



Superintendent's Corner

History has its eyes on us

DR. JOSEPH M. SAWYER
Superintendent of Schools

"Who lives, who dies, who tells your story?"
– George Washington in *Hamilton*

Like so many others, my family recently watched the film version of the smash Broadway musical, *Hamilton*. The line quoted above, which is the title of the show's finale, first appears in the song *History Has Its Eyes on You* where General Washington confides in his aide, Alexander Hamilton, about his self-doubt and fears that history will judge him harshly, because, as he states, "you have no control" over certain fates and over who will ultimately tell your story.

While the musical is set during the American Revolution and early years of the new United States of America, the themes of a lack of control regarding the fates of people's lives and who tells which stories about what happened are prevalent in two crises we currently face as a nation: the coronavirus pandemic and racism.

A lack of control breeds anxiety, and our society is indeed anxious about a virus that currently cannot be controlled. Part of human nature is to seek to resolve fears and anxieties by looking for a "story" that explains why something is happening and to help determine what the right response should be. Unfortunately, too many Americans have chosen the "story" that wearing a mask is an affront to their personal liberty and really isn't necessary, and as a

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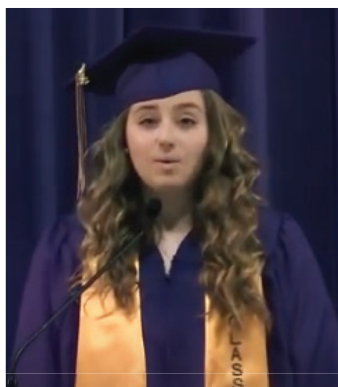
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“ There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about. – Margaret J. Wheatley ”



Celebrating the Shrewsbury High School Class of 2020. With schools transitioning to a remote learning model in March, Shrewsbury High School Administration, students, and families collaborated to recognize the Class of 2020 in unique and thoughtful ways, some of which are pictured here. Top left: Victoria Marshall, Class Marshal, presents remarks at the Shrewsbury High School Graduation, which was broadcast on June 4, 2020. Top middle: Proud families showed support for graduates with lawn signs celebrating the Class of 2020 and its motto, "Refuse 2 Lose." Bottom, and top right: the Department of Social Sciences at Shrewsbury High School is shown bidding farewell to graduating seniors as they took a "Last Ride" through the SHS campus in decorated vehicles on June 3, 2020.

FY2021 budget planning includes new, and recurring, challenges

MS. SANDRA FRYC
School Committee Chair

In early March of this year the School Committee was grappling with another difficult school budget forecast for Fiscal Year 2021. The Superintendent's initial FY21 status quo budget recommendation was \$70,579,913 and the Town Manager's FY21 budget recommendation for the School Department was \$67,668,322. The tentative plan was to lower the budget gap of \$2.9 million using various cost mitigation efforts, including reducing \$1.7 million in costs.

On March 10th Governor Baker declared a state of emergency in Massachusetts due to the Coronavirus pandemic, and on March 17th he ordered all elementary and secondary private and public schools to cease in-person instruction as part of his statewide plan to battle COVID-19. The Coronavirus pandemic threw a curve ball to educators, parents and students as educational services quickly moved to remote learning. The Coronavirus pandemic also created serious and challenging budget issues for our district.

The pressure on state and local finances due to the COVID-19 pandemic and result-

ing economic fallout is expected to be significantly worse than what was experienced during the Great Recession. Massachusetts is predicting a \$6 billion dollar revenue decrease. Due to lower state revenue and uncertainty regarding how long this economic crisis will last, it is expected there will be reduced local and educational aid to cities and towns. This means it will be more difficult to develop even a status quo budget for FY21. Other complicating factors include a potential decrease in Chapter 70 funding. This is the major program of state aid to public elementary and secondary schools, and Shrewsbury will not know what this funding amount will be for FY21 until the state budget is finalized. We are also expecting a significant decrease in Special Education Circuit Breaker reimbursement. These changes in revenue predictions resulted in the committee needing to fully reassess the FY21 budget.

School Administration carefully considered cost reductions with a focus on maintaining consistencies in operations; maintaining class sizes within School Committee guidelines wherever possible; avoiding reductions that would compromise the district's strategic priorities and goals; and minimizing layoffs of staff. On June 24th the School Committee

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result are asserting a type of individual control: refusing to wear a mask when close to others. Thankfully, in our state, most people are responding to the “story” that wearing a mask protects others from becoming sick, while in turn others protect you by doing so. Regardless of which “story” one chooses to believe and act upon, anyone can find a chorus of reinforcing voices for their own position through multiple sources, especially through social media (which is why it is more important than ever for our schools to teach how to discern scientific facts from opinions posing as such).

Our society is also roiling over the issue of racism in response to the deaths of George Floyd and other Black Americans, which represent the polar opposite of safety and control over one’s own life. Depending on which sources of information and news one consumes, there are competing narratives regarding the meaning of these tragic stories and over the larger issue of racism in America, both now and throughout our country’s history. Assuredly, we need to examine what our students are learning about issues of race in our society, both historically and today, and to thoughtfully consider how these issues are presented and discussed. If we do our work well, we will equip our students with the tools to be critical thinkers whose knowledge of the past informs their understanding of the present; whose consideration of multiple perspectives enables them to treat others with empathy and respect; and whose values regarding what is right and just empower them to act ethically and courageously.

“... it is more important than ever for our schools to teach how to discern scientific facts from opinions posing as such.”

Both the pandemic and racism are issues that our schools must address. Obviously, the very functioning of our schools was affected dramatically by the closure this past spring, and we are developing a variety of contingent plans to reopen for the new school year, with a focus on protecting everyone’s health and meeting the educational, social, and emotional needs of our students. While this understandably must be the focus of our work, we must at the same time find a way to address the uncomfortable reality that students of color in Shrewsbury have had difficult and painful experiences in our schools. Whether hurtful words were said intentionally or unintentionally, consciously or from a lack of knowledge, we must find ways to do better so that our students’ differences are respected and celebrated, not disparaged or discounted. If all students have access to equitable

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Recognizing 2020 retirees

BARBARA A. MALONE
Executive Director of Human Resources

Twenty-five faculty and staff are ending their education careers with the closing of the chapter of this most unusual year for education. They have certainly earned their well-deserved retirement. In combination, they have served the students of Shrewsbury for 474 years. This total represents an average of 18.96 years of service in Shrewsbury and does not include prior educational experience in other districts. Each of these talented staff members is recognized for their commitment and dedication to the children of Shrewsbury. Listed below are the names, positions, schools, and years of service to Shrewsbury. We wish them a healthy and happy retirement.

Teachers/Professional Staff:

- Susan Andrews** has served 13 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Seventh Grade Social Studies and World Geography Teacher from Oak Middle School.
- Nancy Bedard** has served 12 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Media Specialist from Oak Middle School.
- Norma Chico** has served 10 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Physics Teacher from Shrewsbury High School.
- Linda Derosier** has served 13 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Special Education Teacher from Shrewsbury High School.
- Anne Ernest** has served 19 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring

- as a Spanish Teacher from Shrewsbury High School.
 - Sara Honig** has served 7 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as both the Director of Foreign Languages for the district, and as a Latin Teacher at Oak Middle School.
 - Amy Johnson** has served 33 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Science Teacher from Oak Middle School.
 - Maggie Korab** has served 23 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as an Instructional Technology/TV Studio/Media Educator from Shrewsbury High School.
 - Nancy Lowery** has served 18 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Mathematics Teacher from Shrewsbury High School.
 - Cathy McDonagh** has served 17 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Mathematics Teacher from Shrewsbury High School.
 - Kathleen Scibelli** has served 27 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Science Teacher from Oak Middle School.
 - Robert Secino** has served 32 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. He is retiring as an English Teacher from Shrewsbury High School.
 - Katie Zimmerman** has served 20 years as an educator in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a School Nurse from the Calvin Coolidge School.
- Paraprofessionals:**
- Mary Benjamin** has served 15 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring from the Walter J. Paton School.
 - Donna Collins** has served 14 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring from Parker Road Pre-

- school.
 - Deborah Durnin** has served 12 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring from Shrewsbury High School.
 - Sharon Laramee** has served 16 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring from Spring Street School.
 - Jane Pineda** has served 7 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring from Parker Road Pre-school.
 - Kathy Mangan** has served 24 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring from Shrewsbury High School.
 - Harold (Hal) Newman** has served 16 years in Shrewsbury. He is retiring from Oak Middle School.
 - Cyndee Tozeski** has served 21 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring from Sherwood Middle School.
 - Nancy Watson** has served 48 years in Shrewsbury. She previously served as a teacher, retiring from Calvin Coolidge School, and then worked part-time as a paraprofessional. She is retiring for the second time, this time from Spring Street School.
- Secretarial/Administrative Assistants:**
- Barbara Bourassa** has served 26 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as the School Secretary/Administrative Assistant from Parker Road Preschool.
 - Kathryn Gaudette** has served 23 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as a Special Education Administrative Assistant and served the special education program across the District.
 - Gail King** has served 8 years in Shrewsbury. She is retiring as the School Counseling Department Administrative Assistant from Shrewsbury High School.

Learning social sciences remotely

JENNIFER DiFRANCESCA
Director of Social Sciences, Shrewsbury High School

The spring of 2020 brought both challenges and opportunities for educators in the Shrewsbury High School (SHS) Social Sciences department to create “challenging, diverse learning opportunities and promote creativity and independent thinking.” As we shifted to Remote Learning in March, educators collaborated on ways to engage and support students during this unprecedented and uncertain time. As a department, we focused not only on providing opportunities for students to engage with new content but also to develop their skills re-

lated to the Social Sciences. During Remote Learning, students enrolled in the World Civilizations class learned about the events and impact of World War II and the Cold War on individuals and states around the globe. In US History I, students examined not only the events but also the legacy of the Civil War and Reconstruction. In US History II, students analyzed how domestic and foreign issues from the 1950s through the 1990s continue to influence America today. In each course, students had opportunities to analyze primary sources, engage in discussions, ask questions, connect to current events and craft arguments with appropriate evidence. Students also had multiple opportunities to

demonstrate their learning in creative ways. Some students created original artwork, videos, animations, poetry, music and collages to illustrate their reflections and analysis on both historic and current events. Additionally, in the semester elective courses, some students participated in StoryCorps, a national oral history project, that enabled them to make connections with family and community members. Although teaching and learning in the SHS Social Sciences looked different this spring, educators ensured students had opportunities to practice the skills that will empower them “to become capable, caring, active contributors to the world in which they live.”

School counseling adapts to closure

NGA HUYNH
*Director of School Counseling,
Shrewsbury High School*

As defined by the American School Counseling Association (ASCA), “school counselors help all students apply academic achievement strategies, manage emotions and apply interpersonal skills, and plan for post-secondary options (higher education, military, workforce).” School counselors have a unique role in supporting students individually and in groups with in-person meetings to establish the connection and trust needed for a positive working relationship. With the school closure, the Shrewsbury High School School Counseling Department has had to adapt to support students through this challenging time of making the quick shift to remote learning while dealing with the pandemic concerns and then the protest after the death of George Floyd. This difficult time has brought an increase in student anxieties. It can exacerbate existing mental health concerns due to uncertainty about academics, standardized testing, the health and safety of family, future planning, and other factors. Knowing that student connection is the key to help students engage, counselors actively reached out to work with students and families through Zoom meetings and phone conversations. With the lack of in-person meetings to help



A panel composed of (clockwise from top, right): Terry Malone, Clark University; Nga Huynh, SHS; Jarrett Saunders, UMass Amherst; and Griffin Monahan, Boston University, addressed concerns for juniors and changes to college admissions and financial aid due to school closure.

counselors “read” a situation, the key to supporting students is collaboration at an elevated level. Counselors worked even more closely with parents/guardians, administrators, teachers, and school psychologists, much like the glue that “sticks” all the parts together.

What does counseling look like remotely? Counselors connected with individual students at his/her comfort level. For some students, it was by phone, and others via the Zoom technology platform for one-on-one counseling meetings. With the volume of students struggling with the changes and needing support, collaboration with school psychologists and adjustment counselors was essential. In addition to the focused counseling, they were able to provide staff development and participated in additional pro-

fessional development to increase their knowledge and services.

With so much uncertainty, the School Counseling Department kept students and families updated with a school closure web page. Programming continued with Clark University hosting the final parent breakfast webinar by Zoom, and a college panel from Clark University, UMass Amherst, and Boston University addressing concerns for juniors and changes to college admissions and financial aid due to school closure. With changes to a “new normal,” the School Counseling Department will assess and adapt services and programming as needed to address the needs of students and families as defined by our role described above by ASCA.

FY2021 Budget

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approved a “Phase I” Cost Reduction Plan totaling \$1,952,119, which is an increase of \$250,760 over the anticipated reductions in March of this year. Phase I includes operations reductions of \$474,145 and personnel/program reductions of \$1,477,974 and it reduces staff by 29.6 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) positions.

At the time of writing (July 3), the FY21 budget process is further complicated by many unknowns including how schools will reopen in the fall, what additional federal stimulus money we will receive, if any, and what unanticipated costs directly or indirectly related to the conditions created by COVID-19 will now need to be included in the FY21 budget. Our district’s potential cost estimate for COVID-19 related expenses as well as additional budget costs is \$ 4.4 million. It is important to recognize that this is our district’s best estimate as of June 25th. The related COVID-19 cost expense and the ultimate budget gap may go up or down based on additional mitigation efforts, further planning or guidance/information from other sources including the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, as well as additional federal stimulus that may or may not be restricted to only COVID-19 related expenses.

Shrewsbury Public Schools has received federal stimulus aid to assist with COVID-19 related costs. Restricted use funds for COVID-19 are the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act, the Elementary and Secondary Schools Emergency Relief (ESSER) Grant, and the Coronavirus Relief Fund (CvRF) DESE Grant. Except for the ESSER Grant (\$133,819), these stimulus aid funds must be expended by December 30, 2020. This is problematic as there are COVID-19 related costs that extend throughout the entire FY21 budget year. The costs for the second half of the year will need to be included in the school’s operating budget. It is important to point out that of the current \$4.4 million in estimated additional budget costs, only \$2,160,747 is considered directly COVID related. The rest of these costs must be covered by the School Department’s operating budget.

Additional cost mitigation efforts to assist in closing the budget gap include all School Administrators and non-union represented staff taking a compensation freeze at FY20 levels. Dr. Lizotte will serve as the acting interim principal at Paton School, which saves \$119,756 in salary costs as the district will not replace Ms. Bell’s position during the 2020-2021 school year. At the time of writing the School Committee is also talking with all School Department union groups to attempt to further mitigate the financial crisis.

The FY21 budget is difficult and I believe the FY22 budget will most likely be equally, if not more challenging, as the district will also be opening the new Beal School in fall of 2021. The current financial crisis is a com-

Sherwood virtual book club

SHAWNA POWERS
*Director of Instructional
Technology & Media Services*

One month into our stay-at-home directive, it was clear that our students were missing the human connections that they found at school, and were clamoring for enrichment activities. In response, the Sherwood Middle School and Shrewsbury High School (SHS) Media Centers teamed up to offer an opportunity that could help to fill both of these needs: an online, extracurricular book club, in which students would read segments of a chosen novel and then log onto the Zoom technology platform each week to discuss what they read with their peers. The way fifth grader Siddhi Vutukuri describes it, “in this pandemic, at first there was nothing to do. Like, there was only homework... but then, there was virtual book club, and that sounded really fun to

me.” More than 120 Sherwood students shared Siddhi’s enthusiasm and signed up to participate.

With so many Sherwood students logging on each week, the book club would not have been possible without the incredible response of our high school volunteers. The high schoolers stepped into leadership roles despite the stressful and uncertain times. They committed to facilitating the discussions each week and served as mentors for the younger students. Each book discussion was led by two or three high school students in an individual Zoom breakout room with a small group of Sherwood students. The Sherwood and SHS media specialists and Sherwood assistant principals provided some discussion questions for the high school students to use to prompt their small group discussions. However, many of

our volunteers prepared their own discussion questions as well. They also allowed the discussions to take shape in the moment, according to the interests of the students there. In reflecting on their experience with the book club, several Sherwood students were particularly grateful for the opportunity to interact with the high schoolers, who were incredibly thoughtful and perceptive as they worked with the fifth and sixth graders.

Both the high school volunteers and the Sherwood participants expressed an appreciation for the ways in which the book club broadened their sense of community at a time when their circle of interaction was narrowing. Sophomore Zaineb Irfan described the book club as “a great opportunity to interact with the younger members in our com-

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learning experiences, educating everyone who is part of our school community regarding these issues will be key.

We have much work to do in the coming weeks and months, and I welcome the entire community’s input and questions regarding both of these critical issues. Please send questions and feedback on issues related to the coronavirus pandemic and reopening school to 2020reopen@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us and on the work we are doing to advance equity and anti-racism to equity@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us. We owe it to our students to rise to the occasion and meet the challenges of this moment – as, indeed, history has its eyes on us.



Goodbyes at the end of the school year were very different due to school closure, with drive-through pick-ups of materials, but families and staff still found ways to express their gratitude to one another. These photos show students and staff saying farewell at Sherwood Middle School.

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 Public Schools need your help

MICHELLE BISCOTTI
& KATHLEEN KEOHANE
Coordinators of Volunteer Activities & Development

As we begin to plan for re-opening schools in the fall, we find ourselves with a staggering financial gap between the resources our students need and the fiscal reality of our school budget. **At the time of writing, the significant loss of state and local revenue resulting from the COVID 19 shutdown, combined with new costs we must now anticipate, has created a multi-million-dollar budget gap for the next school year.**

Prior to the pandemic, our school budget for 2020-2021 was already stretched incredibly thin. In March, district leaders announced \$1.7M in cuts that eliminated teachers and staff and significantly lowered funding for curriculum materials, school supplies and technology. Now we must make additional cuts that will result in more reductions to staff and programming. *Our budget situation is dire.* While we are all hopeful that there will be additional stimulus money for public education, any dollars we receive will likely be insufficient with regard to next year’s

budget crisis.

Our district is now confronted with incredibly difficult choices about how to spend significantly fewer budget dollars in the face of greater need. **You can help alleviate some of this burden by making a gift to the Colonial Fund. Every dollar we raise will go towards the greatest needs in our district, both current and future, and help preserve the quality of education we have all come to expect in Shrewsbury.**

To make your gift to the Colonial Fund scan the QR code on the right or visit <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/future/donate-now>. Every gift - regardless of size - will go towards protecting the high caliber of K-12 education in Shrewsbury.

The Colonial Fund is an unrestricted fund that has been invaluable to our schools for the past six years, sponsoring innovative projects and programs that were too costly to offer without sacrificing existing curriculum or staff. Today, the Colonial Fund is more important than ever, as **we face a multi-million-dollar budget deficit** that will challenge how we educate and captivate our students in the coming year.

For more specific information about the financial crisis facing our district, view the May 27th presentations to the School Committee at <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/sc/20192020-reports-and-presentations> or this brief 5 minute video from Dr. Sawyer at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jRUfTb4MUDI&t=9s>.

For more information about the Colonial Fund and the variety of programs it has supported, please see <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/future>.

COLONIAL FUND

INNOVATE • CREATE • COLLABORATE • INSPIRE • CHALLENGE

SUPPORTING OUR DISTRICT’S GREATEST NEEDS

Shrewsbury Public Schools

Sparked! Shrewsbury elementary students shine during remote Genius Hour

Elementary
Instructional Coaches:
BECKY DUMPHY
Beal/Parker Road
ERIN KENDRICK
Calvin Coolidge School
SHELLEY HOEY & LINDSAY MORSE
Floral Street School
LISA PAPAZIAN
Walter J. Paton School
DONNA RICE
Spring Street School

What do the following activities have in common: learning to play chess, baking desserts, conducting science experiments, growing a pea plant, building with Legos, making international flags, creating a model of the solar system, folding origami, and researching topics from the leafy sea dragon to gemstones to the Andromeda Galaxy? These are all activities that Shrewsbury elementary students completed during Genius Hour this spring!

As part of their remote learning experience, all elementary

students were invited to participate in a weekly Genius Hour. Genius Hour is a block of time during which students are encouraged to let their passions and interests drive their work. They might learn a new skill, study a topic of interest, express themselves creatively, or design and construct something of their choosing. Genius Hour encourages life-long learning, imagination, perseverance, self-awareness, and adaptability - among other life lessons.

Though the doors of our ele-

mentary schools closed for the year in March, the ambition, creativity, and curiosity of our youngest learners continued to thrive. We are so proud of all of the work completed by our elementary students during Genius Hour, and remote learning in general. William Arthur Ward said that “Curiosity is the wick in the candle of learning,” and it’s clear that many candles were sparked during distance learning. It is our hope that students keep those candles burning, and light many more, this summer and well into the future.



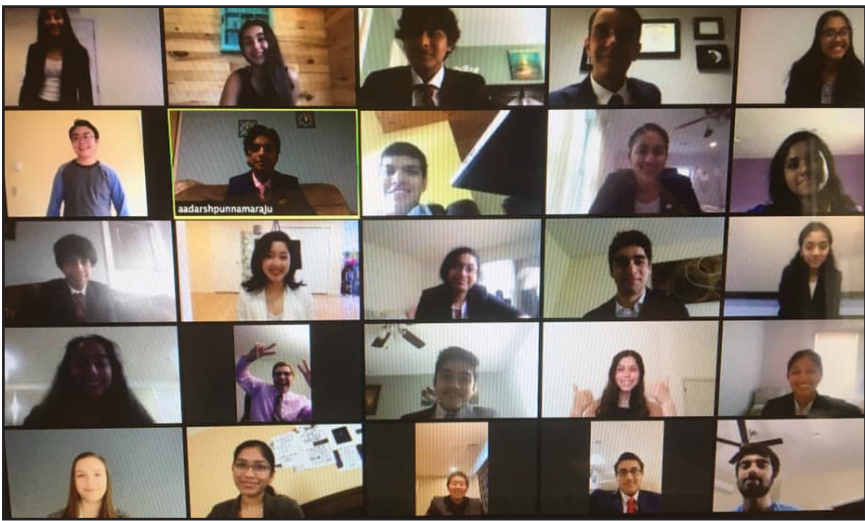
Samanvi Raghav, Spring Street School Kindergarten student, observed flowers during Genius Hour.

Speech and Debate’s new, and not so new, “normal”

GABRIEL HOPKINS
*Assistant Coach,
SHS Speech & Debate Team,
English Language
Learner Teacher,
Oak Middle School*

“Out of an abundance of caution,” “during these unprecedented times,” “you’re living through historical times” - these are some of the common phrases that became second nature to us during the spring as we grappled with the pandemic that has taken over our daily lives. Yet the Shrewsbury High School (SHS) Speech and Debate team did not let the tenor and frequency of these expressions deter them as tournaments were cancelling at both local and national levels. Team members spent much of their time navigating remote learning and global upheaval, while trying to maintain connections with the world around them as they suddenly found themselves confined to their homes. Yet they continued to hone the crafts that will one day prepare them to be the leaders we value, the artists and entertainers we admire, and the force of change for the better that we need.

Debaters organized scrimmages against teams through audio channels; team president, Sophia Peng, hosted “watch parties” of previous national finalists modeling the skills which our team members work towards. The coaches used the Zoom tech-



Shrewsbury High School’s Speech and Debate Team used a “virtual bus” (a Zoom room) to take attendance before and after their online State Championship tournament.

nology platform to conduct elections for next season’s student leaders, where Nikhil Sadavarte was chosen by his peers as President and Reeya Kansra, Sanjana Yadav and Rithika Prasad were announced as Team Captains for the 2020/2021 season. We listened to the senior speeches by our members of the Class of 2020 in a Zoom meeting, instead of on the bus ride home from the last local tournament of the year as we have in years past.

As the wider speech and debate community adapted to the “new normal,” students participated in the 3P Speech Online Showcase, where Shalini Biju was a Semifinalist in Informative Speaking. Next was “The MASQ” (Making Art while Socially Quarantined). This competition brought together over 600 competitors from 188 schools from over

30 states. Here, Jessica Peng was a Semifinalist (12th) in Original Oratory as well as a Quarterfinalist in Prose Reading. Sophia Peng was a Semifinalist in three events, finishing 9th in Informative, 8th in Poetry Reading and 7th in Prose Reading.

Members of the high school team continued to assist and coach the Oak and Sherwood speech teams, with coaches Vivian Powers and Christina Manos especially grateful to the outstanding work and dedication of senior Isha Chug. The Massachusetts Middle School Speech League held an online tournament in May at which 12 of our high school students judged.

Most ambitiously, over Memorial Day weekend, the Massachusetts Speech and Debate

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Even when we can’t be together, we can still perform

THOMAS O'TOOLE
*Director of Music &
Performing Arts*

The school closure in March happened right before the busiest season for the Performing Arts Department. While we were able to have performances of *The Addams Family* at Shrewsbury High School (SHS), they were solely for immediate family members. Students rendered their best, well-rehearsed lines and songs for a fraction of the audience that they had expected and that audience responded enthusiastically. After those performances, the department had cancelations of 12 spring concerts at seven schools, four groups’ performances at the Massachusetts

Instrumental and Choral Conductors Association Festival (MICCA), the SHS Jazz Band performance at the UMass High School Jazz Festival, and the Oak Musical. All of those losses were devastating to the staff and students, but we still turned to music and drama for comfort during this troubling time, and we used technology to get there.

Like all classes, the Performing Arts teachers used the Zoom technology platform to communicate with students. Not only were we able to have discussions and exchange information, but we were able to use it for individual performances. The Improv Club was able to perform scenes over Zoom. With the adjustment of some settings, students

were able to perform, both instrumentally and vocally, for their teachers. In fact, the after-school lesson program (Shrewsbury Instrumental Lesson Program, SILP) was quickly converted to an online environment. Over 4300 lessons happened during the closure period.

The staff of the Performing Arts Department were constantly adapting and learning throughout the closure period. While many of the teachers had some expertise with Schoology, SeeSaw, Zoom and functions of the iPads, Shrewsbury Public Schools was able to offer professional development that gave us more insight into some of the

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FY2021 Budget

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bination of Shrewsbury’s ongoing structural funding issues and an unprecedented, world-wide pandemic. When the committee began the FY21 budget process, I don’t think anyone could have predicted that in a few short weeks our district would be providing remote learning to students and we would be faced with one of the most dire and complicated budget processes in recent memory.

The School Committee is looking to close the budget gap in order to preserve staff jobs and reduce negative impacts on the educational program and working conditions. Our goal is to avoid any additional layoffs. However, if we are not able to close the budget gap through mitigation efforts and additional aid, we will need to move to “Phase II” reductions. The possibility of additional budget reductions is daunting, but the committee recognizes the existing budget constraints and the need to bring a balanced budget to Town Meeting.

The School Committee and School Administration have been working closely with the Board of Selectmen and Town Manager to navigate this very difficult FY21 budget process for the municipal and school departments. During these uncertain and troubling times, we must all work together for the benefit of our community. The School Committee will continue to actively advocate for funding that will provide Shrewsbury Public School students with the best possible educational services. The weeks leading up to the Annual Town Meeting will be busy as we work to finalize the budget. I ask for your patience, understanding and support as we complete the year’s challenging budget work.

Book Club

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munity during an unprecedented time like this, when most people are not socializing as much as they used to.” Fifth grader Shamini Biju added that “I liked how we weren’t paired just with our class. We see our class during every Zoom, and it was good to see some familiar faces that aren’t in my class.”

Almost as importantly, the weekly book club meetings gave our students a way to stay engaged with reading. As we’ve isolated ourselves at home and engaged in much of our intellectual lives through screens, the value of a book, and the way stories can transport us, has become especially clear.

Deeptha Ganesh, a 10th grade volunteer, shared a sentiment felt by many, “I loved it! Not only did this book club give me and many other high school volunteers an opportunity to foster our love for reading, but it also provided a sense of stability and community in this unprecedented time. It would be amazing if this could continue into the school year, whether virtual or in real life; I think it would be a great way for all of us to keep reading!”

Speech and Debate

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League hosted the first full-fledged online tournament in the country with both speech and debate competing synchronously. This State Championship tournament was deemed a great success by all those involved, from parent judges to coaches and students. Not only was this tournament important to the Massachusetts Speech and Debate community; the National Speech and Debate Association closely followed this tournament as we tried out a new online platform and format that they were planning to use for the national tournament, hosted the following month. It was remarkable that the students were able to get close to an authentic and positive competitive experience albeit without the invaluable social aspect that in-person tournaments bring. Furthermore, all Speech and Debate tournaments, whether in-person or online, rely upon a large number of people from the wider community to judge multiple events throughout a day or weekend. In a positive twist to the pandemic, we were able to welcome back a number of alumni from across the country, and as far away as California, to assist in judging.

In the not so new normal, Shrewsbury High School was extremely successful at the State Championships, finishing 2nd Place overall in Speech, trailing Catholic Memorial by only four points. Proudly, three students were individual State Champions: team president, Sophia Peng in Informative Speaking; Haleema Siddiqui in Poetry Reading; and Pranav Vadlamudi in Play Reading. Many other students placed in their respective categories, and the work of each and every student contributed to the team’s strong overall place.

At the time of writing, nine SHS students who qualified from the New England District are busy pre-recording speeches or preparing for live events at the National Speech and Debate Association’s National Tournament, which is also taking place online this year. Shrewsbury High School is hoping for a successful showing in its landmark 50th appearance at this event.

Interestingly, there has already been discussion of additional online tournaments even post-pandemic as there were significant advantages realized, from cutting travel costs to enabling the wider Speech and Debate community to remain engaged. Yet this is not going to be our new normal. Naturally, it is difficult to assess someone’s poise or presence when the student is not in the same room; humorous interpretation lacks humor if the audio skips during the punchline; and debate loses some of its edge when your opponent has to ask if they are finished rebutting your argument. Nevertheless, as the team moves to our end of year awards ceremony (on Zoom) and to the beginning of next season competing at the Yale tournament (online) the SHS Speech and Debate team will aim to not only continue their unabating competitive success, but find some sense of normalcy and certainty at these most turbulent of times.

HOPE in challenging times

ROBERT SECINO
English Teacher,
Shrewsbury High School

The following are remarks given by Mr. Secino, English Teacher, at the Shrewsbury High School Class of 2020 Commemoration video broadcast on June 2, 2020, edited for publication.

I am so honored to talk to you. I’d like to thank Dr. Sawyer, the Shrewsbury School Committee, Mr. Bazydlo and the SHS administration, the Class of 2020 officers and advisors, and of course I congratulate all the seniors and their families. And with this year’s coronavirus pandemic, I save my biggest thanks for the essential workers who keep our community running, especially all the brave health care workers. Thank you very, very much.

And on a lighter note, I’d like to thank whoever had the crazy idea that I should give this talk!

Before I get fully underway, let’s all agree on something right off the bat. Both you and I know exactly the number one reason why you’re watching this. You’re dying to answer the question that all of Shrewsbury is asking, and it’s this: *During these ten weeks of remote learning and all this time away from SHS, exactly how big—how bushy—has Mr. Secino’s hair grown?* Admit it, a lot of you are watching just to see it for yourself. So, I invite you now to take a *g-o-o-d, l-o-o-n-g* look. And don’t forget the eyebrows! So that’s settled! Some of you can tune out now.

And on the subject of rumors, no, it is not true that in my final Zoom class meetings I had to duck and maneuver just to make my head fit inside the Zoom screen. That rumor I flatly deny.

There is one more thing. Word has gotten around that I’m retiring this year after 37 years of teaching, with 31 of those years at SHS. Now that’s not a rumor; it’s the truth. Of course, this raises another question: Why has it taken me 31 years to leave SHS when it took the rest of you just four? It doesn’t seem quite fair, does it? Well, stick around, because by the end of this talk I’ll think you’ll have your answer.

So now that I’ve covered the urgent preliminaries, let’s get this speech on the road.

For these past ten weeks of remote learning, many of you seniors have emailed me questions. Most of your ques-

tions have been subject-related, but others have been, well, let’s just call them unorthodox. From my busy email inbox, I’d like to share three of your questions here and now, along with my answers:

Question Number One: This one comes signed by all 67 of my Honors Seniors with whom I read George Orwell’s quite important novel, *1984*. They ask, “Mr. Secino, tell us the truth now! Are you BIG BROTHER?”

A: Well, it’s like this. *(Puts on dark glasses and holds up sign, “BIG BROTHER IS WATCHING YOU.”)* Just like I’ve told you in class so many times, “I’m not BIG BROTHER. I’m just BIG BROTHER’s liaison!” *(Switches back to regular glasses.)* Now I hope that satisfies you.

Question Number Two: A student from my Period 5 class asks, “Mr. Secino, do you own the Panera at White City? Before the shut-down, my friends and I and even my little sister would see you at Panera practically every day after school doing paperwork, including on the weekends.”

A: Thank you for your question. *(Sips from Panera cup.)* It’s true that I am one of Panera’s best customers. However, I don’t yet own the franchise. But now that I think about it, down the road, who knows?

And finally, **Question Number Three:** “Mr. Secino, why is it that I sometimes see you outside your classroom between bells, dancing in the hallway?”

A: This is a very, very good question. And I don’t deny it: I have danced in the English hallway. But for this question too, just like the earlier one, I think the answer will be quite clear by the end of my talk. You’ll have your answer soon.

Now I teach English, and it’s just not possible for an English teacher to give a talk without turning to literature. And for that reason, I’d like to share a poem by Emily Dickinson. Dickinson lived just down Route 9 about an hour west of here in the village of Amherst. Although she wrote this poem a while ago, it speaks powerfully to this pandemic we have right now.

In the poem, Dickinson talks about HOPE. Now HOPE is one of those abstract emotions that can seem almost impossible to describe. It ranks up there with other intangibles such as loneliness, fear, and even love. So how can Emily Dickinson help us to see HOPE? I’d like to talk you

through her lines, and then at the end I’ll say the complete poem. Dickinson decides to embody HOPE as “a thing with feathers.” She doesn’t even directly call it a “bird” until line 7—as if even to name it will cause it to take fright and fly away—birds do that, we know. Birds are fragile things, and so is HOPE. It’s like that birthday ritual—you know, the one that says, when you blow out the candles on your cake, you should never say out loud what you wished for—in other words, *hoped* for—because if you do, your wish—your *hope*—won’t come true; in effect, it will “fly away.” But Dickinson goes a step further: she doesn’t even call this “thing with feathers” HOPE directly, but instead places the very word HOPE inside quotation marks like this: “Hope.” This bird is *that* delicate, as soft and yielding as “feathers.”

Here are the first two lines of her poem:

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –*

Notice where “Hope” takes a stand: “in the soul.” And what is “the soul”—but that deepest, most fundamental core at the very center of who we are as human beings? When we hope, it’s an act of faith. Right now, we don’t know when the pandemic will pass, just like we don’t know when the rules of social distance will be relaxed, or when life will go back to normal. But based on every historical precedent and with the best efforts of our scientists, we believe—we have faith—that it will pass eventually. The entire scientific history of pandemics gives us every reason to hope. And let’s keep this in mind: Science now is a whole lot better than science then.

Let’s go back to the poem:

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –*

HOPE is wordless. Again, you blow out your birthday candles and then you *shush*, you keep silent. Notice, too, that HOPE “sings.” It’s musical. Music is the language of the spirit. It sings, it soars, it lifts us skyward.

Here’s the second stanza:

*And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –*

When do we need HOPE the

CONTINUED, see page 7

SPS remote learning - lessons learned

AMY CLOUTER
*Assistant Superintendent
for Curriculum, Instruction,
and Assessment*

During times of crisis, we are all reminded of the importance of community. In Shrewsbury our mission statement makes explicit that we serve our students in partnership with others. Further, our guiding principles purposefully name as a shared responsibility our commitment to care for and support one another. Most importantly, the educators in our district aspire to act in accordance with that value. Yet the relationship between home and school during the pandemic was sorely tested, and not just in Shrewsbury.

During school closure, students had to remain engaged, organized and motivated while learning at a distance. Families had to become teachers - often while working remotely themselves. Educators were charged with learning how to use new technology while developing a combination of “live” and asynchronous les-

sons. No matter their role in the district, everyone was fully engaged. For example, the Information Technology Department distributed 128 iPads and resolved 2,650 helpdesk tickets (649 of which were received directly from parents through our “Parent Tech Support” address). All of us had to respond to the unexpected while managing fear, grappling with uncertainty, master-

ing new safety protocols, and hunting for basic supplies. At times these past four months have felt like an elaborate community scavenger hunt. What have we found? I am gratified to say that we found our way, together.

Our plans reflected our priorities, namely keeping our stu-

CONTINUED, see right

What is Remote Learning?

Remote learning is not merely online learning; we want our students to experience the richness of diverse learning experiences, including teacher-directed assignments, options to engage with content in multiple modalities, interdisciplinary projects, nature walks and integrated experiences with Art, Music, Media and Physical Education. Just as importantly, we seek to maintain connections with classroom communities and further opportunities for social emotional learning . Finally, choice and enrichment encourage our students to be self-directed. Accordingly, SPS structured remote learning plans purposefully to include:

- Pencil and paper practice of academic skills
- Online learning opportunities, and
- Interactive experiences that engage students and connect them to their teacher, other educators and to their classmates for the purpose of reviewing material, applying new skills and learning new concepts aligned with grade level standards.

HOPE

CONTINUED from page 6

most? In the toughest times, the stormiest times—the harder the storm, the greater the need. In that movie we all know, *The Wizard of Oz*, Dorothy’s last name is Gale, a word that means “a very strong wind” just like the twister that carries Dorothy away. A “sore” storm is a painful storm, and “Hope” is “sweetest”—in other words, most soothing, in the midst of pain. Today as I give this talk, around the world over 320,000 of our fellow human beings have died from COVID-19, including over 90,000 Americans and almost 6,000 of our Massachusetts neighbors. So many families are in pain right now. We all want this pandemic to pass; that is our shared hope. Notice, too, the size of Dickinson’s “Bird”—it’s “little”—but despite its small size, it sings without shame or embarrassment—it refuses to be “abashed” by the storm; in other words, it can’t be bullied into “bash”-fulness. This is one very tough bird to face down such a storm; and clearly, it’s up to the task.

Dickinson’s poem has one more stanza, and it’s my favorite:

*I've heard it in the chilliest land –
And on the strangest Sea –*

That’s right. HOPE keeps us warm and afloat in the cold-

est of times, in the deepest despair. What is “the strangest Sea”? It is the deep, deep, expansive ocean that feels unfamiliar; we’ve never sailed it before. It can drown us, if we let it. This pandemic feels bottomless; it stretches beyond the horizon. We can’t see the end of it. On this ocean, HOPE is our lifeboat.

Her last two lines go like this, and they’re stunning:

*Yet never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of Me.*

This tiny “thing with feathers” doesn’t rely on us to fill the backyard bird feeder. In our direst, most “extreme” times of need, HOPE doesn’t need us at all! We don’t feed it; it feeds us. So, it turns out, this fragile bird is at the very same time the strongest of creatures—far stronger than we are without it. In fact, this bird, this faith, this HOPE, lies at the very root of our strength.

So now without interruption, I give you Emily Dickinson’s full poem, and then I’ll conclude:

*“Hope” is the thing with feathers –
That perches in the soul –
And sings the tune without the words –
And never stops – at all –*

*And sweetest – in the Gale – is heard –
And sore must be the storm –
That could abash the little Bird
That kept so many warm –*

*I've heard it in the chilliest land –
And on the strangest Sea –
Yet never, in Extremity,
It asked a crumb – of Me.*

For you, my dear graduating seniors, I hope so many good things. At the top of my list, I hope that you and your families emerge from this pandemic safely, in the best of health, and with a deeper understanding of what matters most in life. And I hope that when you leave SHS, you have the courage to live your lives in accordance with your highest values.

I hope these things for you, and a whole lot more. And I believe in you!

So, I’ve reached the end of my talk. Now do you realize why it has taken me 31 years to leave SHS when it took you just four? Now do you know why you sometimes see me dancing in the hallway? Yes, I know it sounds crazy, but I’ve stuck around this long because I’ve enjoyed every year of it. And the number one reason why I’ve enjoyed it is you, the SHS students. Thank you for being who you are.

Senior Class of 2020, I look forward to graduating with you. “Twenty-Twenty.” It has a very nice ring to it!

Thank you very much. And congratulations, seniors!

Remote Learning

CONTINUED from left

dents connected to educators and classmates and engaged in remote learning. Teams across schools rallied to ensure that all students were connected to at least one adult, that all families had access to resources, and that we fostered academic learning, engagement with the arts, and social connection. We are poised now to build on that foundation. Given the tools we’ve put in place since March, we can feel confident knowing that students and families will be better able to access resources no matter the model we return to in the fall. Thanks to the resources afforded us from the state for funding for COVID-related expenses, the district will be able to provide students with the devices and technology required to put a more nuanced learning plan in place. This is critically important, because as we prepare for a return to school we must all be mindful of the impact of extended closure.

Can families anticipate changes? In a word, yes. Since we are actively reviewing the latest guidance from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at the time of this writing (June 25, 2020), it’s too early to share specifics. At the same time, survey results from families and staff suggest that both groups are seeking ways to tailor instruction to specific student needs, to include longer term projects and/or choice as part of lesson plans, and to enable more effective feedback. We will continue to expect our students to complete assignments no matter the setting, and we will put routines in place to ensure full and active participation. We understand that, for some students and families, this will require additional supports like translation services, modifications and/or additional supports.

Although we have learned a lot about the power of the student-teacher bond, the importance of routines to effective functioning, and the importance of student and family engagement to successful outcomes, we really hope to put these findings into practice in person. What our “new normal” looks like when school reopens is an open question at this point. What is certain? For one, we have learned that indeed we are a learning organization- and we will be ready. Secondly, we know students will return with learning gaps. Please keep your child(ren) engaged in practicing academic skills by maintaining a weekly routine. We’ve put some terrific resources together on our website, and a direct link to calendars, learning tools and resources can be found with one click.

In closing, I want to personally thank everyone - students, families, educators and community members - for your commitment to education, resilience, determination, and support of the district and our students during this unprecedented time. I have never been more proud to work in Shrewsbury, in large part because of the community spirit that permeates the town.

State champions, again

STEVE McKINSTRY
Esports Coach / IT Support Specialist, Shrewsbury High School

Congratulations are in order for the Rocket League and League of Legends Esports teams at Shrewsbury High School for defending their “State Champion” titles once again for the Spring 2020 Season! The finals were held remotely on May 21, 2020 and live-streamed directly to Twitch by PlayVS and the National Federation of State High School Associations.

The varsity League of Legends team, the SHS Gatekeepers, played against Natick High School in a best of three format and came out ahead after two victories!

The Gatekeepers consist of: Captain: Sajed Ziade - Junior, Jerry Du - Senior, John ‘Jack’ Doyle - Senior, Trevor Dodson - Senior, Tristan Duerk - Senior, Raul Martins - Sophomore

The varsity Rocket League team, the CEOs, faced off against Southwick Regional in a best of seven format, and came out as champions with four wins!

The CEOs consist of: Captain: Riley Crowell - Senior, Lawrence ‘Sky’ Pemberton - Sophomore, Trevor Perduta - Sophomore

High School Esports came to life in Fall 2018 by a partnership between the MSAA, PlayVS, and the NFHS. Each year, there are Fall and Spring seasons, which Shrewsbury High School has swept since the inception, bringing home seven state championships to-date!

Perform

CONTINUED from page 5

functions that we hadn’t tapped into yet. Many of the teachers developed skills in creating videos for their lessons using Screencastify, QuickTime Movies, and Screencast-O-Matic to create movies that students could watch at a later time if they needed review or couldn’t log in for the class. We were able to connect with colleagues from other departments who created and recorded online sessions to share techniques that had worked in their practices. The team of elementary music teachers were very excited about SeeSaw and were able to collaborate and create several weeks of lesson content for their students at the kindergarten through grade-four levels. The Choice Boards that they created gave students a voice in how they were learning the content of their classes.

Also, our colleagues from our professional associations such as Massachusetts Music Education Association, and National Association for Music Education were able to offer online webinars to help us

deal with the “new normal” of remote teaching. Discussions were held on the best ways to configure online learning websites, how to best engage students, and incorporating Social Emotional Learning and Mindfulness in a remote environment.

Many of the publishers of music education software also offered webinars and free use of their product through the closure period. One of the most useful at the middle school and high school level was SmartMusic, an online practice program that gives feedback to students on their performance. Smrithi Krishnaswamy said of the program “I would play through a section, sight reading it. Then play with the accompaniment and see if my rhythms were correct. Playing the right pitch/note is usually ok for me, but I sometimes have trouble counting rhythms while playing, which trips me up when sight reading. So, that feature was really helpful for me.” In addition to giving students feedback on the accuracy of the rhythms and pitches that they played, the program also provides accompaniment from the rest of the (virtual) band or orchestra. Retna

Arun found this feature useful “I really like how it gives me instant feedback about the rhythms and pitches, so I can fix it instantly. I also like how I can hear the other parts through the music accompaniment, so I understand where my part fits in within the group and it almost mimics actually being at school in band.” One other feature is the vast library of solo and small ensemble literature that is available to students for additional study.

These are a few of the experiences and experiments that the Performing Arts Department engaged in during the school closure. While we are anxious to get back to in-person instruction and performing for a live audience, we will continue to look for the most impactful ways to engage students online if we need to return to remote learning. Thanks to technology, we can still find ways to be expressive and to perform for each other, even though we can’t be together. The Performing Arts Department hopes that all our students enjoy the summer and continue to find ways to express their hopes, thoughts, and feelings through performance.

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