

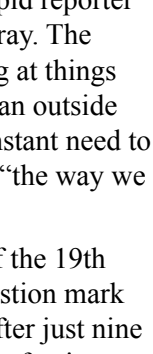


HADDONFIELD SCHOOL DISTRICT

... news from the Board of Education

FROM the SUPERINTENDENT

On April 20th, Bob Herpen, a reporter for the Haddonfield Sun, wrote a [wonderful article on the revamped Tatem fair](#) (May 4 from 4:00-8:00 p.m.). What I liked most about the article was this quote from Megan York Parker, the chairperson of the Tatem Fair Committee: "I got some new committee members last spring. I went around and asked people to help me out, and we formed a great new committee with great new ideas. My first inclination was, 'This is the way we've always done it,' but then came to realize that wasn't a good enough answer, so we focused on how we could make it better." That statement epitomizes a **continuous improvement growth mindset**.



In this issue of our Board of Education newsletter to the community, our intrepid reporter Polly Mitchell interviewed our new Chief Academic Officer, Dr. Colleen Murray. The article gives everyone insight into new folks coming into a system and looking at things through a different lens, just like the Parker quote above. It's a good read and an outside analysis of what internal folks don't always see. And to be clear, there is a constant need to re-examine practices, systems and ways of doing things because doing things "the way we always did them" just isn't a good enough answer in 2019.

British philosopher Bertrand Russell made this observation in the early part of the 19th century. He said, "In all affairs it's a healthy thing now and then to hang a question mark on the things you have long taken for granted." Although I too am new here after just nine months in the HSD, I have taken Russell's words to heart in 40 years in this profession.

Why do we believe that the system by which we educate children today is the correct, best and only system of education? In 2019, flexibility is key to just about everything we do. Today, more than ever, we need to thoroughly examine our worldviews. So having a 2x4x8 fixed, one-size-fits-all mindset about how we educate children is absurd. We do not need two covers to read a book. We read books, magazines, newspapers and everything digitally and on paper. We listen to books on mobile devices. Hey, I like books. The question here isn't about books, rather it's about flexibility. We do not need four walls to have a classroom. That's too funny today. We have dozens of digital ways we learn and find out information. Can a classroom have four walls? Heck, yes! Do we "need" four walls to create a classroom in 2019? No way! That's a story we are telling ourselves. Last, we do not need eight inflexible periods where student have no time to think, no time for social-emotional metacognition, no time for anything except to act like a mouse or a hamster running on a wheel in a cage. Frankly too many American schools continue to follow a system designed in the early 20th century to sort and select the 18 to 20% of the students going to college and identify the 80% or so who would work in factories during the industrial revolution. That world has long passed us. So, "this is the way we always have done it" **is no longer a good enough answer**.

In May I will write about all of the accomplishments of the BOE over the course of the past 12 months. That will be a fun article giving you examples of the myriad things the BOE has done for the community and school system over that short time frame.

Enjoy the last eight weeks of the school year!

Sincerely,

- Larry Mussoline, Ph.D.

DISTRICT NEWS

DR. COLLEEN MURRAY, CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER

Significant changes are occurring in the Haddonfield School District, changes that will improve the quality of the educational experience offered to all students. The result will be graduates who are better prepared to advance in continued education and careers and to approach life with global competence.

You have read about (and perhaps participated in) the strategic planning process as well as the ongoing QSAC (Quality Single Accountability Continuum) self-assessment. Both will help the district to better align with state standards, quality teaching and learning, and to plan the future of our schools.

In November, another significant change occurred when Dr. Colleen Murray was hired as Chief Academic Officer replacing an older Haddonfield position called Director of Curriculum.

I sat down with Dr. Murray to find out more about her job; what she has accomplished, what her goals are and what the results will be.

Polly Mitchell: Welcome to Haddonfield!

Colleen Murray: Thank you. I'm very happy to be here!

PM: You began working in the district in November, and so I thought the community might like to know what you are doing, why your position is important, etc. Can you give me your two-minute elevator speech?

CM: Sure. In the simplest of terms, it was evident that the Haddonfield School District was acting somewhat as five separate, siloed school sites, with little coordination between them, especially as it pertains to curriculum and instruction. How we're learning, what we're learning, may be different depending on the school and the teacher. With that backdrop, I see my job as a "systems convener." All that means is that I'm trying to create spaces to bring the variety of stakeholder voices together as one. We have a curriculum that we're required to teach, we have state requirements, but it leaves a lot of room, as it should, for local input. The teachers are the ones implementing the curriculum, and they need to have a voice in it, but that wasn't happening with fidelity, or it was happening defacto, as teachers worked frequently in isolation, fending for themselves. We have outstanding teachers in Haddonfield, but teacher A and teacher B, both teaching the same subject, might be teaching different things and in different ways. This can result in feelings of inequity among students and community members. Also, without someone bringing up questions, resources and conversations, about "where are we going?" the idea of a shared vision was nearly impossible.

PM: I have heard some people say, "But our students' test scores are so high. Why do we need to make changes in the curriculum or the pedagogy?" What is your answer?

CM: Our test scores are high compared to statewide scores, but this is an affluent district. Our students – by and large – are exposed to rich vocabularies and challenges they have that we could help prevent while they are still with us? Why are kids – a very large number of our kids – so anxious? These are things we need to take a focused look at. Big picture things that, without someone doing my job, would be left to the devices of individuals. We can do better.

PM: What is the role of QSAC in current curricular work? As a quick reminder, QSAC is a state-led monitoring process for all schools to ensure that students are provided a fair and quality education. The State Department of Education oversees the process, and HSD has not been reviewed in 10 years.

CM: Because much of our curriculum had not been updated in years, the board and administration knew that we would fail certain areas of the QSAC process, including the curriculum section of the QSAC review. Hiring a chief academic officer was one way of getting ahead of this and taking positive action to move the district forward, to begin to address areas of concern.

PM: So once you arrived here in November, what were the first three things you did?

CM: I set out to get to know the teachers, to visit every classroom. I have not quite reached that goal, but I visited many, many classes. The second thing was to do a needs-assessment so we could create a curricular revision plan that we will start this summer. Thirdly, I recognized that the teachers felt that they had no voice, and, equally important, that they had no time to get together to express their understandings about what's working and what could be improved. So I began to create "teacher-leader teams" and to set up meetings so the teachers could collaborate and have a say in what we are doing. Everything I do comes back to being the systems convener. What I bring to the conversation joins with what you bring, and together we create a new tree of knowledge.

PM: Who are the teacher-leaders?

CM: The teacher-leaders represent a subject specialization and sometimes a grade level. Through communication with the teachers they represent, they will set curricular revision priorities, help to support teachers' efforts to follow the curriculum, offer expertise, guide the creation and monitoring of common assessments and field professional development suggestions. They will be the lead learners of their departments or grade levels.

PM: Does professional development come under your umbrella?

CM: Yes, I lead PD along with our teacher-leaders, but again the choices we make are based on input from many others. When we meet, everyone will help to create the agenda, and everyone will bring concerns and suggestions from their colleagues.

PM: Does the strategic plan affect what you are doing?

CM: Definitely. The strategic plan tells us we have to support global competency development, social-emotional learning, and we have to make it contemporary. This will be a heavy lift, but it's exciting!

PM: I think that some people may think that improving the curriculum means updating the content; WHAT we teach, not HOW we teach. Can you comment on how your work may shape teaching methods?

CM: The curriculum is about content, but it is also about collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, real life problem-solving. All that ties to pedagogy. I think one of the reasons I was hired was because of my doctoral program in learning technologies. I'm really here to help our teachers, and every teacher I have ever known wants to be the best he/she can be. So part of my job is to hold up a mirror and say, "Here is what we are doing well, and here is what we haven't yet figured out." Our curricular analysis and the data we analyze is helpful because it points out learning opportunities for us as we move forward. It's not anything about good or bad, it's about us getting better ... together.

PM: Can you give me an example of something that we could do differently?

CM: I recently introduced the T-3 framework to start to think about how we might modify our classrooms. The first T is "translation," where, for example, we were using a paper grade book but now you use a computer for the same thing. The second T is "transformative." One example would be to use a Google doc in class so a student who is home sick can still contribute and work with his partner from home. The third T is "transcendent." Transcendent means students are addressing real-world problems like climate change, a changing economy, prison reform, diabetes, world hunger and disease. We have some teachers already doing this, like Ron Smith (HMHS science) taking students to a beach/nature area to count shorebirds for the New Jersey Audubon Society. That's called citizen-science and it's an example of how our kids can be helping to solve problems that are directly relevant to them.

PM: Last month, I wrote about proposed schedule changes for the school day. I think it's clear that there is a direct relationship between the schedule, teaching methods and the social-emotional needs of our students. How do we prepare for these changes?

CM: Curriculum writing is the first part. The more we all examine and reflect on the curriculum, the better. Grade levels or department teams start by looking at state learning standards and other standards like 21st-century skills needed for the workplace of the future, and International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) standards. We work together to design courses that meet those standards. This is very time-consuming but so important. It's my job to bring us together, to make sure we have time together, to help find the resources we need and to make sure we focus on the right things.

PM: Is there anything else you'd like to add?

CM: I hope that I am conveying how exciting it is to work in Haddonfield right now. I have gotten to know the Board, and I consider them truly visionary. Each board member has expertise in some area, and they are risk-takers. It's risky to be innovative because it's human nature to poke holes in new ideas. We are moving ahead with intention, with open minds, with creativity and with transparency. In fact, we are pointing out areas that need improvement. We are becoming a true learning institution, and I am really proud to be a part of it.

UPDATE ON THE SCHOOL SAFETY COMMITTEE

Under the guidance of Sandra Horwitz, District Safety Coordinator, a joint Community and District Safety Committee was formed and has met several times this school year. (We shared an overview of the committee and its goals in the January issue of this newsletter.) At the most recent meeting, in March, school anti-bullying specialists presented a School Climate Showcase to the Safety Committee, highlighting efforts underway in each building to eradicate bullying and to minimize the potential for violence by improving school climate. Since that meeting, members of our district's leadership and the BOE have secured cost analyses on the Safety Committee's recommendations and are moving forward as quickly as possible to take safety measures that current funds will allow.

In April, Horwitz and Communications Specialist Polly Mitchell attended a symposium on Crisis Response and Communication presented by the New Jersey School Public Relations Association. Speakers shared their experiences managing a school crisis and suggested best practices for handling the emergency and communications following it. Also in April, high school and middle school students attended assemblies in which they were reminded about the option of using STOPit!, an anonymous reporting app introduced in the fall. Please check to see if your middle or high school student has downloaded the app on his or her cell phone, take a look at how it works, and discuss whether and when they would use the app. StopIt! allows students to share any kind of concern, anonymously, ranging from seeing that a friend is sad or observing something upsetting on the playground to more threatening behaviors such as drug abuse or talk of suicide. Reports submitted through the STOPit! app are monitored 24/7 even when school is closed. We encourage all members of our school family to adopt a "See Something, Say Something" approach to school (and community) safety and to use the STOPit! app. Once the app is downloaded, a school code is required. Learn more about STOPit! by viewing [this video](#) or visiting [their website](#).

A GRAPHIC ILLUSTRATION OF THE DISTRICT'S PRELIMINARY BUDGET

On March 14, the preliminary budget for the 2019-20 school year was presented to the board. Included in the presentation was the following graphic. The [entire PowerPoint](#) is posted on the district website under "Board of Education" and "Budget Information."

SCHOOL NEWS

"DISCOVERY" OFFERS REAL-LIFE CHOICES TO CENTRAL GRADE FIVE

Fifth graders are "discovering" what life was like for early settlers in North America, the hard way. Central teachers and their students are experiencing Colonial Life using a program called Discovery. The classes are divided up into small groups of students who form a community. They create a fictional country from which they travel to the New World, designing flags and describing their reasons for emigrating. Each group starts out with three ships, but chance (rolling dice), such as weather, and choices ("What shall we load onto our ships?") dictate how well they fare on the trip. During the journey and after landing, the groups have to make decisions and confront unexpected obstacles to successfully establish themselves in the new colony. How many in our party are adults and how many are children? When offered the chance to trade with Native Americans, should we accept their terms? Where shall we settle? What crops shall we plant? And so on. When good choices are made and fate is friendly, the teams accrue points. The fifth-grade Colonists are discovering what a hard life our early settlers faced!

CAPTION: Students in Cindy Rogers' class make a tough decision when choosing a plot of land in which to settle.

LIZZY HADDON STUDENTS LOVE MAKERSPACE!

First-graders in Sue Zitter's class at Lizzy Haddon recently participated in one of their favorite activities: Makerspace! Part of an innovative movement in education, Makerspaces encourage small group collaboration and communication and encourage students to use skills in science, technology, engineering, art and math: STEAM. Teachers throughout the district include Makerspace activities in class, providing a robust and unique learning experience. When asked what they accomplished in recent maker spaces, Zitter's students said, "I used engineering to build a ramp," "I used my imagination, and I reflected on my work when I was finished" and "I made a game that really worked."

"Makerspace activities encourage so many positive possibilities," said Zitter. "They allow students to take ownership of their learning, foster critical thinking and even lead students toward careers in engineering and science."

CAPTION: Left: student is creating a ramp with blocks and sticks to get the ball to roll into the cup (engineering). Right top: student is creating a design using pattern blocks, then re-creating that design on paper using a pattern block template (math and geometry). Right bottom: student is using Lego Storytelling to create a character and scene from a story.

"¿CÓMO ES?" IN THIRD GRADE AT TATEM

Spanish language teacher Luis Bayona asked his third-graders to describe themselves or a favorite character in an art and language project. The image above is currently displayed on a bulletin board in Tatem. Apparently, these students are "rápidos," "cómicos," "fuertes" and "creativas." Other classes have posted their Spanish menus and descriptions of the four seasons. HSD elementary students love to share their enthusiasm for communicating in español. These projects were part of different presentational, writing and speaking assessments during the year.

"LEGALLY BLONDE JR." AND DRAMA IN EDUCATION

Did you see it? Wow! What a wonderful middle school production! Caren Izzo, eighth-grade social studies teacher at HMS and director of "Legally Blonde Jr.," shared her views on the value of drama in education.

"I believe drama and theatre for middle-school-aged students is valuable for both their social and emotional learning. Drama and theatre allow students to use their imagination to explore roles, characters, time periods, and economic and social experiences different from their own. Students must focus on the task at hand, work together to accomplish a goal and take ownership of the final project. Drama gives them a place to explore their own voice and their place in the world."

"PHYSICS IN MY LIFE" AT HMHS

Accelerated physics students in both Matt DiDonato's and Kyle Williams' classes have been working on a project entitled, "Physics in My Life." Each student makes a video of something from everyday life such as diving into a pool or kicking a soccer ball, and then analyzes the footage frame by frame using open-source software (Tracker). Methodically clicking on points in each frame to define what is moving (the soccer ball, for example), the software produces spreadsheets of data for position and time for each frame. The student analyzes the data, creating charts and graphs that illustrate concepts such as force, momentum, circular motion or energy. In addition, there is a written component in which students explain the motion of the object using evidence from the graphs. This project requires the students to synthesize and apply all of the physics concepts and mathematical tools learned so far this year.

Haddonfield School District News is created and shared monthly throughout the school year. It is written by Communications Specialist Polly Mitchell and distributed to staff, families and community members. Suggestions and comments are welcome.

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