



Superintendent's Corner

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Superintendent's Coffee

This week, I had the wonderful opportunity to hold a couple of 'coffee' hours with parents and staff from Cashman and Amesbury Elementary Schools. I also met with staff from the Amesbury Innovation Academy. It was a great chance for me to learn more about the district, including its strengths and needs, from the people that have the best 'pulse' on our district. I appreciated people's candid reflections about our district and willingness to share with me. The discussions from these meetings will be included as part of my entry plan findings. I am still working on some dates for the middle school and high school. I will also be hosting a district-wide 'coffee hour' for all of the school councils to meet together and share about the district. I value these opportunities for rich conversation.



Winter is Approaching

On Monday, I received an email communication from our City benefits administrator regarding Seasonal Affective Disorder. This is a condition that occurs as the weather becomes colder, days become shorter and there is less natural sunlight. It is characterized by the following symptoms:

- Fatigue
- Oversleeping
- Wanting to "hibernate" until spring
- Sadness, moodiness, or irritability
- Overeating (especially craving carbohydrates later on in the day)
- A loss of interest in usual activities

I share this 'blurb' in my week in review because as we begin to enter into the winter months, it is important that we are mindful of the impact of winter, watch for these indicators from both students and staff, and support all of our school community as needed.

School Safety Meeting

On Monday afternoon, Representatives from the police and fire departments (including Police Chief Ouellet and Fire Chief Berkenbush) and I met with Lt. Scott Sencabaugh from the Wilmington Police Department to discuss the STARS (School Threat Assessment and Response System) initiative started through the North Eastern Massachusetts Law Enforcement Council (NEMLEC). STARS mission is to prepare, assess, respond, and strive to prevent threats of violence in our schools through a regional program that recognizes the individual uniqueness and integrity of each community. Members of the STARS team provide support to school communities in response to crises that we may be encountering. Lt. Sencabaugh provided an overview of the program, discussed possible areas in which the STARS team members might support schools, and identified the mechanism for 'activating' the STARS team. It was a great opportunity to meet with multiple safety officials to ensure the safety of our students.

MCAS 2.0

As I presented at our Monday night school committee meeting, the Board of Education has decided to accept Commissioner Chester's recommendations for the development and implementation of a next generation assessment. This assessment will include some format/questions from both MCAS and PARCC, although it seems that the test will rely more heavily on PARCC related questions. Districts will have the opportunity to administer either PARCC or MCAS for this current school year. Districts that administered PARCC last year will be required to administer that assessment again this year. For those districts, including Amesbury, that administered the MCAS, districts can choose to either administer PARCC or MCAS. It is my recommendation that we continue with MCAS for one more year before transitioning to the next generation assessment. All districts will take the next generation assessment beginning in 2017, with the expectation that the assessment will be completely computer-based by 2019. This shift to online assessments will require a significant investment in technology, both in terms of the infrastructure, overall access to computers, as well as an analysis of our current staffing structure. We will look at this more closely as we prepare our budget for this upcoming school year, as well as while we examine our long range technology capital plan.

New Superintendent Induction Program (NSIP)

On Wednesday, I attended the new superintendent induction program provided through the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents. The focus this month was on coding data and cultivating trends and patterns from our entry plan activities. Already, some 'buckets' or themes are emerging from my work that I will be able to present out to the school committee in January.

In Our Schools

One does not need to look very far and long to recognize the quality instruction that is happening in our schools. This week, I observed two before school programs, one at Cashman and one at Amesbury Elementary. At Cashman, I observed a computer club that was writing 'code' through the use of Minecraft. At Amesbury Elementary, I also observed a 'technology' club – students who were writing 'news' for the school. Both activities were engaging and very student-centered. I applaud the work of Bruce McBrien (AES) and Leslie Barnaby (CES) for their creative work with our students. While at Amesbury Elementary, I also had the opportunity to visit a kindergarten classroom as the students were arriving to school. The teacher had set up thematic centers focused around turkeys. Students were doing math (sequencing numbers), identifying the parts of a turkey, and following step by step directions to draw a turkey. The students were engaged and were able to work independently as the

teacher sat at one of the centers. Speaking of student engagement, I also had the opportunity to visit with second graders who were outside planting tulip bulbs as part of a science unit on seasons. In the spring, the students will be able to see the 'fruits of their labor' and discuss parts of a flower, germination, and aspects of seasons. I was invited to attend the third grade Thanksgiving celebration today. I had the opportunity to listen to students explain about the Wampanoag Indians and the contributions of the Indians. I was impressed both with the children's knowledge, as well as their ability to articulate what they had learned. I was equally impressed with the food that had been collected by the school for their food drive for Our Neighbor's Table. It was very humbling to see the students bringing in food to support those in need.

Amesbury in the News

Check out the following link which describes the curriculum enrichment class project of 7th Grade AMS life science teacher. This project involves the Brad Ford Nature Trail and the new Chromebook cart at the middle school. It is a great example of how we utilize the technology in our schools.

<http://newburyport.wickedlocal.com/article/20151120/NEWS/151129548/?Start=2>

As you can see, it has been a busy week. Next week will be a short week as Wednesday will be a half day and the schools will be closed on Thursday and Friday in order for families to celebrate Thanksgiving. My Italian family will be enjoying both a homemade Italian dinner along with a traditional turkey dinner – yes, we eat two dinners... that's what it means to be Italian! Be well and have a great weekend!

Gary