



Superintendent's Corner

Gary S. Reese, Ed.D.

Interim Superintendent

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Fortunately, the snow this week did not impact the schools from opening. The weather has certainly been strange, as some have gone from wearing shorts last week, to wearing winter jackets this week!

MCAS Testing

Students in grades 3-8 began this year's MCAS testing administration this week. During the month of March, the students take the English Language Arts portion of the MCAS tests. Unlike previous years, the students in grades 4 and 8 are not completing a long composition. Rather, they are doing additional writing in response to text.

This year, we did have a few families that submitted letters to opt out of the MCAS testing. While state regulations do not permit for an 'opt' out provision, we respect the rights of parents to make that decision for their child. If a child does not participate in the testing, however, it is scored as a zero and has an impact on our accountability data for the school year. Additionally, depending on the number of students that do not take the testing, it could influence our participation rate. Also, we use the data from the MCAS as one data source to review our curriculum and drive our instructional practices; when not all students participate, it could skew the results. I share this information, not to try to shame any parent that makes this decision for their child, but rather as a precursor to the challenges that are faced when using this data to identify our accountability levels from the state. When results are released in the fall, we will have a better sense of how these students' scores have influenced our overall data.

In Case you missed the school committee meeting...

School Resource Officers – Officers LeSage and Bybee, the district's school resource officers were in attendance to discuss the SRO program and the impact that it has had on the schools...

School Attendance Officer – David Meuse, the school attendance officer, was present to answer questions from school committee members about the tracking of attendance and the types of support he provides to ensure student safety. He also spoke about the work he does to verify student residency.

Little League- Michael Buetow from the Amesbury Little League requested permission from the school committee to place a flag pole near the concession stand at the field behind Cashman Elementary.

School Budget Vote - The school committee voted to approve the proposed budget for fiscal year 2017 in the amount of \$29,669,627. This budget represents a 2.46% increase over last year's budget and enables each of our schools to add some form of staffing back to the building.

School Choice vote – Each year, the school committee must take a vote to determine any seats that will be open for the upcoming school year for school choice (students from communities outside of Amesbury attending school in Amesbury). School choice brings some additional revenue to the schools. This year, 50 seats were voted by the school committee to be available for next year (10 seats at each grade level from grade 6-10). A formal process will be identified to complete a lottery process to fill those seats.

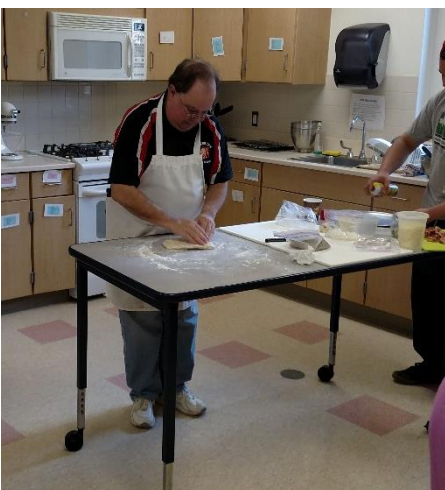
PRT (Professional Release Time) Day Activities

During this week's early release day, all staff members participated in a workshop presented by Jessica Minahan. Ms. Minahan is a board-certified behavioral analyst and educator. She is the co-author of *The Behavior Code*. She is renowned across the state and country for her work with districts in helping to better understand and respond to challenging behaviors. The focus of this workshop was on responding to children with anxiety, including how this issue manifests itself in the school setting and strategies to work effectively with a children experiencing anxiety. This workshop was very well –received by staff members; most of us could relate to the strategies being presented, as we could identify at least one student that exhibited the characteristics of a child with anxiety. Her approach is very straight forward and the strategies presented are very easy to implement in the school setting.

Administrative Leadership Team Meeting

On Thursday afternoon, the administrative leadership team met to discuss plans for curriculum development through next year. We brought in a consultant, Ronit Carter, who has expertise in developing curriculum using a backwards design approach. Backwards design is an approach to developing curriculum where you start at the end (what do we want kids to know and be able to do when we finish this unit), followed by the building of assessments (both paper-pencil and performance tasks) that demonstrate acquisition of those skills and knowledge. The final step is the development of the lessons to help students develop their understanding of the concepts. This approach is different than what has been a typical approach in education where we first think about the lesson and then move forward. The challenge with this type of approach is if you don't know where you are going (your destination), you can't plan the activities to get there (the journey). The best way to describe it is through going on a trip – you can't pack or prepare for the trip if you don't know where you are going! The purpose of this initial meeting was to help lay the foundation for work that will be completed over the summer and throughout next year by staff members. Administrators left this meeting invigorated and excited about the opportunities that lay ahead in terms of curriculum development and implementation.

In our schools...



Who's that chef in the picture? It's none other than High School Principal Roy Hamond. Mr. Hamond spent time with some students making breakfast pizzas as part of a culmination of a unit they had recently completed on cooking. The students had developed recipes and designed a cookbook. While I didn't get to enjoy a piece of Mr. Hamond's breakfast pizza, I was told it was delicious!

Shrek, The Musical

Amesbury High School presents *Shrek, the Musical* this weekend in the high school auditorium. Tickets are \$10 for students and \$12 for adults and can be purchased at the door. Come on out to show your support of some very talented students! On Friday and Saturday evening, the show is at 7:00 pm. On Sunday, there is a 'matinee' performance at 2:00 pm.



Be well and have a great weekend!

Gary