



## Superintendent's Corner

Gary S. Reese, Ed.D.  
Superintendent

October 28, 2016

### In our schools this week...

*Cashman Elementary School* – During a recent visit to Cashman, I was most impressed with the interactions I observed between a student and a paraprofessional. The student was building a structure that could be moved with wind (a fan). The conversations that the two had were meaningful and the paraprofessional did a nice job pushing the student to reflect on his structure. When I was leaving the building, I saw the two in the hallway with a teacher, ‘testing’ out his completed project. The structure was a success, but as the student watched it blow down the hallway, he was already thinking about ways to improve and have his structure go farther. This was a gentle reminder of how we need to push our students to think critically and problem solve... and more importantly, how well students will accept the challenge when provided with the appropriate scaffolds.



*Cashman student Whyatt Spurr is working hard on his project.*

*Amesbury Middle School* – Mr. Curry and I had the opportunity to walkthrough some eighth grade math classes. In one class, the students were converting from fractions to decimals. In the other class, the students were simplifying statements with variables. One thing I noticed in each of the classes was how the teacher shifted seamlessly between direct instruction and student involvement/participation. Both teachers used effective questioning strategies to ascertain the students’ understanding of the concepts and to push the students’ thinking.

*Amesbury High School* – This morning, I was invited to a performance at the high school. AHS Teacher Maggie Furlong had written a grant to AEFI last spring to bring a program called “Terezin, Children of the Holocaust” to our school district. This play was written by the daughter of Auschwitz survivors. The scene is a cell in a concentration camp outside of Prague that imprisoned many European Jews. The performance was powerful – it provided a historical context within which to examine issues of hatred, prejudice and indifference. The actors ranged in age from 8 – 17, and all attend local school in neighboring communities. Because of the sensitive nature of this content, the school used advisory blocks to further process the topics addressed through the play. I want to thank Maggie Furlong and AEFI for bringing such a moving performance to our schools.



The high school also held their pep rally this afternoon. Students showed a lot of school spirit, dressing up in their grade-levels colors, or, for the seniors, dressing up in Halloween costumes (no clowns!). The students participated in a variety of games and activities to determine the grade with the most spirit. As is tradition, the seniors are welcomed into the pep rally by the lower classmen. It was great to see all of the costumes and enthusiasm from the students.



During the pep rally, representatives from Wendy's Restaurant were there to present the Wendy High School Heisman award for Massachusetts to Pat McCue. He is one of two recipients of this state award. He is hoping to be selected as one of the ten national finalists to go to New York for a chance to win \$10,000. Congratulations Pat!



### **In case you missed this week's school committee meeting...**

Some highlights from this week's meeting included:

- Rita O'Neill, AMS Nurse, has been appointed to serve as the nurse leader for the district. She is already very busy planning out activities, ensuring compliance with laws and regulations, and forming a wellness committee. The school committee unanimously approved her appointment.
- Field trip approval – Disney Youth Education Series: Under school committee policy established in September 2016, overnight field trips need to be approved on an annual basis. The first overnight trip to go through this new process was the 8<sup>th</sup> grade spring trip to Disney to participate in the Disney Education Series. This trip had generated a significant amount of discussion and feedback from the

community. The school committee had received a number of letters and emails, both in favor of the trip and against the trip. After careful consideration and discussion, the committee approved the trip.

- Superintendent's Goals – I have established my goals for the upcoming school year. This year, I identified two professional practice goals (goals that are focused on how I want to improve as an educator) and two student learning goals (goals that are focused on student achievement). I will be posting my goals soon to the website for the community to be able to read.
- Acceptance of gift – Each year, the Richard A. Eaton Charitable Foundation provides a gift to the schools to offset athletic fee costs for families needing financial assistance. We are very appreciative of this incredible donation which allows the district some flexibility in helping families to participate in athletics, while at the same time allowing the school budget to remain stable.
- MASC/MASS Joint Conference – In November, Deb LaValley and I will be attending the joint conference of the Massachusetts Association of School Committees (MASC) and the Massachusetts Association of School Superintendents (MASS). Each year, MASC identifies some key areas that they want to advocate for with our legislators. These resolutions are presented to the school committees and one member of each school committee is elected to act as the delegate (representative) for the community. Deb LaValley was nominated to serve in this role this year. For a full listing of the resolutions that are being discussed this year, go to: <http://masc.org/member-resources-3/news/780-report-of-the-resolutions-committee-2016>

### **North Shore Superintendent's Roundtable Discussion**

This morning, I attended the North Shore Superintendent's Roundtable meeting. This month, we heard from Ron Noble and Rob Curtin from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Rob shared with the group about the accountability framework under the Every Student Succeeds Act. There are some implications under this act which will impact how Massachusetts restructures its accountability system. They are spending much time this year listening to the field and drafting out potential changes for input. Ron spoke about the educator evaluation system. In particular, he shared a resource available through DESE for calibrating educator evaluation and feedback. It was interesting to note that this tool was relatively new to many of the participants, but we had training on it in during our summer leadership team and have plans to use it at upcoming leadership meetings.

### **Curriculum Work**

This week, the district continued to work on updating our curriculum to reflect new understandings about learning, as well as to embed social emotional learning competencies into the curriculum. Math teachers met on Tuesday to review their transfer goals. I will continue to update you on the progress of this revolutionary work as we progress. To learn more about the framework in which we are creating our curriculum, Understanding by Design (UbD), go to: <http://iaymctighe.com/resources/> At that site, you can find links to a variety of resources that discuss UbD, including articles, videos, and links to other websites.

### **Distractology**

This week at the high school, students that have their licenses and permits were invited to participate in Distractology, sponsored by Gould Insurance. In this driving experience, students strap on to a video game like screen and are asked to drive down certain roads while performing various tasks, such as texting and changing radio stations. I decided to try it out, sure that I was a proficient driver. Luckily, I don't text and drive – I



couldn't believe how fast I got into an accident while just looking down to get to my texting app. I am hopeful that the 80+ students that took advantage of this opportunity learned a lesson about being a safe driver and ignoring distractions on the road.

A couple of Important Upcoming Events...

Amesbury Educational Foundation Inc.  
**AUTUMN EVENING  
OF GIVING**

Come enjoy an autumn evening with friends and celebrate the winners of:

The annual \$10,000 Jordan M. Shay Memorial Grant  
An annual grant funds innovative programs in the Amesbury School System

A \$5,000 AEFI Educational Grant

Monday November 7th  
6pm-9pm  
The Ale House  
33 Main Street Amesbury, MA

Tickets are \$25 and include a  
Delicious 4 course buffet dinner featuring a seasonal menu

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For information on this event or to purchase tickets in advance visit [www.AEFIonline.com](http://www.AEFIonline.com)



THE PETTENGILL HOUSE, INC.  
Children & Family Services

**11<sup>th</sup> ANNUAL WINTER COAT PROGRAM**

Collecting new and gently used warm winter jackets, parkas, snowsuits, heavy winter sweatshirts for teens, ski jackets and waterproof gloves to support community adults and children in need. All sizes from infant to XXL are needed.

PLEASE DROP OFF AT:  
**Millennium Engineering, Inc.**  
(Go to the back of the building.)  
62 Elm Street (rte. 110) Salisbury, MA  
(across the street from Merrimack River Feline Rescue Society)

Monday, November 7<sup>th</sup>  
Wednesday, November 9<sup>th</sup>  
Thursday, November 10<sup>th</sup>  
10am to 2pm

Direct inquiries to Peg Brown, Coat Volunteer Coordinator at:  
[coatdrive@pettengillhouse.org](mailto:coatdrive@pettengillhouse.org)  
Or call Pettengill Family Resource Center at:  
978-792-5205



Be well and have a great weekend! I am off tonight to Bishop Fenwick High School to watch the varsity football team as they try to get a win and advance in the playoffs!

Gary