

Superintendent's Corner

Striving to adapt to our greatest challenge

DR. JOSEPH M. SAWYER
Superintendent of Schools

As I write this in mid-November, we are all continuing to experience a momentous time in history, as our nation grapples with several crises simultaneously: the resurgent COVID-19 pandemic; ongoing calls for racial justice and equity; an economy that has created difficulties for many and uncertainty for all; and a great political division exacerbated by the national election and its aftermath. All of these crises are affecting our public schools in the U.S., Massachusetts, and right here in Shrewsbury.

While public education has always been a crucial component of society, it hasn't typically received the attention or support it deserves. The pandemic has reminded us all that schools are critically important not only for the academic development of our youth, but also for their social, emotional, and physical well-being. The forced closure of schools last spring also made clear the importance of schools to the functioning of families and communities, including the ability of parents to work.

Navigating these challenging times has not been easy for anyone. Families are struggling to balance working and caring for and helping to educate their children who cannot be in school full time, due to limited school capacity because of physical distancing for safety. Educators are performing the most difficult work they have ever done, as our school district is jug-

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“Democracy cannot succeed unless those who express their choice are prepared to choose wisely. The real safeguard of democracy, therefore, is education.” - Franklin D. Roosevelt



Beal Early Childhood Center students are enjoying exploring the freshly painted sensory paths created by teachers and parents. The sensory paths have added an additional way for kids to play and move! This helps with self-regulation. Please see "Elementary Students 'grow' with SEL" on page 3.

Educating students in a pandemic

MS. SANDRA FRYC
School Committee Chair

On Thursday, March 12th I was scheduled to participate at Parker Road Preschool's Community Reading Day. Just as I arrived in the parking lot, I received a call from Dr. Sawyer and he informed me that he was closing school on Friday, March 13th due to rapid changes occurring across the nation and state as a result of the coronavirus pandemic. Shortly thereafter Governor Baker issued an order to close schools in Massachusetts until at least April 7th, as part of the mitigation strategy to stop the spread of COVID-19. On April 19th, Governor Baker announced all schools in our state would be closed for the remainder of the school year. The phrase "remote learning" quickly became part of our vocabulary.

Most, if not all of us, now live and work very differently due to the current pandemic. We now practice social distancing. We no longer greet each other with a handshake or a hug. Wearing a mask to prevent the spread of COVID-19 is mandatory. A global pandemic quickly created a massive change in our society. Where and how students receive their educational services changed drastically and our school district needed to quickly determine how it was going to educate students and provide a safe environment for them and their

educators. The task of providing educational services during a pandemic has proven to be not only challenging, but multi-layered.

The typical concern for the School Committee during the first part of the calendar year is the annual school budget process. The School Committee met with the Finance Committee on Saturday, March 7th to discuss the Fiscal Year 2021 budget. As I think back to that meeting, I wish the issues and concerns discussed remained our most pressing problems. Dealing with the budget issues is familiar and something I've dealt with throughout my tenure on the committee. Dealing with a global pandemic and the need for the district to quickly pivot to remote learning, as well as constantly changing information about the virus and unexpected costs to the district due to COVID-19, are issues the committee has never encountered or even imagined we would have to deal with while serving in our roles.

Communication is key to any successful relationship and due to the rapid pace of new or changing information, it was vital for everyone to have up to date knowledge of the work happening across the district. Since March the School Committee and school administration, as well as the district's union leadership, have been in constant contact. Another

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gling the education of four distinct groups of students simultaneously: two cohorts of students who alternate coming to school in person for part of the week who then must be provided with learning opportunities at home when they aren’t in school; a cohort of students with significant needs who are in school almost all week and require highly specialized programming; and a group of students whose families opted to have them learn entirely remotely from home.

On top of the complexity of the educational program, there continues to be disagreements across countries, states, and communities regarding how schools should be operating during the pandemic. As stated in a recent New York Times article, the decision-making process that school districts have been faced with regarding whether and how to reopen schools “reflects a divisive debate raging in almost every country over the importance of reopening schools while the outbreak grinds on. That fight has sometimes seen parents, teachers, politicians and epidemiologists stake out conflicting positions and has raised difficult questions about the health threats of returning schoolchildren to classrooms — and the educational and economic risks of keeping them out.” Disagreements about what schools should be doing are amplified by the fact that people’s tolerance for risk varies greatly, and have a range of opinions regarding which of the risks concern them the most.

Since the virus emerged last March, our school district has focused on how we can best provide a safe and healthy environment for all of students and staff while pursuing our mission to promote the well-being of everyone in our school community and enabling high levels of learning. We have sought the best and most recent medical and public health guidance from experts, which naturally continues to evolve. We have empowered our staff – whose dedication and expertise are unsurpassed in my eyes – to essentially reinvent many aspects of how to best educate children given the conditions we face. We have reached out to our families to determine what is working and what is challenging so that we can try to provide the best support possible. And all of this has required extraordinary effort that has challenged all of us like never before.

I am proud of how our schools have adapted to the formidable challenges that we have experienced and continue to face. I am worried that the level of effort required to do this work well is becoming difficult to sustain, and so we must be clear about our priorities and realistic about our limits. I am confident that our students will get the best of which our schools are capable, and I ask everyone in the Shrewsbury community for your continued support as we strive to meet the demands placed upon us during this unprecedented time.

Staffing schools during a pandemic

BARBARA A. MALONE
Executive Director of
Human Resources

Shrewsbury Public Schools has successfully completed most hiring to fill key positions within the District, despite the very unusual circumstances presented in hiring for both a hybrid model and for those families who have chosen a full remote model, as well as to fill new roles created by the pandemic. Positions were also hired to replace educators who had retired or resigned, and we continue to fill long-term substitute positions available due to maternity and paternity leaves, staff illnesses, quarantine orders, or emergent needs as the school year progresses.

We have appointed 61 staff to professional positions, including internal transfers into a new role or new school, promotions, and long-term substitute teacher appointments. This does not mean that we added 61 new professional positions; rather, it illustrates the amount of movement that was needed in order to best meet the needs of all of our students, regardless of cohort. We have appointed 25 staff to paraprofessional positions and 17 staff to the newly created “Covid Operations Specialist” role. We have appointed 6 staff to office, crossing guard, or IT positions, which support the district as a whole. In total, we have hired 109 people for the upcoming school year. As of October 29, 2020 we have a few positions still open, which are posted on www.schoolspring.com

New Hiring – Professional Staff

The 61 professional staff includes one hire at the district level (Kenneth Almeida, Interim Director of Foreign/World Languages), 24 hires for the high school, 16 hires for the middle level, and 20 hires for the preschool/elementary level.

The teacher selection process in Shrewsbury is rigorous, and through the hard work of our District Leadership Team, as well as educators, parents and students who volunteered to be part of selection meetings or demonstration lessons, we have adhered to our standards. However, for a few roles, portions of the hiring process occurred out of order due to last minute needs and prevailing market pressures in order to fill teaching positions for the first day of school.

The process includes phone, remote, or in-person interviews with principals, depart-

ment directors, curriculum coordinators/instructional coaches, teachers, parents and central office administrators, and sometimes students, depending on the level. It also includes thorough background checks and demonstration lessons.

We continue to use www.schoolspring.com as our primary sourcing tool, which netted 1,558 applicants to our professional positions, including those ultimately filled by our own transfers or promotions. This means that 3.92% of those who applied to our professional positions ultimately received a position with us this year (2020-2021 school year). Last year, for FY20 it was 2.16%; in FY19 it was 1.6%; in FY18 it was 1%; in FY17 it was 1.46%.

New Hiring-Paraprofessional Staff

As of October 15, 2020 we had hired 25 paraprofessional positions. These positions have been the most difficult to fill as many of our strongest paraprofessionals as well as our strongest paraprofessional applicants ultimately accepted professional level positions for this school year. We continue to have a need to fill paraprofessional positions. Para positions netted 213 applicants. This means we hired 11.7% of those who applied to our paraprofessional positions in FY21, compared to 8.85% in FY20, 7% in FY19, 8% in FY18, 6.2% in FY17, and 4.3% in FY16. These applicants also underwent a rigorous selection process, which included applicant packet screening, phone and face-to-face interviews, reference checks, and the CORI and SAFIS background checks.

New Hiring-Other Positions

We hired two office support positions, two IT positions, one courier position, one crossing guard and 17 COVID Operations Specialists.

Over the summer we planned for an increased need for staff through posting Long-Term Substitute positions; in a handful of cases, these postings did assist us in filling positions. In other cases, our identified candidates were given either full-year or regular (rather than substitute) positions at nearby districts, and we lost six finalist candidates this way. We pivoted to offering full-year positions ourselves and that helped us close several offers with a positive outcome for Shrewsbury Public Schools.

We found that at the elementary level, when we realized

the need for educators for more than 30 remote classrooms of students, that ultimately our best source for filling teaching positions was our paraprofessional staff, and that had a “downstream” impact on our ability to fill as many paraprofessional positions earlier in the school year as we’ve been able to do in previous years. We also found that remote cohorts needed to be a mix of students from different elementary schools assigned into the same remote classroom, in order to create the most efficiency possible for our hiring efforts.

Please see below for the names of our new hires, rehires, or transfers.

New Educators/Transfers

District/Leadership
Kenneth Almeida, Director of Foreign/World Languages, Grades 7-12

Shrewsbury High School
Ann Ambiel, Special Education; Matthew Braz, Social Sciences; Lauren Cacula, English; Robert Corazzini, Physical Education; Theresa Foley, Special Education; Christopher Garth, Social Sciences; Lynn Gracie-Rogers, Computer Science; Eva Grimm, English; Meaghan Hamond, Little Colonials; Mark Hannah, Science; Thomas Jacobsen, English; David Keating, Mathematics; Dr. Sandrine Kouassi, French; Debra Leavitt Herbert, TV Studio and Multimedia; Sarah Lin, Spanish; Michael Mazzu, Mathematics; Francesca Panarelli, Social Sciences; Sara Praguski-Walsh, Science; Jonathan Shea, English; Julianna Young Ju, Mathematics; Rosanne Cataldo Enriquez, ESL; Michelle Pasquale, School Counselor; Evan Sooy, Spanish (transfer from Sherwood); Colleen O’Hara, Visual Arts

Oak Middle School
Stacey Fair, Science; Julie Holzwasser, Speech Language Pathologist; Erin McCullough, Special Education; Margaret Pomerleau, English Language Arts; Ashley Poulin, Special Education; Jordan Proctor, Performing Arts; Thomas Sutherland, Science; Daniel Waite, Science; Jennifer Cotie, English Language Arts (transfer from Sherwood); Payson Hendrix, Science

Sherwood Middle School
Thomas Angell, English Language Arts and Social Studies; Brendon Connors, English Language Arts and Social Studies; Jennifer Cosenza, Occupational Therapist; Anne Dooley, English Language Arts

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Beal School construction is on schedule despite COVID

PATRICK COLLINS

*Assistant Superintendent
for Finance and Operations*

Despite the coronavirus pandemic, the Beal School construction project is on schedule. The project will be substantially complete in May 2021, at which time we will begin delivery of furnishings and equipment. Beginning with the 2021-2022 school year, all students will have a full day kindergarten experience and the lottery will be eliminated. All elementary schools will have students in grades kindergarten through grade 4.



The front of the new Beal School (October 2020) takes shape with a great view west to Worcester.

District ramps up redistricting planning

PATRICK COLLINS

*Assistant Superintendent
for Finance and Operations*

With all the challenges that the coronavirus has brought to our school district and community at large, the excitement and anticipation of opening the new Beal School has been a bright spot. In coordination with the opening of the new Beal School, the Shrewsbury School Committee voted to reconfigure all of our elementary schools to a kindergarten through grade 4 model. Further, we will now have space for all children to have a full day kindergarten experience.

In order to relieve space pres-

sure at all of our existing elementary schools, provide full day kindergarten for all students, and plan for future enrollment growth, we need to realign our elementary school zones.

The district has hired Applied Geographics [Boston] to provide consultant and professional services with this project as they have experience assisting several other area communities do this same work.

The Shrewsbury School Committee also established a Redistricting Committee with parent representatives from each elementary school along with district administrators and two

school committee members to develop recommendations for new elementary school zones. The school district will be hosting several opportunities for community members to view potential new elementary zones and provide input into this process.

The school committee is scheduled to vote on the new elementary zones at their February 10, 2021 meeting for implementation for Fall 2021.

For more information on this topic, please visit the Beal Redistricting webpages at <https://schools.shrewsburma.gov/sc/beal-school-project-redistricting>.

Elementary students “grow” with SEL

**REBECCA DUMPHY,
SHELLEY HOEY,
ERIN KENDRICK,
LISA PAPAIZIAN,
DONNA RICE**

*Elementary Instructional
Coaches / Curriculum
Coordinators*

On September 15, after being shuttered for six months, our schools finally reopened for our students! Educators have spent countless hours in great anticipation preparing for the return of our learners. While we are always concerned with making sure our students are continuing to progress with academic skills, we realize that with so much time spent away from the school community, social emotional learning (SEL) is of equal, if not greater, importance.

Each day students at the elementary level have an opportunity to connect with their peers

and teachers whether they are fully remote, in school, or at home on a remote learning day. The ability to make these connections is vital for our students as they transition back to learning and engage with the school community. Classroom teachers host a daily morning meeting with their students, where students and their teacher have an opportunity to “see” each other and check in. Students participate in virtual community building activities, may brainstorm ways to react to difficult situations or share a story, and most importantly, greet each other and enjoy being together in this way. Mindfulness is also a practice that many teachers are embedding into their classroom meetings. Students learn breathing techniques, visualization strategies, and many other approaches to help with emotional regulation both in school and at home. District-wide remote teacher Emily Walker

states, “This school year, we have been focusing on growth-mindset in my classroom. It’s so important to teach students to understand that even though things change and things may be difficult, we can always try our best and do hard things. I remind my students that each day is a new day to work hard and to never give up.” With lessons like these, our students continue to build resilience in the face of change.

Teachers are exploring creative ways to encourage connections between students. Floral Street School second grade teacher Angela Poppalardo’s Cohort A, B, and C students are sharing the care of plants together. Students who are in school water and care for the plant, and when students return they resume the care. Mrs. Poppalardo reflects, “It’s been wonderful seeing the

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key communication component is receiving input from staff, students and families in order to help us make well-informed decisions. Finally, the School Committee has been meeting almost weekly since March in order to provide staff, families and the community with detailed information and updates. I want to thank my fellow committee members Vice-Chair, Jon Wensky; Secretary, Dr. Dale Magee; Jason Palitsch and Lynsey Hefernan, who have put in a tremendous amount of time and effort over the past eight months. It is an honor to serve with such a dedicated group of individuals who are committed to continuing Shrewsbury’s excellence in educational services to students during these unfamiliar and very challenging times.

Interaction with the Shrewsbury Board of Selectmen (BOS) and Town Manager Kevin Mizikar has been another integral part of the committee’s work to reopen schools and to continue to assess the School Department and Municipal Department financial picture. I would like to thank BOS Chair Beth Casavant and BOS members John Samia and Moe DePalo who have been meeting with me, Dr. Magee, School Superintendent Joe Sawyer, and Assistant Superintendent of Finance and Operations Patrick Collins on a bi-monthly basis to discuss school reopening and budget information. By working collaboratively, our town leadership provided invaluable support to our school district during the past eight months. Our plan is to continue to meet regularly so we have up to date information that will aid us in ongoing decision making for our schools.

This is my thirteenth year on the Shrewsbury School Committee and I can honestly say that I have never encountered a more stressful time for our district. Due to the pandemic, our district leadership needed to develop an entirely new process to provide educational services that adhere to state standards and curriculum, while keeping staff and students safe. The amount of time and effort the district’s leadership team has spent on developing a school reopening plan can’t be measured. The sheer scope of the project management effort and the layers of details needed to be worked through have been immense. Meetings and the work required to reopen schools continued long after what most would consider the end of a normal workday and weekends were not work-free. On behalf of the School Committee I want to express my deep appreciation to everyone who worked tirelessly to reopen our schools. There are no perfect answers or solutions to many of the issues and concerns that arose during the planning process, but the work done by district leadership, the School Committee and staff members was done with the best interests of students, staff and families in mind. I am incredibly grateful for the strength, dedication and care all Shrewsbury Public School staff have shown during this challenging time. They have gone above and beyond

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Elementary students

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children take on this shared responsibility. They’ve all seemed to enjoy watching the changes in their plants, participating in their care and sharing a link with their table partners. Every adult who visits our room comments on the calming effect the plants have on the room.” This shared responsibility fosters connections between students, even when they aren’t physically in school at the same time. Recess is a wonderful time for students to make connections and grow their social emotional skills. At Beal school, parents and teachers worked together to create sensory paths for students to explore outside. The paths are helping children connect with one another and expand academic skills, all while having fun!

School psychologists and adjustment counselors are also key players in helping to foster social emotional learning at the elementary level, from facilitating SEL lessons in classrooms to hosting short and distanced experiences for students to practice their SEL skills. Kara Richardson, an adjustment counselor at Spring Street and Paton schools, has designed lessons that help students identify feelings, tools and strategies to help feel calm, ways to problem-solve, and expectations for whole group learning. Individual student support includes self regulating, increasing motivation, self-confidence and task completion - which are all crucial to SEL growth. In addition, a subset of the school psychologists and adjustment counselors are working with the Character Strong curriculum to develop a scope and sequence of SEL lessons as well as additional resources for Shrewsbury’s educators to implement as they wish. According to Walter J. Paton school psychologist Angelina Adams, “It is critical, now more than ever, that our students are feeling safe and positive in their learning environment while also acquiring ways to manage their emotions and build and maintain interpersonal relationships that will ultimately help lead to long-term positive outcomes.”

This school year is guaranteed to be unique in many ways. One thing is for certain. Just as students in some classrooms are witnessing growth in plants they nurture, educators will continue to foster the growth of our students - both academically and in their social emotional skills.

SHREWSBURY SCHOOL

Journal

The non-profit Shrewsbury School Journal is published three times a year and reaches every household in the diverse and growing town of Shrewsbury. It is published by the central office of the Shrewsbury Public Schools with the help and expertise of many individuals. The mission of the Shrewsbury School Journal is to provide an accurate source of information about our school system and the town in which we live. We hope to foster a community of continuous learners.

Dr. Joseph M. Sawyer, Superintendent
Elizabeth McCollum, Project Coordinator
Cristina Luther, Designer

Shrewsbury High School sports are back!

JAY COSTA
Director of Athletics,
Shrewsbury High School

As of September 18th, Shrewsbury High School (SHS) Athletics are back after a six-month pause due to the COVID-19 pandemic. On Thursday, March 12, 2020 schools transitioned to remote learning due to the pandemic just three days before the start of the spring season. With no spring sports, the athletes have been waiting with great anticipation for the start of high school sports. While it has been a long journey to get sports up and running, the reward of seeing athletes performing their skills has been uplifting for all.

The journey to have high school sports back at SHS started in June, when the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA) formed a COVID Task Force Team that consisted of high school principals and athletic directors to review how Massachusetts high schools could return sports back for student-athletes across the state of Massachusetts. The MIAA COVID Task Force, Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), Governor’s Office, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE), Midland-Wachusett League and local high school administrations created a plan that would be safe for athletes.

After receiving final guidance



Fall Season | Shrewsbury High School varsity student-athletes pictured above (left to right) are Holly Hruskoci, Nancy Tian, Isabella Marcello, and Korinna Muller, Girls Cross Country

from the MA EEA, DESE, and our governing body for athletics, the Massachusetts Interscholastic Athletic Association (MIAA), Shrewsbury High School and the Midland-Wachusett League feel a solid plan was put into place for the fall season.

The Midland-Wachusett League Statement of Purpose notes that “Interscholastic Athletics can play a vital role in re-engaging our students as we seek to get back to school and to some sense of normalcy. A functioning athletic program will aid in rebuilding the interpersonal connections that would fundamentally support the implementation of any of the proposed academic instructional models... In the quest to educate the whole student, it cannot be overstated enough that Interscholastic Athletics can foster profound and positive social and emotional health outcomes in our collective communities.”

The plan created by the MIAA

and Midland-Wachusett took into consideration the level of risk developed by the EEA.

Based on the on the guidelines developed, the MIAA and Midland-Wachusett League developed the following seasonal model that is different from our standard year of athletics:

Fall Season I: September 18 - November 20 (Cross Country, Soccer, Field Hockey and Golf)

Winter Season: November 30 - February 21 (Alpine Ski, Basketball, Ice Hockey, Gymnastics, Indoor Track and Swim/Dive)

Fall Season II or “Floating Season”: February 22 - April 25 (Cheer, Football, G. Volleyball and Unified Basketball)

Spring Season: April 26 - July 3 (Baseball/Softball, Crew, Lacrosse, Track & Field Tennis, and Unified Track).

Dates may change as we
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Alumni News

MICHELLE BISCOTTI
& KATHLEEN KEOHANE
Coordinators of Volunteer
Activities & Development

This new column in the School Journal will feature Shrewsbury High School alumni and what they’ve been doing since graduation. If you are an SHS alum or know one who we should feature, please contact development@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us

Deborah Kesseli Dilorio
Deborah graduated from Shrewsbury High School in 1977. At the time, she couldn’t afford to attend a four year college so she enrolled at Quinsigamond Community College in Worcester. She graduated in two years with an associates degree in liberal arts. For the next 30 years, she worked hard in her profes-

sional career, ultimately being promoted to Vice President of Sales in North America for a national company. Her advice to current students? “Working hard and being passionate about what you do really does pay off.”

Steven Pawlik
Steven Pawlik graduated from Shrewsbury High School in 2007. He went on to attend UMass Amherst where he graduated in 2011, Summa Cum Laude, with a degree in Finance and Investments. Today, Steven lives in Southern California where he works as an Account Executive for Blue-Jeans Network, the teleconferencing arm of Verizon. Steven is also a co-founder of ‘Merican Mule, a line of premium, canned Moscow Mule cocktails. Starting in 2015, with the concept written out on the back of a napkin, Steven and

his partners cashed out their savings, 401ks and pulled together every dollar they could find to build their brand from the ground up. Today, you can find ‘Merican Mule in over 2,000 retailers across thirteen states. Steven’s advice to students is that “you’re never fully ready to launch a business. The most important thing is to start, build a minimum viable product, and learn from your mistakes. Quickly adapt to the ever-changing market conditions and double down on the strategies that are working for you to scale. Lastly, reach out for advice! And pay close attention to those who have successfully built businesses in the past.”

Steven can be reached at steve@mericanmule.com and loves to help support other fellow Shrewsbury Alumni and entrepreneurs.

School nursing in 2020

NOELLE FREEMAN
*Director of School Nursing,
District*

There is no doubt that COVID-19 and the global pandemic have altered the day-to-day operations in our schools. Nowhere is this more true than in our health offices. As the pandemic has evolved, the work of the school nurse team has adapted to meet the needs of the students, staff and families across the district.

Last spring, while school buildings were closed, nurses worked remotely with school teams to reach out to students and families who required a variety of supports. In addition to that work within the school community, school nurses assisted the staff at the Central Massachusetts Regional Public Health Alliance (CMRPHA) with COVID-19 case management and contact tracing in the larger Shrewsbury and Worcester communities. Under the guidance of CMRPHA staff, our nurses contacted individuals who had received a positive test result to check in, provide support, and answer and ask questions regarding symptoms and contacts. This experience has served us well as we move into this school year.

This fall, school nurses are primarily serving students and staff in the hybrid program, while continuing to check in as needed with students in the full remote program, helping to ensure the health and safety of all. Nurses assist with monitoring many of the new protocols that have been put in place, namely proper mask wearing by all, hand washing, physical distancing, and staying home if sick. We provide replacement masks and additional personal protective equipment (PPE) to those who require them throughout the school day. We reach out to staff members and the families of students who have stayed home due to illness in order to review symptoms and determine if COVID-19 testing is required before returning to school. When students or staff become ill during the school day, nurses evaluate any symptoms, and those individuals with symptoms consistent with possible COVID-19 are dismissed from school for further evaluation, including testing. And, nurses continue to be available for students who require care during the day for chronic illness, struggles with mental health, injuries, etc.

When we are informed of a positive case of COVID-19 in the school community, school nurses complete the process of contact tracing in collaboration with our CMRPHA colleagues. Contact tracing is not new, or something that was created for COVID-19. It has been part of public health practice for decades and is used to slow or stop the spread of infectious diseases. Contact tracing is the process of determining where the infected person has been, and with whom and to what extent they were in contact during the period of time they are considered contagious. For COVID-19, individuals are considered potentially contagious beginning 2 days prior to the onset of symptoms, or 2 days before a positive test result if there are no symptoms.

While the idea of contact tracing may be new for many people, school nurses have been involved in the contact tracing process in past years for diseases that occasionally occur in schools such as chicken pox and pertussis (whooping cough). We also became much more familiar with the process by assisting the Cen-

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to ensure that students' educational needs are being addressed. Our talented educators have been instrumental in guiding the district's work over the past few months and they will continue to provide students with the educational services they need in the short and long term.

Our district has faced difficult times and we have persevered. The current challenge is like nothing we have experienced, but we will once again rise to meet it and be successful. Dr. Sawyer is quick to say that the success of our district is due to all of the individuals who work every day to provide students with the best possible educational services. Due to Dr. Sawyer's dedication to education, his ability to build and foster a strong school culture, advocacy for school funding, work ethic and his emphasis on collaboration and leadership, our district was better positioned to deal with the crisis created by the COVID-19 pandemic. I want to thank Dr. Sawyer for showing not only strong leadership, but also care and compassion as we continue to navigate this unfamiliar educational landscape.

The COVID pandemic has created many challenges and there will be more challenges ahead. It is natural to be apprehensive and concerned about what this school year will bring for staff, students and families. Our school district will need to reshape how educational services are delivered; however, the School Committee's commitment to an academic environment that fosters learning remains unchanged. As the uncertainty surrounding COVID-19 continues, the School Committee will continue to have a vital role in the critical decision making needed to successfully run our school district. We are committed to working with our district leadership as we navigate this crisis. We are committed to staying connected with the Shrewsbury community and will continue to provide timely and up-to-date information during our meetings. We will continue to strongly advocate for appropriate state and federal funding to cover COVID related costs that were not anticipated when we began our FY21 budget process.

Finally, I would like to thank the parents and students who continue to persevere during these difficult times. Many parents are juggling their own work requirements with the need to provide increased guidance and assistance to their children's schoolwork. This is not an easy balance for many working families. We often hear that children are resilient, but we need to remember that the COVID-19 pandemic has caused serious disruption to their school routine. Students are dealing with uncertainty, anxiety and social isolation. Now more than ever, we need to help them adapt to the changing environment and provide them with the stability and care they need to cope. It certainly does "take a village to raise a child" and we are blessed to live in a community that supports education and has truly come together to navigate through a

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Gardening in a time of need

CAROL TASKER
*Paraprofessional,
Child Specific Aide;
Farm to School Crew Leader,
Sherwood Middle School*

While some were focused on the front page COVID-19 news, social distancing, and remote learning, Felix Gregory had a different focus. At a time when people are hungry, losing jobs and worse, Gregory, now a Grade 7 student at Oak Middle School, found a way to support his community the best way he knew how - gardening.

This spring and summer, Felix met the challenge of clearing the garden beds at Sherwood Middle school, planting, transporting his own water, weeding, and eventually, harvesting vegetables to give to St. Anne's Human Services Food Pantry. He harvested a variety of vegetables from beets to tomatoes, and despite a few challenges, he had a lot of fun. In his own words Gregory states, "I learned how long it takes to grow them, how much work it is, and I am very happy that I donated them to people who needed them." His thoughtfulness gave him a "brilliant feel-

ing" to be helping others.

In April, Felix approached Mr. Jonathan Kelly, Sherwood Middle School Principal, and me about planting the garden. He admits he was missing our Farm to School Club at Sherwood and wanted to do something to help the local food bank. A few teachers, the crew and I were intending to plant the vegetables seeds about the same time he came up with his idea. However, we were unable to meet due to pandemic restrictions on schools and large group gatherings. We all agreed it was a worthy cause and gave him the green light.

With the support of his mother, Gregory did just that. He carried many jugs and cans of water, as the outside faucet was turned off; he planted and persevered to weed the large garden area. It paid off with his huge bounty of beets, carrots, tomatoes, beans, and squash. He showed great resiliency during a difficult time in the lives of the whole community.

Sherwood Middle School and the community commend

Felix for his ability to use his knowledge of gardening and take initiative to fulfill his dream to stock the pantries of those in need. As a teacher, it is heart-warming to see your student follow through on his aspirations. Gregory's determination is a shining example for others who may want to help their community during these unusual times, and always.



Shrewsbury Public Schools student Felix Gregory is shown above harvesting beets from the garden beds at Sherwood Middle School that were donated to St. Anne's Human Services Food Pantry in Shrewsbury.

SHS sports

CONTINUED from page 4

move through the year and there will be no MIAA Tournament for Fall I. At the time of writing (October 21, 2020) no decisions have been made by the MIAA regarding postseason tournaments for the Winter, Fall II, or Spring seasons. Decisions on what sports will be offered at SHS will be determined on a season by season basis and must align with the guidelines previously mentioned.

Further rules and regulations were created by the SHS Athletic Department that include coach, player and spectator guidelines that must be followed in order for athletics competitions to be played.

While sports will look very different this year at SHS, the Athletic Department still values the importance of time management, hard work, teamwork and good sportsmanship. All involved need to be reminded that this is a unique athletic year and while competition is always in our nature, this year we will focus on skill development and building team cultures and providing and focusing on social and emotional well-being of athletes.

Go Colonials!

Nursing

CONTINUED from page 5

tral Massachusetts Regional Public Health Alliance (CMRPHA) with COVID-19 contact tracing in the larger community during school closure in the spring.

Each time school nurses are informed of a positive case, several things need to happen, including informing the positive individual of the need to isolate, determining when the person was last in school, and looking at what degree of contact occurred in classrooms and other school related spaces such as the bus, athletics, recess and other activities during the 2 day “look back” period. All of the information gathered by school nurses is then reviewed with the public health professionals at CMRPHA in order to make the determination of “close contacts”. Close contact is defined as being within 6 feet for 15 minutes or more, and is considered cumulative if contact is more than a brief interaction. All close contacts are contacted by school nurses in person if at school, or by phone if at home, to discuss the need for quarantine and testing and answer any questions. The identity of the individual who has tested positive is kept confidential to the greatest extent possible throughout the contact tracing process.

While much has changed about the practice of school nursing due to the pandemic, what has not changed is the willingness and ability of the Shrewsbury school nurses to step up and adapt their practice to provide the various types of care that our students and staff now require. Shrewsbury Public Schools is fortunate to have a team of dedicated and skilled professionals in our school health offices.

A new way to give: consider a monthly gift to the Colonial Fund

MICHELLE BISCOTTI & KATHLEEN KEOHANE
Coordinators of Volunteer Activities & Development

The Colonial Fund is incredibly grateful to the 487 people who donated over \$121,000 since June 9th to fund the greatest needs in our schools.

Normally, at this time of year, we make an appeal for “end of year” donations, when many people feel most comfortable making their tax-deductible gifts. This year, because so many people have already been generous, we are asking for help in a different way.

If you regularly donate at the end of the year or have already donated to our most recent appeal, we would like you to consider making a regular monthly donation, or recurring gift, to the Colonial Fund in 2021. Your consistent and ongoing support will provide the Colonial Fund, and our schools, with some stability in

an uncertain time.

Establishing a recurring gift allows you to spread your donation out over the course of a year, into manageable monthly payments. If making a lump sum donation of \$100-\$200 feels cost prohibitive, consider a recurring gift of \$10-\$15 per month instead. In the end, your impact is the same, if not greater, than a one-time gift.

Making a recurring gift is easy, cost-effective and efficient, and you can change or cancel at any time. Here are some additional benefits:

- You designate the amount that is most manageable for you
- Your donation is automatically charged to your credit card each month - no need to fill out multiple forms, checks or envelopes
- Your gift automatically renews - but you can cancel or change your amount at any time
- You help provide the Co-

lonial Fund with a consistent revenue stream that we can anticipate each month, thus broadening our options and giving us more flexibility to further our mission

- Your donation accumulates over the course of a year, thus maximizing the power of your gift
- The sum of your monthly donations will earn you recognition in our giving circles, shown on our Supporters page, <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/future/supporters>.

Recurring gifts start at just \$10 a month. To start your giving for the new year, please visit the Colonial Fund website: <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/future/donate-now>.

Thank you for considering this new method for helping our schools. *Your generosity helps the Colonial Fund keep Shrewsbury Public Schools extraordinary.*

Reopening school 2020: imperfect and improving

AMY CLOUTER
Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction

As Dr. Sawyer has often shared in his updates to the School Committee, our school communities have numerous reasons to take pride in successfully welcoming students back to class. As anyone who has gone grocery shopping recently knows, a safe reopening under pandemic conditions entails addressing a number of logistical challenges, many of which required collaboration across departments and levels. Our educators met these challenges head on- and we continue to work together to improve the experience of teaching and learning in Shrewsbury.

Most of us are able to picture a good meal. To successfully serve it, one must secure the space, procure the right ingredients and fully engage the kitchen crew. It’s helpful to think about the process of reopening school in stages, too.

Prepare
Planning for opening day began in earnest when the Student Services department opened the doors to the summer program in July. Initially

the district implementation plan was informed by the hard work of Assistant Superintendent Meg Belsito and the members of her team as they reimaged and then reintroduced in-person teaching and learning under COVID conditions for students attending the summer program. Shortly thereafter, our school district formed a Reopening Task Force to prepare to welcome all staff and students back into our school buildings. The areas of focus differed, but the overall goal was to brainstorm, solicit feedback about the most promising ideas for a safe reopening, and actively engage staff in the planning process. In all 142 people labored over the summer to produce a reopening plan that detailed procedures to address:

- Human Resources and Staff Well-being
- Operations and Technology
- Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment and
- Health and Safety, Nursing, Student Well-being and Special Education

Representatives from all levels and departments worked together throughout the summer to identify and effectively support both staff and student needs. After thoughtfully considering the risks and

weighing the pros and cons of various learning models, the Task Force ultimately recommended a hybrid model in which students attended school each week. The team also planned for how best to meet the needs of students whose families elected to remain in a fully remote model. Regardless of model, we seek for all students the very best learning experiences, from an academic as well as a social emotional standpoint.

Implement
The creation of a plan is one thing- executing it is another. For the successes our students are currently experiencing we must credit all the nurses, educators and administrators working in our schools. Once a learning model was selected, members of all three groups worked tirelessly to establish class lists, craft schedules, and connect students, families and staff. Initially, collaboration efforts focused on professional development, including staff training and the creation of content planning teams for each cohort, as these teams are responsible for producing weekly learning plans for students at each grade span. However, running two simulta-

CONTINUED, see page 8



Unprecedented donations in an unprecedented year

On June 9th, when our schools were facing a staggering multi-million dollar deficit, we asked for help to fund the greatest needs in our district. An incredible 487 people answered our plea and, through October 22, donated \$122,706 to help our schools.

Thank you to each and every donor for this awe-inspiring generosity.

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Jane Bell	Anil Gupta	Benjamin Minsk	Lori Shattuck
Benjamin Bell	Chetan Gupta	Vidya Mohan	Andrew & Bree Shaw
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Mary Courtemanche	Melanie Petrucci	Melanie Petrucci	Eliot Weinman
Stefanie Cuniffe	Kathy Pierce	Kathy Pierce	Elizabeth Welch
Aimee Davis	Zenaida & Joel Popkin	Zenaida & Joel Popkin	Jill Wensky
Robin De Pina	Sara Port	Sara Port	Kevin & Lisa Whitcomb
John Demac	Jennifer Potter	Jennifer Potter	Dori & Mark Willingham
Sharda Dewal	Lisa & Mark Powers	Lisa & Mark Powers	Vera & Dennis Wrenn
Lucrezia Dickey	April & David Prince	April & David Prince	Gajendra Yadav
Anne Duffy	James Quinlan	James Quinlan	Shintaro Yamada
Akshay Dupuguntla	Preethi Rajkumar	Preethi Rajkumar	Zakir Yellala
Helene Duru	Keerthi & Raghavendra Rakees	Keerthi & Raghavendra Rakees	Ana Maria Young
John Fellian	Srinivasan Ramkumar	Srinivasan Ramkumar	Haitao Zhang
	Chandra Rana	Chandra Rana	Ernest Zimmermann
	Satya Rao	Satya Rao	Anonymous (206)

Educating

CONTINUED from page 5

very difficult time in our nation and the world.

This school year, probably more than ever, the work done in our district will be complex and require patience, but we will get through it together. On behalf of the School Committee, I want to wish all students, families and staff a wonderful school year.

If you have a question, concern or suggestion, please reach out to the School Committee at schoolcommittee@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us

Staffing

CONTINUED from page 2

and Social Studies; Kimberly Spicer, Special Education; Angela Walsh, Mathematics and Science

Elementary Level and Preschool
Leah Crossen, Classroom; Kelly Delaney, Classroom; Amanda de Zago, Visual Arts; Kym Dufault, Classroom; Erin Duffy, Classroom; Leah Eagle, Classroom; Karen Geddy, Classroom; Gretchen Herdrich, Performing Arts; Allyson Hoffman, Classroom; Patricia Hollyer, Classroom; Megan Kelly, Classroom; Amanda Miville, ESL; Sarah Monica, Classroom;transfer from SHS Little Colonials); Christina Moore, Classroom; Hala Moustafah, School Nurse; Casey O'Connell, Classroom; Delani Savoy, Classroom; Susannah Speed, Classroom; Rachael Tucker, School Nurse; Christina Ty, Special Education

New Paraprofessional Staff

ABA Technicians:
Lidia Anaya, Kelly Coutu, Samantha Greenough, Shannon Keith, Nicole Kujala, Emily Letendre, Alyssa Marlborough, Amanda Molina, John McHugh, Jessica Palermo, Bryanna Sullivan-Massey

Child Specific Aides:
James Capuzziello, Ryan Capuzziello, Julia Duquette, Jyoti Gulati, Sarah Kasof, Michelle Meyer, Michael Pearlless, Jennifer Thibodeau, Joanne Tonelli

Special Education or Instructional Aides:
Mala Ganesan, Cari O'Rourke, Alyssa Ritaco, Dorris Sullivan, Pirro Tomco

New Office and Other Roles
Alex Cashman, Courier; Sarah Frederick, SHS Special Education Administrative Assistant; Barbara Mancini, Crossing Guard; Chris Radkowski, IT Specialist; Heather Sena, SHS Administrative Assistant; Geoffrey Thayer, IT Specialist

COVID Operations Specialists
Erica Brassard, Jordan Brattlof, Joseph Gosselin, Arezoo Khoshdel, Patricia Kubilis, Theresa Lunt, Tanya Mongeon, Christine Morris, Allison O'Neill, Barbara Ostromecky, Andre Pare, Mary Pritchard, Rita Reidy, Maria Rydelek, Oaj Shahid, Cynthia Tozeski, Michelle Troy

Reopening

CONTINUED from page 6

neous learning models certainly introduced new complexities to day to day operations.

Last spring was good preparation in that it helped to frame the work ahead. We knew, for example, that we could do terrific things together once we assembled teams. At the same time, state guidelines introduced new constraints, from safety metrics to curriculum requirements and time on learning expectations. We anticipated many of

the obstacles we faced- but not all. For example, we expected to face staffing shortages. We purchased technology tools to improve connectivity for students and families. At the same time, we faced a number of new dilemmas, from how to form classroom communities with students that are new to our schools to how best to support students learning in the full remote model, especially at Shrewsbury High School. This is some of the most complex work we have ever done- at a time when staff and families alike continue to experience significant stress. Although

Key Messages

1. The health & well-being of students, families, & staff is priority #1.
2. Our focus for the coming year is to develop a safe school environment for our students and staff that prioritizes everyone's well-being and enables high levels of learning for all.
3. We are planning based on guidance from the MA Department of Elementary & Secondary Education while closely monitoring the latest information from medical experts and the evolving data regarding the pandemic both in Massachusetts and in Shrewsbury.



there is a lot to celebrate, we understand that there is plenty of room for improvement as well.

Improve

We often tell students that mistakes and challenges fuel learning. Indeed, never before have educators had so many opportunities to demonstrate a growth mindset. While it can be uncomfortable to hear critical feedback, we welcome hearing from families, because this helps us to serve our students better. Some of the areas we know we need to address include:

- Responding to students' di-

verse needs, including calibrating student workload

- Assessing and addressing student learning gaps and
- Balancing the staff need for planning blocks with time on learning expectations for students

Our shared commitment to excellence means working within the district as well as consulting with colleagues in other districts to surface solutions. While few of us would claim that current conditions are perfect, all of us are committed to continuous improvement.

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