

Superintendent's Update

Wednesday, May 19, 2021

Today was the 147th day of the 2020-21 school year. We have 23 school days left this year. Just as a reminder, the last day of school is Monday, June 21 and this is a half-day for students.

Last week on Wednesday, May 12 was National School Nurses Day. I know the Committee wishes to send thanks to all the nurses for their additional efforts invested during the pandemic over the past year. Many thanks to all of our nurses and the tremendous job they have done all year keeping us safe in the Dedham Public Schools!

Last Wednesday, May 12 all Dedham PTO's sponsored a showing of the documentary movie "***Screenagers - The Next Chapter - Uncovering Skills for Stress Resilience***". Over 100 people signed up to attend the screening and panel discussion of DPS leaders addressed questions from viewers after the movie. I would like to graciously thank the PTO's for providing funding to bring this experience to parents, students and faculty/staff here in Dedham. If anyone would like to view it, a link to the movie and panel discussion will be available [HERE](#) for the next two weeks. I encourage Committee members to take advantage of this opportunity to learn more about the impact of screen time and social media on our teens.

Last week Dedham High School completed annual MCAS testing in English-Language Arts (ELA) and Math for all 10th grade students. These exams were completed online and passing these exams will return as a graduation requirement for current grade 10 students (Class of 2023) this year. As many are aware, current juniors (Class of 2022) will NOT have to pass the MCAS exam as a prerequisite for a high school diploma, but many students did choose to participate this year in order to qualify for the John and Abigail Adams Scholarship program. Current juniors may also participate in the exam this fall if they wish to qualify for this scholarship then.

On Monday, May 17th at Dedham's Annual Spring Town Meeting, the Dedham Public Schools [FY22 Operating Budget and Capital Budgets](#) were approved by an overwhelming majority vote. I did field a few questions from Town Meeting members including questions about the contractual pay raises included in the FY19 through FY22 Budgets, and an inquiry about the addition of \$17,500 for Equity Team Leaders in the district.

This allowed me a brief opportunity to speak with Town Meeting members about the importance of the district's ongoing work in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This work is being guided by Dr. Oneida Fox Roye, our district's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer. However, Dr. Fox Roye cannot do this work alone, and our FY22 Budget request for Equity Team Leaders was included to support a \$2500 stipend for each of our schools to enlist individuals to help develop and coordinate our efforts.

I want to also emphasize that when we say "Inclusion" in the Dedham Public Schools we mean that ALL students and families are valued, welcomed and supported in our schools and in our district. This includes families and students of all races, religions, ethnicities, beliefs, sexual orientations, abilities, and differences. In particular, I want to reassert our support for our students and families who identify as LGBTQ and affirm our welcome and acceptance of your presence in our community. We see you, we recognize you, and we support you for who you are. Thank you for choosing Dedham as your community.

I also wanted to alert the school community to a Town of Dedham event sponsored by the Dedham Human Rights Commission. Dedham's first-ever [LGBTQ+ Pride Celebration and Flag Raising](#), will take place at Town Hall on Tuesday, June 1 at 7 p.m. There will be speeches from Rep. Paul McMurtry and a member of the Select Board, a shared blessing by four local religious leaders, reflections on the personal meaning of Pride by

members of the local LGBTQ+ community, musical performances and a trivia contest with prizes from Dedham restaurants and shops. All community members are welcome and invited to attend.

As everyone is aware, on Monday this week [the Baker-Polito administration announced sweeping new guidance regarding reopening plans](#) in response to dropping rates of COVID-19 in the Commonwealth. I will address these new guidelines and their impact on the operational aspects of our district in my COVID-19 update.

This week all elementary schools completed in-person MCAS testing in ELA for students in grades 3-5. Next week the same students will complete MCAS Math testing. These tests are an abbreviated version of the typical annual exams, with only one 60-minute session for each subject.

Some members of the community may be aware that DHS Senior Jaden Thompson was severely injured in a tragic car accident in March. The community will be holding a Vigil of Hope for Jaden in conjunction with his family **this Sunday, May 23rd at 6:30 PM** in front of the Allin Congregational Church on 683 High Street in Dedham. Reverend Cheryl Kerr from Allin will lead attendees in positive thoughts for Jaden and his family. This is a non-denominational event and all are welcome to attend.

Last Thursday I facilitated a meeting with representatives from Dedham Parks and Recreation, Dedham Community House, the YMCA, Dedham Youth Commission, the Dedham Public Library, Dedham Police, and Dedham Country Day's Horizons Program to discuss how we could best collaborate regarding summer programming for Dedham students. This was a productive conversation, and we are currently surveying parents of all students recommended for additional summer support in Grades K-5 to help provide whatever students and families need.

On Friday, May 14 I participated in an all-day followup systems thinking workshop with ECEC faculty and staff to plan a Kindergarten Jump Start program for students who show increased need to improve Kindergarten readiness during their screenings this spring. Over 100 students are currently scheduled to be screened next week at the ECEC, and we hope to design and implement this program during the month of July.

I recently received word from Dedham Police Chief Mike D'Entremont that his department will be running a [Citizen Police Academy](#) informational training program this summer. Any resident is welcome to apply and there is no cost to participants. There is a maximum capacity of only 10 participants, so I encourage anyone interested to apply right away.

I am very pleased to inform the Committee that the district has received a [\\$5000 grant award from Norfolk County](#) to address mental health needs in the Dedham Schools. This grant will be used to defray the costs of implementing a universal mental health screening tool within the District (PreK-12). Our Director of Counseling Services Dr. Ashley Dube and Greenlodge Psychologist Jessica Blais combined in writing this grant and we received notification of the award last week. The [grant application](#) and award letter are in tonight's donations folder.

The annual Scully Award nominees are in!! Thank you again to all of the judges who contributed their time and effort to watch and vote on all of the best student videos this year. This year's ceremony will be virtual and is being held on **Wednesday, May 26th at 7pm via Zoom**. There is a banner on the DPS and DHS website that will be a live link to the awards ceremony when the event begins. There will be student hosting and multiple students presenting the nominees and announcing the winners. Please join in! A link to all of the nominees in and their videos is here: [2021 Scully Award Nominees](#)

The DHS Performing Arts Company recently released a [1-minute trailer for their upcoming virtual presentation of MacBeth](#). The full release will take place on Friday, May 28th at 7:00 PM. You can tune in [by clicking on this link](#).

I am happy to answer any questions the Committee may have.