

## Superintendent's News and Notes for Parents August 26, 2009

**Welcome to the 2009-10 academic year!**

**These messages are in no particular order or priority but rather of general interest to most parents as we embark on a new year of learning and personal growth for all children.**

### **H1N1**

Let me tackle this one first as there are so many questions and concerns. I receive weekly updates from the CDC and the federal, state and local departments of health. We have solid clear guidance on preventive measures, exclusions from school, reporting of absentee rates and mass vaccination plans. All of the PRS guidelines, links to government resources and information related to minimizing the impact of H1N1 in our schools and families will be posted on the main page of the district website for the entire school year and you will receive printed information as needed in mailings, via email and in backpack distributions. Overall though my most important message is this: **PARENTS HAVE THE GREATEST POWER AND RESPONSIBILITY IN MINIMIZING THE SPREAD OF H1N1.** Children exhibiting signs of flu-like symptoms must stay home! The revised CDC guidelines call for children's **exclusion from school for 24 hours AFTER a fever and without fever-reducing medications (i.e., Tylenol).** That is what we are enforcing and children's temperatures will be taken when they return to school to insure that no one is returning too soon.

### **PLEASE HAVE YOUR CHILDCARE PLANS IN PLACE.**

School nurses will be required to document daily absences and the reasons for them, so expect phone calls when your child is absent due to illness.

**Above all, remember that although this is a novel virus and children ages 5-17 are impacted to the greatest degree, the severity of the illness is similar to seasonal flu. Good hygiene is the best measure of protection and, if ill, separation from others is the best control for minimizing the spread. Making arrangements to keep your child home when he or she is ill is not only the best care for your child but also the most considerate action for the school and greater community.**

### **REPORTING STUDENT ABSENCES**

There is a new process for parents to report the absences of children in grades PK-8. You will receive a copy of the directions with a specific phone number to be called in the early morning so that we know who will be absent and the reason for the absence. It is very important that this process become routine for you as it is a major health and safety factor. If your child is not in school, we must know that he/she is with you or in the care you have arranged for him/her!

## **PTOC, PEF, 101, Tutors: We need YOU!**

Our school district thrives because of the many talents that parents and other adults throughout the community devote to the success of our students. There are roles, big and small, in the spotlight and behind the scenes, for everyone! Please be certain to join your children's Parent Teacher Organization where an hour a month can matter tremendously to the overall success of a school. The Princeton Education Foundation and Fund101: (formerly Princeton Regional Scholarship Foundation) are also incredible organizations that support our work and our students in invaluable ways. Both organizations are always looking for new voices and more hands!

[www.pefnj.org](http://www.pefnj.org) and [www.fund101.org](http://www.fund101.org) will give you all the info you need to get started. If you are able to volunteer as a tutor in the high school IDEAS center, please contact Dr. Dinan at 806-4280 after September 1<sup>st</sup>.

## **Minority Education Committee**

MEC is a community based committee that is charged by the Board of Education to promote and advance equity and success for all children, especially those historically under-represented or struggling in our educational system. This group of community members is under leadership with Fern Spruill as their chair and they are working hard to engage parents in meaningful ways in their children's learning. Your voice and participation would be appreciated! Meetings are held the third Monday of each month at 7:30 in the Valley Road building. Mark your calendar for September 21<sup>st</sup>!

## **Power School**

We have adopted Power School as our software for organizing attendance, student schedules, grading, demographic and transcript information, etc., throughout the district. While in its first layer of implementation this is more of an internal difference, when we roll into the next phases of use Power School will change the way parents can access grades and attendance online and the way that teachers can create websites for their class work, projects, notices, etc. The major impact this year will be at the high school level, with faculty and staff from PK-12 tapping into the full capacity of Power School use as the months unfold.

## **Your Email and Cell Info**

**PLEASE** share your email and cell phone contact info with us so that we can have a stronger emergency notification system in place for you. That information was requested on the contact info sheets sent home in late August mailings.

## **Tri State Consortium**

This is the third year for our nascent work with the Tri-State Consortium, a network of high achieving districts in New York, Connecticut and New Jersey. We continue to focus on the training of teachers and administrators as they become grounded in the eight indicators that when equally strong and pervasive across a district form the pillars for long-term success. This work has been of the highest quality and of great interest to our

educators. As we move toward 2011, we anticipate a visit from an external team of educators from across the consortium that will assist us in reflecting upon our strengths and needs.

[www.tristate.org](http://www.tristate.org)

### **Technology in the Classrooms**

While we are forerunners in many areas and have so many points of pride across our PK-12 academic and co-curricular programs, providing for enough tech equipment in classrooms has not been a strength. We are aggressively working to close that resource gap so that teachers have the instructional tools to tackle their work in the most effective and efficient ways possible and so that students have the best resources for research, creation and presentation. As we return to school, all PK-5 classrooms will have a core set of instructional tools (computer, DVD player, ceiling mounted projector, document camera) connected to a wireless environment. Thanks to the Princeton Education Foundation, all PHS math classes will have new sets of that equipment, also. Our science classrooms have been fairly well equipped but there are many more rooms to tackle and that is only on the core instructional sets of equipment. Quick response clickers, laptops by the dozen (actually by the hundred), interactive white boards and itouches are among the needs that still exist in order for us to better support and accelerate instruction. We are creating the roadmap to get us toward a better level of technology integration...soon.

### **Keeping Learning on Track**

Enhancing our practice through the study of current research and the application of best strategies is our constant goal. Dozens of faculty members including a team of teachers at each elementary school, every middle school teacher and three teams of PHS teachers will be engaged in two years of professional learning based on research regarding formative assessment of student work and strategies for feedback that best promotes learning. The program, Keeping Learning on Track, is through ETS and has been generously underwritten for the Princeton Regional Schools by ETS. Interested in further information? [www.ets.org](http://www.ets.org)

### **Creating 21<sup>st</sup> Century Schools—NJ Department of Education**

You have probably read in the papers about work at the State Department of Education to align our teaching and learning standards with 21<sup>st</sup> skills, to increase the number of credits required for graduation to 120, to change the required courses for high school pupils to include the study of economics and personal finance, to move toward end-of-course state tests which will replace the High School Proficiency Assessment ( HSPA) in a couple of years, to increase the rigor of coursework across the state, and to encourage and support the best uses of technology in our schools. You might be asking yourself how, if at all, it matters to PRS.

Yes, our students must now have more credits to graduate, but most of students graduate with more than 120 credits already.

End of course tests move us away from math and language arts tests in the junior year and toward course (i.e., Biology, Algebra, English 1). This has been in the works for the past few years and will continue to evolve.

As students (next year's freshmen) must soon take the economics half year elective, it will reduce their options for other electives.

What makes the most difference for teaching and learning at PRS will be the mandated standards for each grade level and subject area, combined with the integration of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills for students (tech, collaboration, communication, etc.) Most of the standards have already been approved by the State Board of Education for immediate implementation and with a requirement for courses of study to be updated or rewritten in the months ahead. We have such talent on our faculty and so much expertise at our fingertips that we will certainly be in good stead as we embrace these standards.

Interested in more info? [www.state.nj.us/education](http://www.state.nj.us/education)

### **District Refinancing**

Great news! On June 13<sup>th</sup> our business administrator, Stephanie Kennedy, authorized the refunding of long-term debt, which is essentially our mortgage from referendum/construction work. We hit the market on just the right day, saving slightly over 5%. That equates to a savings for the taxpayer in '10-'11 of **\$174,000** and a savings over the next decade of over **2 million** dollars!

### **Stimulus Dollars**

More news on the financial front...

We have benefited from the federal stimulus fund in two ways. We will receive an additional \$173,994 to be used for Title 1 programs over the next 18 months. These are programs serving the most economically disadvantaged pupils in the district and the funds can be used only at JP and CP and with some allocation for eligible local non-public schools.

We also received an additional \$1,208,000 in funding for IDEA programs, or special education, which can be used at all six schools as well as our local non-publics. The stimulus money will primarily be used for purchase of tech equipment to support reading and math instruction as well as for professional learning for our staff. None of this would occur without the stimulus dollars and will have effects for our students which last longer than the influx of money.

### **Princeton Reads: Three Cups of Tea**

The district is most pleased to partner with one of our community's gems, the Princeton Public Library, as we welcome Greg Mortenson, author of "Three Cups of Tea" to PRS in October. All of our juniors had the text as summer required reading, our youngest readers will be reading "Listen to the Wind" in the elementary schools and we encourage many of our middle schoolers to read the intermediate level book of Greg's just recently published. About 400 of our students will hear Greg speak on October 23<sup>rd</sup> and I

encourage you to check for tickets to the public event at Nassau Presbyterian Church that week. Tickets will be available via the public library beginning September 15<sup>th</sup>. Most of all, this is a tremendous chance to capture opportunities for shared reading and discussion with our children! Stay close to the PPL website [www.princeton.lib.nj.us](http://www.princeton.lib.nj.us) and the PRS website [www.prs.k12.nj.us](http://www.prs.k12.nj.us) for further information.

### **Faculty and Program Changes**

Although this was not a year of much hiring, we do have several new faculty and support staff with us across the six schools. I know you will be eager to meet them and welcome them to our community!

Achtau, Maria	Spanish LV REP	JW
Baldwin, Charles G.	Reading Teacher	HS
Battista, Alysia	Elem Science	RS
Blick, Lauren	Spec Ed LV REP	HS
	English (.6) LV	
Coen, Barbara	REP	HS
Conroy, Monica	English	JW
Darpino, Lara	Art	JW
Davison, Valerie	Math	HS
DePugh, Dana Hice	LDTC	RS
Ferrera, Taryn	Psychology Intern	
McGhee, Lisa	Reading	JW
Newman, Suzanne	Speech Lang Spec	JP
	Guidance	
Samara, Benjamin	Counselor	RS
Shah, Nipurna	Counselor (1.027)	HS
Shelley, John	Social Studies (.8)	HS
Simon, Jennifer	Spec Ed	JW
Wickerhauser, Olga	Chemistry (.5)	HS
Zimmerman, Michael	English (.8)	HS

During the summer months PRS teachers were very busy designing curriculum, learning how to use new tools, planning for program implementation and attending state and national training programs. Some highlights:

- Re-design of our elementary basic skills services to include new screenings, entrance and exit criteria and tools. You'll now hear these services referred to as Accelerated Intervention Services.
- New k-5 science units that build upon our exceptional foundation for inquiry based learning while integrating technology into every unit ( each elementary school now has a fulltime science instructor instead of a half time science and half time computer ed teacher)
- Two more elementary teachers trained in SEED, Seeking Educational Equity and Diversity.

- Several additional teachers trained in Teachers College Writing and Reading workshop methodologies.
- Many teachers involved in hands-on workshops for mastering tech tools
- Dozens of faculty members designed curriculum in every subject area

All of this plus hundreds students were in summer programs with us this year. We have become a 12 month organization serving children in many ways each day.

### **Next Challenges**

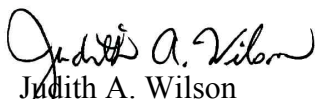
Across the schools and grade levels, we do *many* things and deliver *many* services exceptionally well and consistently. But the demands of society, requirements from the state and federal levels, expectations of our families and students, and new research that informs our practice all combine with our internal drive and desire to continually improve. Our best work will come through collaborative, systemic efforts as we use data better, strengthen our practices and become more and more transparent and accountable for each child's strong and steady growth.

In the short-term, several new working groups will concentrate on these efforts:

- District Technology Committee will create a new tech plan for '10-'13
- Sustainability Committee will crystallize its mission in order to make recommendations at the Board level
- The district's wellness plan and goals will be revised
- The Board will engage in a strategic planning process

This is by no means an exhaustive look at our current work, but it is my hope that it gives you an understanding of some of the highlights. I look forward to seeing you often and always welcome your questions and recommendations. Wishing you and your families the very best for the school year!

With gratitude for the support you provide for your children and for our district,

  
Judith A. Wilson  
Superintendent of Schools