare numerous State financial reports which will ultimately determine any future amounts of State aid.

With District voters recently approving the 2016-17 school budget, the business office has now activated the 2016-17 budget year for purchases. The District's purchasing agent, in coordination with various departments, has also conducted competitive bids for commonly used goods and

services to assure best pricing. With the 2016-17 budget approved and competitive pricing in place, District teachers and school offices are allowed to enter supply orders into the District's financial system before the summer recess. Supplies ordered at this time will then be received this summer prior to the arrival of students in September. So, along with all the deep cleaning, polishing, repairing, and refurbishing that goes on in classrooms throughout the District over the summer months, we will also be well-stocked and ready to welcome students in the fall.

Transformational vs. Transactional Relationships

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

Many of our personal interactions are transactional in nature. The simple purchase of a morning coffee, or saying "Good morning" as an echoed response to a neighbor, are transactional. These exchanges are fairly superficial, and expectations are predictable and clear. However, problems begin when you do not receive what you expect. What is your reaction when a server gets your order wrong? How about when you say good morning and the person does not respond?

Problems worsen when these transactional relationships creep into sports. On the playing field, an overemphasis on winning increases transactive behaviors in both magnitude and frequency. At its worst, fans are yelling at referees, players are blaming each other, and coaches are demeaning and demoralizing players. At its best, we practice, we win, and we seem happy: all the private lessons, late practices, and long treks to travel games and showcases have paid off.

Unfortunately, these transactional phenomena in sports are common, even in Scarsdale. Too often, a focus on self-interest, return on investment, and winning overshadow the true value of sports. Is the purpose of sports to win games and set records? Or should winning be the natural by-product of focusing on player growth and development? Can we turn this transactional experience into one that is transformative?

A Focus on Coaching
Transactional coaches tend to use rewards to incentivize performance, monitor players, and move them from practice to practice, game to game, and season to season with little relational impact. This approach often stems from the coach's personal need to "succeed." Other negative behaviors arising from an emphasis on the transaction include breaking down players to rebuild them, humiliating players, and forcing players to comply rather than understand.

In sharp contrast, transformational coaches have much more to offer. The underlying assumption of their approach is that every relationship is long-lasting and important; in athletics, the coach-athlete relationship is at the core. Transformational coaches see themselves as mentors, and use their platform to nurture and foster player growth first. The team comes second, and their own needs are met through meeting the needs of their players.

While all coaches find themselves someplace on the continuum between transactional and transformational, we are working to shift our dispositions toward the transformative side. As with the development of all long-term relationships, this process requires time and trust. The outcome will be a student-athlete centered program based on a partnership between the families of Scarsdale and the Athletic Department, where the value and personal growth of each player is respected and nurtured.

Technology: The Year in Review

By Jerry Crisci, Director of Instructional Technology and Innovation

The Instructional Technology Department completed "a year of partnerships" this school year that helped to launch several key technology initiatives. I am grateful for the collective wisdom of all those who took part, and their willingness to work with me on these initiatives.

Here is a recap of the progress on our instructional technology goals:

Goal 1, developing a new technology plan, was completed last month, and was adopted by the Board of Education. The plan provides Scarsdale with a road map for teaching and learning in the years ahead, and calls for publication of three integrated components: a K-12 STEAM sequence; an elementary digital literacies plan; and a K-12 coding sequence.

Goal 2 involves the creation of a three-year budget projection. A preliminary projection is included in the technology plan; a detailed projection will be completed in conjunction with the development of our Smart Schools Bond finance plan this fall. This plan also includes completion of a technology "walking inventory" that was started last fall.

Goal 3 is ensuring alignment of K-12 coding opportunities and STEAM expectations. We have published our K-12 STEAM sequence; the coding sequence will be completed this summer, as planned.

Goal 4, formalizing a technology professional development program, has turned into a two-year goal. We provided many technology professional development opportunities for teachers this year, and look forward to meeting with our stakeholders and completing this goal in the winter of 2017.

Goal 5, developing Center For Innovation grant proposals and programs, was accomplished in partnership with my CFI Co-Director, Lynne Shain. This year we hosted four speakers: Connor Zwick, Will Richardson, Kristin Ziemke, and Mukesh Patel. We presented our annual report on the Center for Innovation at the Board meeting on June 20th.

Finally, Goal 6 -- redesigning the District website, launching a mobile app, and creating a social media workflow -- was completed this year. Of course, a website is never finished, so we will continue to add content, launch the District Twitter feed, and aggregate our social media on individual school websites. This additional work is planned for the summer and will continue into the fall.

Information Technology Update

By Rachel Moseley, Director of Information Technology

At the June 8th Board of Education meeting, I gave an overview of the progress the Information Technology team has made this year. I was very proud to report that my team completed all the projects outlined as 2015-16 transition goals. Here are a few of this year's accomplishments:

- The Technical Services team successfully completed several critical and complex

upgrades to the wired and wireless network to ensure network reliability, and to provide increased bandwidth to support the growth of the instructional technology program and its increased use of mobile devices.

- With short notice, our old phone system provider, Mitel, informed the District last year that they would no longer support our phone equipment unless the District upgraded to Mitel's Voice over IP phone and speaker system for $2.2 million. Moving quickly, the business office and the technology team evaluated systems, decided on a ShoreTel Voice over IP phone system and 2-way speakers for classrooms, and worked with Select Telecom to install the system in less than three months. This was a very difficult project and not surprisingly, there were some phone system and speaker issues at the beginning. However, the system is now running well, and much of the phone system support that used to be handled by Mitel is now being handled internally by the IT team. This has not only helped reduce cost, but also improved response times.

- The Data Services team supported the Human Resources Department in implementing AESOP, the substitute and absence management system. Data Services also integrated AESOP with our personnel database system, SMARTS. In addition, the team rolled out the SMARTS employee web portal, which enables staff to verify and enter dependent and health insurance information for compliance with the Affordable Care Act.

This progress on major projects was possible because of the hard work of the Information Technology team. At the same time, it is important to note that team members spend most of their days performing critical tasks such as repairing equipment, recording and editing video productions, providing audiovisual support, managing equipment orders, building computer images and cloning computers, supporting staff and parents with systems questions, managing user accounts, reporting data to the State and Federal governments, writing specifications, and developing reports and data visualizations. Without the dedication and expertise that these team members demonstrate every day, the District could not function, and the projects that I report on at Board meetings could not succeed.

This was my first year in my new role as Director of Information Technology. The year was filled with tight timelines and technical challenges. It has been a distinct pleasure to work with such a dedicated and skilled team to overcome the challenges and to work long hours to meet the deadlines. I look forward to another year of hard work and much progress ahead of us.