

Superintendent’s Corner

A culture of belonging promotes learning

DR. JOSEPH M. SAWYER
Superintendent of Schools

As I write this, we have completed a little more than the first quarter of the school year, during which our students, families, and staff have experienced both triumphs and challenges. We began the year celebrating the return of full-time, in-person learning for all of our students and the opening of the extraordinary new Major Howard W. Beal School, while also contemplating how the continuation of the pandemic and the disruptions of the prior two school years would affect our students. Over the past two and a half months, we have seen many of our students thriving in academics, in the arts, in athletics, and in co-curricular activities as the experience of school has returned closer to “normal.” At the same time, we have seen many students struggling with learning, motivation, mental health, and behavior to a much more significant degree than before the pandemic. Sometimes, these are the same students who are thriving in some ways and struggling in others.

It would have been naive to think that things would simply get back to “normal” given the upheaval so many of our children, families, and staff members experienced since March of 2020. As I expressed to our staff in my opening day remarks, it is important that we not fall into the trap of overfocusing on potential “learning loss” or to approach this year as a race to “catch up” on what

CONTINUED, see page 2

In this edition

- Welcome to our new staff members page 2
- Preserving in-person learning with Test and Stay page 3
- Fostering strength of character at Oak Middle School page 3
- Student recognition opportunity: Seal of Biliteracy page 4
- The new Major Howard W. Beal School opens its doors page 4
- Be you, be here, belong page 5
- Wellness: Strategies for health this winter and beyond page 6
- SPS alumni invited to “come back” page 6
- SPS Colonial Fund supports programs that have an impact page 7

“When students feel safe and supported, they are truly ready and able to learn.”
- Laura Weaver & Mark Wilding



Art teachers Sara Gustafson and Whitney Archambeault led Floral Street School students and staff in the creation of an all-school collaborative display in celebration of belonging. After reading the book “The Day You Begin” by Jacqueline Woodson, students and staff created this piece, which decorates the school lobby. Each grade level had a thematic component. Circles, birds, leaves, flowers, and rulers were imagery inspired by the illustrations in the story. See “Be you, be here, belong” and more photos on page 5.

A new year, a new school, and a new normal

JON WENSKY
School Committee Chair

As a lifelong resident of Shrewsbury, from the perspectives of a student, parent, and School Committee member, a new school year always brings excitement, promise, new challenges, and consistently aligns with cooler temperatures leading into my favorite season of fall in New England. We are off to a great start and have much to be thankful for as we continue to write the next chapter in the post-pandemic public education playbook together.

The 2021-2022 Shrewsbury school year brings us the grand opening of the new Major Howard W. Beal Elementary School on Lake Street. It ends the 99-year run of the old Beal School building in the town center and marks the culmination of a three-year journey for both school and town leadership as well as our residents who generously supported the funding of a beautiful, new school that provides adequate learning spaces across all elementary school buildings. It delivers the promise of free, full-day kindergarten for all families and alleviates overcrowded elementary school buildings, while providing and restoring new spaces for learning. As a School Committee member, there is nothing more gratifying than witnessing the successes of the school district you serve. Upon waking up on the first day of school, I wasn’t prepared for the emotion I experienced when scrolling through my social media feed to find a picture of five elementary school students standing

at the entrance to the new Beal School ready to start the day. It truly brought tears to my eyes. The time, effort, and advocacy had finally come to fruition. 120 days prior to opening its doors, we truly weren’t sure if Beal would open. Our community rallied for supporting public schools with the successful May 4th operational override. The new Beal School opened because the residents of Shrewsbury voted to make it a reality - not once, but twice.

Prior to the official start of school, I had the honor of participating in an annual tradition for employees of Shrewsbury Public Schools. “Opening Day” serves as a “welcome back to school” kickoff for the returning and new staff members of our district. Prior to last year, this event was always held in the Shrewsbury High School (SHS) auditorium for a standing-room only crowd. We continued this tradition last year, virtually, via the Zoom video platform. This year’s August 30th gathering was held at a new venue with over 800+ staff filling the stands and common areas at the SHS football field. I provided welcoming remarks from the School Committee while recalling my own journey as a Shrewsbury student. I have fond memories of my teachers, all of whom had a profound impact on my life. I felt it important to provide today’s educators with a retrospective of my teachers at Artemus Ward, Coolidge Elementary, and Shrewsbury Middle schools. I provided examples of how their commitment and teaching taught me life lessons that contributed to my successes later in life. Teachers were a constant in my life. In addition to teaching the basic curriculum, they provided me with a historical perspective

CONTINUED, see page 3

Superintendent’s Corner

CONTINUED from page 1

students missed. This kind of approach can unintentionally send the message to our students that the pandemic caused them to be damaged goods who somehow need to be “fixed,” and that it is academic performance that is the be-all and end-all goal of their school experience. While learning is, of course, the central purpose of our schools, we must attend to our children’s overall well-being in order to create the conditions where effective learning can take place. More importantly, we must do this because our primary responsibility is to meet our duty to care for our children’s health, safety, and well-being.

Attending to our students’ social, emotional, and mental health needs is critically important, and we have taken various steps to increase our capacity to do so, from adding programming aimed at fostering social and emotional competencies for all students, to adding additional counseling staff to provide support for students who need additional assistance. In addition to targeted approaches, we are intentionally emphasizing creating a culture of belonging, where all members of our school community feel accepted unconditionally, regardless of whatever human differences are part of who they are.

“... our primary responsibility is to meet our duty to care for our children’s health, safety, and well-being.”

While our schools’ core purpose is to advance student learning, we know that this is best achieved in a culture of caring and positive relationships. As we continue to make our way through the many challenges posed by our current circumstances, we will strive to create an environment of unconditional belonging that creates fertile ground for our students to learn and grow.



Welcome to our new staff members

BARBARA A. MALONE
Executive Director of Human Resources

Shrewsbury Public Schools has completed most hiring to fill key positions within the District. During this hiring season we experienced a lack of applicants compared to other years, especially in hard to fill positions such as Speech Language Pathologists, School Nurses, School Psychologists, and Special Education Teachers. We worked to increase the diversity of our applicant pools and on staffing for the newly opened Major Howard W. Beal (elementary) School, with appreciation to the citizens of Shrewsbury for approving the override that allowed us to adequately staff our elementary program. As always, positions were hired to replace educators who resigned or retired, and for emergent needs as the year progressed, including several long-term substitute positions. The information presented here reflects **new staff data as of early October 2021.**

As of early October we had appointed or promoted 11 staff to district leadership positions, 40 staff to professional positions such as teachers and specialists, 54 staff to paraprofessional positions, and five staff to administrative assistant positions. In total, we had hired 110 people for the upcoming school year. At the time of publication, positions which remain open will be posted on www.schoolspring.com.

New Hiring/Promotion-District Leadership Team

The following leaders were appointed for the 2021-2022 school year:
Ken Almeida, from Interim Director to Director of World Languages
Angie Flynn, Director of School Counseling, Shrewsbury High School
Ashley Gallagher, Instructional Coach/Curriculum Coordinator, Walter J. Paton School
Shelley Hoey, Assistant Principal, Major Howard W. Beal School
Nga Huynh, Assistant Principal, Shrewsbury High School
Jeff Lane, Assistant Principal, Shrewsbury High School
Christina Manos, Interim Director of English Language Learning, District
Sarah Matthews, Instructional Coach/Curriculum Coordinator, Floral Street School
Bridget Nichols, from Interim Director to Director of Parker Road Preschool
Erica Pratt, Director of Physical Education, Health, and Family Consumer Science

April Yu, Assistant Finance and Operations Manager, District

New Hiring-Professional Staff

The 40 professional staff include 12 hires for the high school, six hires for the middle level, and 22 hires for the pre-school/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. The process includes phone, remote, or in-person interviews with principals, department 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. However, this year we also advertised positions through www.IMDiversity.com and asked applicants to apply via schoolspring if they were interested. We had a total of 1621 applicants to our professional positions. This means that 2.47% of those who applied to our professional positions ultimately received a position with us for FY 22. Last year, for FY 21 it was 3.92%; for FY 20 it was 2.16%; in FY 19 it was 1.6%; in FY 18 it was 1%.

New Hiring-Paraprofessional Staff

As of early October we had hired 54 staff to paraprofessional positions. Para positions netted 353 applicants. This means we hired 15.3% of those who applied to our paraprofessional positions for FY 22, compared to 11.7% in FY 21, 8.85% in FY 20, 7% in FY 19, and 8% in FY 18.

New Hiring-Administrative Assistant Positions

As of early October we hired five administrative assistant positions due to retirements or resignations and additional support for the new Major Howard W. Beal School. Administrative assistant positions brought in 367 applicants. We hired 1.36% of applicants to these roles.

New Educators

Shrewsbury High School
David Belbin, Social Science

Teacher
Justin Bleier, Music Teacher
Matthew Braz, Social Science Teacher
Leo DeOrsey, Science Teacher
Sandra Domenikos, World Language Teacher
Grace Hunter, Special Education Teacher
Nicholas Krefting, Science Teacher
Curtis O’Dell, Special Education Teacher
Sean Russell, School Counselor
Jazmin Santos, School Psychologist
Danielle Watkins, English Teacher
Tammy Yeung, School Counselor

Oak Middle School
Emilee Bates, Speech Language Pathologist
Kayleigh Eldridge, Grade 8 Teacher
Kevin Holm, World Language Teacher

Sherwood Middle School
John Egan, Special Education Teacher
Mubashra Munawar, Grade 5 Teacher
Carly Williams, Grade 5 Teacher

Elementary and Preschool
Skyler Acconcio, Music Teacher
Whitney Archambeault, Art Teacher
Sarah Badry, Grade 3 Teacher
Yudit Bolotovskaya, Speech Language Pathologist
Aimee Bunn, Special Education Teacher
Matthew Carter, School Psychologist
Erin Duffy, Kindergarten Teacher
Samantha El Saddik, Grade 3 Teacher
Johanna Evans, Art Teacher
Robyn Gaines, Grade 1 Teacher
Sarah Gerlt, Special Education Team Chair
Allyson Hoffman, Grade 1 Teacher
Patricia Hollyer, Grade 4 Teacher
Alycia Hudson, Special Education Teacher
Danielle Jusseaume, School Nurse
Alison Kimball, Special Education Team Chair and Structured Reading Teacher
Jordan Lyons, Kindergarten Teacher
Stephanie Martin, School Psychologist
Jaclyn Pierce, Special Education Teacher
Audreanna Sauro, Grade 4 Teacher
Karyn Savell, School Adjustment Counselor
Sarah Williams, Kindergarten Teacher
Michelle Zimmerman, Media Specialist

CONTINUED, see page 7

Preserving in-person learning with *Test and Stay*

NOELLE FREEMAN
Director of School Nursing

As the 2020-2021 school year came to a close in June after more than a year of remote and hybrid learning, many people had high hopes for a return to a “normal” school year this fall. Fortunately, and arguably most importantly, we began the 2021-2022 school year with all students in school full time. The benefits of children being at school for in-person learning are clear, and it is refreshing to see classrooms alive with full complements of students once again. The course of the COVID-19 pandemic has, however, required Shrewsbury Public Schools, along with districts across the state and country, to once again make adjustments to typical routines in order to provide an environment that is as safe as possible for students

and staff.

While monitoring the prevalence of COVID and the Delta variant in Shrewsbury and the state, the District is using a multifaceted approach to prevent transmission of the virus. At the time of this writing (November 3, 2021), face masks are required for all students and staff while indoors at school and on the school bus; the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education has mandated masks in all public schools, most recently extending that requirement through January 15, 2022. Additional mitigation measures at school include frequent hand hygiene, distancing of 3 feet or more when possible and pragmatic, maximizing ventilation, staying home and being tested for COVID when symptomatic, contact tracing to identify close contacts

when positive cases occur, and voluntary routine testing.

One new addition to the district’s list of mitigation strategies is the *Test and Stay* program which is part of the state-funded COVID-19 testing program. The program is voluntary and is available to individuals who would otherwise be required to quarantine when identified as a close contact to a positive case of COVID-19 in the school environment. The *Test and Stay* option involves the use of a BinaxNow rapid antigen test each school day until day seven (7) after exposure to a positive case. If the student or staff member participating in the program tests negative, they can attend school that day. If the test is positive for COVID, they must return home

CONTINUED, see page 4

Fostering strength of character at Oak Middle School

DR. ANN JONES
Principal,
Oak Middle School
SARAH POWERS
Teacher,
Oak Middle School

Building strong character takes work and at Oak Middle School we are up for the challenge! Once every six days, staff and students take time out of their academic schedules to engage in our Advisory program. With only a few sessions under our belt we are still new at this, but we have high hopes that Advisory will soon become a key part of our middle school program.

Advisory programs have been a hallmark of the middle level since the inception of the Middle School model in the 1970s (Association of Middle Level Education, 2021.) Over the years, Advisory programs have come and gone in Shrewsbury; some have been more successful than others, and they have often been tied to the availability of financial and human resources. Our Advisory program takes the form of small groups of students working together with a staff advisor to address students’ social-emotional learning needs. Educational research has flooded our industry and social media with the importance of social-emotional learning, especially given the many impacts of the pandemic on our children’s mental health. Social-emotional learn-

ing is defined as:

the process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring decisions. (CASEL, 2021)

Much has been published about the important role schools play in fostering and supporting these skills, and in living it every day, we know how critical it is that our school step up and explicitly teach these skills as well.

For a few years now, Oak has been moving toward fully implementing an Advisory program. Committees of dedicated staff have reviewed and tried research-based programs to find just the right one for our finicky, unique, and often unpredictable age group. We wanted a program that addressed the variety of social-emotional needs of young adolescents in a way that would encourage them to engage, think, interact, and reflect with one another in positive and productive ways. We also wanted a program that was accessible to the wide variety of learners our school represents. Finally, we wanted a program that fostered connectedness to school, peers, and adults. What we found was



Ms. Powers’ Advisory Group Community Agreements are presented in this graphic.

a treasure trove of resources that is specifically designed for young adolescents in a program called Character Strong.

Character Strong is a research-based social-emotional learning curriculum for middle school and high school students. Founded in 2016, and now serving over one million students in 2500 schools, Character Strong evolved during the pandemic to offer virtual lessons as well as their tried and true in-person activities that enable students to interact over topics related to empathy, social awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision making. Additionally, weekly sessions foster character building in the areas of patience, kindness, honesty, respect, selflessness, forgiveness, commitment and humility.

CONTINUED, see page 5

A new year

CONTINUED from page 1

on current events. As I look back on my grade school years I am thankful for the time, effort, and support that they provided to me.

Shrewsbury teachers and staff, both past and present, inspired my journey from student to parent to School Committee member in our community. District leaders, principals, teachers, paraprofessionals, school nurses, and staff members collectively spend a third of their day with our children, often on the front lines of history. Over the course of 18 months, from March 2020 to September 2021, their day jobs were immersed in the unfamiliar rigors of teaching amidst a pandemic, political chaos, economic uncertainty, civil rights struggles, and climate-change fears. Students lean on these dedicated educators and look to them for support and guidance to help them understand the world from a much different lens than we, as parents and caretakers, can provide to them. Additionally, teachers provided our students with a unique sense of normalcy during these incomparable life-changing events all while experiencing the most challenging times of their professional careers and balancing the needs of their own families. Their unwavering commitment to the success of our students is invaluable and will continue to be a critical part of their educational journey.

“The new Beal School opened because the residents of Shrewsbury voted to make it a reality - not once, but twice.”

It’s exciting to have all students and staff back to full, in-person learning. A new set of challenges is upon us as we adapt to the changes we’ve experienced over the last two years and its impact on the future success of our students. While hybrid students previously returned to in-person learning from April through June, we just welcomed back many staff and students that spent the entire year teaching and learning from home. It’s easy to reflect back on how far we’ve come since the “remote learning” but hard to assume that “back to school” in 2021 means “back to normal”. It’s a sign of both forward progress and new territory for every school community in the country. There is no frame of reference for the times we are living in, nor is there a playbook that can help guide us through what might happen next. We have never experienced what it was like when returning back to school after the last pandemic. It’s important to be cognizant of these continued unknowns and work together to collectively tackle the challenges ahead of us, one day at a time. Thank you all for your continued support, patience, and flexibility as we navigate this uncharted educational road together. I wish you all a safe and successful school year.

Test and Stay

CONTINUED from page 3

and isolate per Massachusetts Department of Public Health (MDPH) guidelines. Families are notified by the school nurse if their child is eligible to participate in *Test and Stay*. At the time of this writing, close to 2,000 student learning days have been preserved thanks to negative test results. The option to eliminate school days missed due to quarantine is a clear benefit provided by testing, as is our ability to identify asymptomatic positive individuals and complete additional contact tracing as quickly as possible. We are grateful that the *Test and Stay* option is available to our school community and want to thank everyone who is involved in the administration of the program as well as those who have participated!

This combination of mitigation strategies, which is based on recommendations from health experts, has become the “new normal” in our buildings and has helped to make it possible for our schools to successfully return to much more typical routines in many ways. Our classrooms are full of students engaged in collaborative learning; there are increased opportunities for face-to-face social interactions at lunches, recess and mask breaks; Extended School Care services are available once again for students in kindergarten through grade 6; and many extracurricular activities are up and running, including a full fall season of interscholastic athletics at Oak Middle School and Shrewsbury High School, instrument lessons, chorus and band concerts, and a variety of after school clubs and enrichment opportunities.

We certainly all look forward to the day when we can leave COVID and all that goes with it in the past. Until that time, we thank you for your patience and cooperation as we do what is necessary to keep our school community as safe as possible!

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

Student recognition opportunity: Seal of Biliteracy

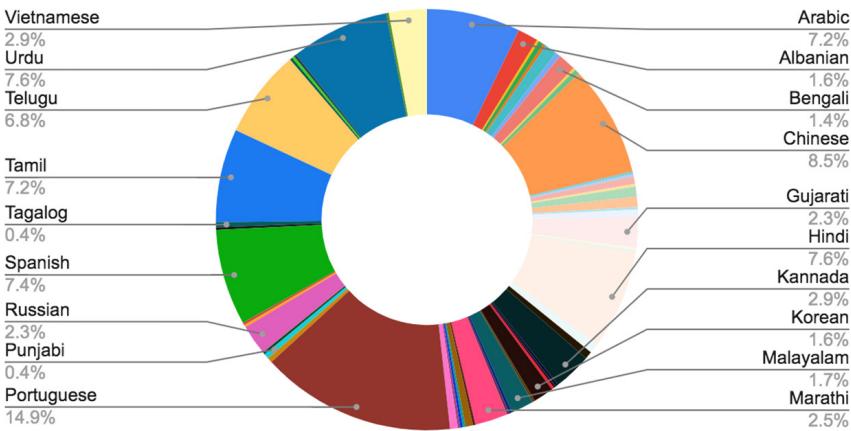
KENNETH ALMEIDA
Director of World Languages

AMY CLOUTER
Assistant Superintendent of Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

The word “globalization” appears often in news headlines. It’s no surprise that developments in technology and communication have resulted in a greater mixing of people, ideas and resources across borders. This interdependence is evident when we grapple with supply chain shortages. Closer to home, the benefits of this rich exchange can be felt in Shrewsbury’s classrooms.

Did you know that a recent home language survey of Shrewsbury High School (SHS) students revealed that our students speak 20 different languages at home? Specifically, of the 1,325 students surveyed, 45% identified as being from homes where a language other than English is spoken, with Portuguese accounting for the majority. Moreover, roughly five percent of those students come from homes where no English is spoken.

Count of What language do you speak at home that is not English?



Almeida, K. (2021). [Home Language Survey unpublished]. Shrewsbury Public Schools

It’s becoming increasingly clear that language proficiency is an important skill in itself. Moreover, the ability to communicate effectively with others aligns well with the aspirations captured in Shrewsbury’s Portrait of a Graduate, our vision for the skills our graduates should learn as a result of their experience in our schools. Fortunately, a new initiative launched by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) called the Massachusetts Seal of Biliteracy will enable Shrewsbury High School to recognize proficient students with a special designation on their diploma. How does it work? Read on for more information.

2022 Seal of Biliteracy Implementation:

To prepare for implementation, all seniors who are currently enrolled in a level 5 or Advanced Placement World Language course will take an exam as part of their coursework. Shrewsbury Public School (SPS) students will be tested using the AAPL (ACTFL Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages) in modern language, and the ALIRA (ACTFL Latin Interpretive Reading Assessment) for Latin.

It is important to note that the 2021 Massachusetts Curricu-

CONTINUED, see page 6

The new Major Howard W. Beal School opens its doors

SHELLEY HOEY
Assistant Principal
Major Howard W. Beal School

The doors of the new Major Howard W. Beal School opened to students on September 1, 2021. Just under 600 students in grades kindergarten through four, and nearly 150 staff members have quickly come together to form a new school community. As a result of the redis-

tricting process, the new Beal School brought students and staff together from throughout Shrewsbury. The school, located at 214 Lake Street, is built on the very same street where Major Howard W. Beal and his wife resided in the early 20th century.

The opening days of the school were focused on learning the new building and routines. Staff and students logged thousands of steps across



Teacher Katie Knott’s kindergarten students are shown enjoying the outdoor classroom.

the 140,000 square foot building as we learned our way to classes, lunch, recess, the nurses’ office and dismissal. However, as we’ve settled in, the important work of building our community has begun. Students contributed to the development of our school expectations which all fall under three key categories: be safe, be respectful and be responsible. We were fortunate to have some fourth grade leaders share these expectations with everyone during our October All School Meetings. Our school council is also up and running with staff, parents, and community members col-



An aerial view of the new Maj. Howard W. Beal School at 214 Lake Street is pictured here.

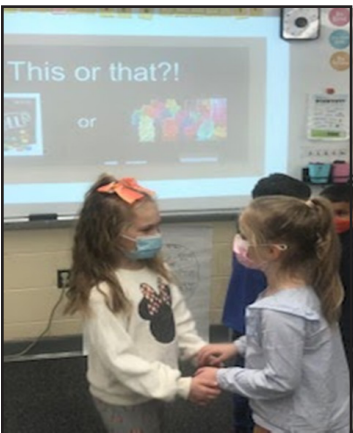
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Be you, be here, belong

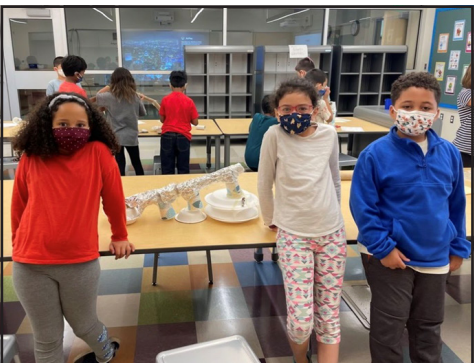
Elementary teachers use art and activities to foster students' sense of belonging

**BECKY DUMPHY,
ASHLEY GALLAGHER,
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*Elementary Curriculum
Coordinators / Instructional
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Scientific research says that a sense of belonging at school has many academic benefits for students. Students are more likely to engage, persevere, maintain a positive outlook, and take greater advantage of learning opportunities when they feel like they belong. Here are some ways that elementary teachers in Shrewsbury have been working to foster students' sense of belonging this year.



At Spring Street School, students in Jordan Lyons' kindergarten class played an icebreaker game called "This or That." Icebreakers like this one help students to build relationships and connections with one another.



At Major Howard W. Beal School, third-grade teacher Heidi Richard led her students in a series of cooperative, team-building activities earlier this year. Here, students Joochara, Catherine, and Ryan pose with the waterslide they created during the class waterslide challenge.



At Walter J. Paton School, Jill Symonds' first graders listen to the song "Count on Me" by Bruno Mars as they gather for Morning Meeting. The music video highlights themes of love and friendship and sets the tone for a kind, happy and inclusive day for all.



At Calvin Coolidge School, fourth-grade students in Kelly Finneran's class took part in a playground clean-up effort where they swept the common area and picked up trash. This initiative instilled students with feelings of pride in, and responsibility for, their school campus and community.

Efforts towards building belonging, like those featured **above and the Floral Street School art project on page 1**, are widespread and ongoing in elementary classrooms as educators strive to ensure that all of our youngest learners feel seen, valued, connected, and championed this school year.

Major Howard W. Beal

CONTINUED from page 4

laborating together to begin building our school's mission statement and core values. We look forward to including our students on this essential work and know they will help to identify a school mascot with pride.

Learning at Beal takes place both inside and outside. The classrooms are organized in neighborhoods which consist of full size classrooms, half

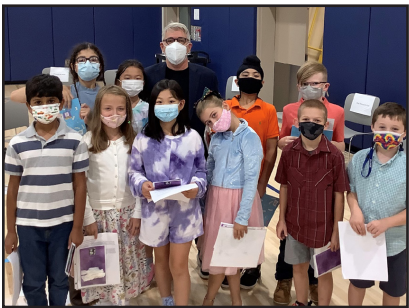
size classrooms for support staff, and common areas with whiteboards and tables for teaching and learning. Additionally, the neighborhoods are equipped with comfortable seating for all learners and projectors for large group lessons. Outdoors, you can find our students playing across the two playgrounds, an outdoor climbing wall, and blacktop play area. Learning also takes place in our outdoor classroom near the entrance to Beal. Finally, students have the opportunity to bring their science learn-

ing outside across our multiple gardens. It is there you'll find them hands-on weeding, planting, and observing.

On Friday, September 24, 2021, the school hosted a beautiful dedication ceremony. Peter H. Reynolds, children's author and illustrator who created the stunning mural that lights up the main lobby at Beal, joined us and visited with children throughout the morning. As Reynolds' quote on the mural says, Beal School is a place where you can "Reach for your own words. Tell the world who you are and how you will make it better."



Third and fourth grade students help walk our kindergarteners to the buses each afternoon.



Author and illustrator Peter H. Reynolds is joined by the fourth grade presenters after the dedication ceremony at Maj. Howard W. Beal School.

Oak

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Character Strong provides a structured and comprehensive curriculum that works to create community within the classroom to help all students belong. Each lesson begins with an icebreaker activity to facilitate sharing and discussions between the students and teacher. There are several starter activities included in Character Strong; for example, Deck of Destiny allows students to pick different questions that they can discuss as a group. The hope is that these starters and activities will prompt the students into discussions with one another, allowing them to learn about their peers and feel more comfortable in future discussions. Following the icebreaker activity the students are led through activities that build upon one another, and they discuss important topics such as kindness, community and respect.

When asked about their Advisory sessions, students had this to say:
"It helps you connect with people you might not know otherwise." - Andrew, Grade 8
"For kids who are shy, it helps them to open up and talk to people." - Ellie, Grade 8
"It pushes you out of your comfort zone [in a good way]." - Rory, Grade 8
"It should be more student led." - Aahal, Grade 7
"It's kind of at that time of day when I really need a break, so I like that." - Aaron, Grade 7
"Overall I like it. I like being able to take my mind off stuff." - Merritt, Grade 7
"I like that it is a calming time and you don't need to think about school work." - Satya, Grade 7
"I like how we can all be together and just talk. You not really doing any work it's just a time to relax your brain." - Marii, Grade 7
"The teachers are very opened because of these classes." - Enzo, Grade 7
"I like being able to talk in a safe space and get to know the teachers and the students better." - Hannah, Grade 7

As a district, we have dedicated ourselves to creating a place of belonging for all students, and we believe Advisory can help facilitate that. One of the more beneficial pieces of Advisory is providing students with an additional trusted adult with whom they feel comfortable, connected, and empowered to use their voice. Moreover, the small-group structure of the Advisory program is designed to foster a sense of belonging and self-advocacy wherein students can create strong peer and adult relationships that focus on crafting core values that we hope to see translate to the whole school community.

We are all new to the Advisory program and Character Strong. As we learn and grow together, we are committed to building on both student and staff feedback to make this an integral part of our middle school program where everyone feels they belong.

Endnotes:
Association for Middle Level Educators, AMLE.org
Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, CASEL.org

Seal of Biliteracy

CONTINUED from page 4

lum Framework for World Languages is based on the ACTFL World-Readiness Standards. The terminologies used to qualify for the Seal, i.e. intermediate-high or advanced low, are based on the prescribed ACTFL proficiency levels which are used to measure students’ progress in a World Language. Additionally, all junior World Language students will take those exams in place of a traditional final exam. Many districts have incorporated them as part of their common assessments.

The AAPL exam is only available in Arabic, Chinese, French, German, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Portuguese, Spanish, and Thai. This means that if a student speaking a language that is not listed wishes to participate in the Seal, SPS will need to secure another approved test for that student. This is why surveying our students about the languages they speak at home is so important; the information will help to inform next steps.

In late November or early December of 2021, a letter will be sent to the families of seniors informing them of the district’s participation in the Seal of Biliteracy. This letter will need to be sent in a language that the families can understand (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). To that end, the Information Technology department has pulled a report on the current senior class whose families require written translation. Portuguese, Spanish, Vietnamese, and Arabic were identified. Translated versions of the district’s notice of participation have been secured and will be sent to families in both principal and teacher communications. Embedded in those letters is a registration form for those students who wish to participate by assessing their home language. Once this data is collected, those languages for which an alternative test must be given will be identified. Further consultation with DESE and other districts implementing the Seal will be necessary.

The SHS leadership team is currently in the planning phase for administering the exam in a fair and equitable manner. Students participating in the Seal of Biliteracy program as World Language students and those participating in the program based on their home language should have equal access to testing. As such, a variety of factors need to be considered before administering the exams, including time on learning, space and scheduling constraints, staffing, special needs and accommodations, and transportation. Although the number of students participating in the Seal of Biliteracy program will not be as large as the group of students taking the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) the logistical planning and training of proctors are key considerations for both exams. Nevertheless, the benefits to our students of having an opportunity to achieve this special designation far outnumber the logistical challenges. We are excited to see what the exams yield, and to update the community on the results.

Wellness: Strategies for health this winter and beyond

AMY CLOUTER
Assistant Superintendent
for Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

ERICA PRATT
Director of Physical
Education, Health & Family
Consumer Science

December is a time for reflection. While we are all thankful that our students were able to return to school for a full five days of learning, both at home and at school we are still challenged by things that hinder our ability to get “back to normal”. As we contemplate the start of the new year, it’s hard to accept that it will take time to recover from the disruptions caused by the pandemic. How can we manage the feelings of frustration, disappointment, and/or anxiety that we experience? Fortunately, there are a number of strategies that foster and sustain wellness. This article was designed to help you reflect and recharge as we head into the winter season.

First of all, let’s revisit the basics. As human beings there are several biological needs we must meet in order to thrive. Surprisingly, when we get busy or feel overwhelmed, we tend to overlook these basics. For example, we all know that good nutrition is important- and yet many of us indulge in some form of stress eating. Have you been treating your body as a vehicle to carry your brain around? Then this first section is for you.

Sleep & Exercise- how much are you getting?
Did you know that the Centers for Disease Control offers resources for healthy living? Included on their website are several fact sheets that outline their research-backed recom-

mendations for nutrition, physical activity and sleep.

Sufficient sleep and exercise are essential to good health. Are you getting both? The way to wellness starts with taking a realistic look at how your daily habits compare to the recommendations outlined in the table below:

Basics	Sleep	Exercise
Ages 6-12	9-12 hours	60 minutes
Ages 13-18	8-10 hours	60 minutes
Adults	7 hours or more	30 minutes/day

Even people who take good care of their bodies can struggle with stress. How can we foster good physical *and* mental health? Chances are if you asked this question of five people, you’d get at least four different answers! This is because our sources of stress vary. For this reason your approach should be tailored to your personal needs. The best wellness strategy starts with personal reflection. What’s causing you stress, and what brings you joy? Attending to both of these questions is key; you’ll be more successful if you can align your wellness strategy with your personal preferences.

Dr. Jane Lizotte, Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships and Well-Being, in collaboration with Noelle

Freeman, Director of Nursing for Shrewsbury Public Schools, and in consultation with the district’s School Wellness Advisory Committee, created a Well-Being Guide for students, families, and staff. It’s available on the district website, and includes extensive resources for mental health and wellness.

Check it out here: <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/district/well-being-guide>

It may be that you can identify a trigger for your stress, but don’t yet know what works - and that’s okay. Think of yourself as a researcher, and try different strategies one at a time. Pursue the ones that work best for you.

The Knowing/Doing Gap
If you are rolling your eyes while reading, it’s likely because you know well what you should be doing- the problem is that you are not doing it. Why is that? Likely it comes down to a lack of time or support.

- Mark your calendar! No matter what you choose, protecting time in your daily schedule for your go-to strategy will help ensure you follow through.
- Find a Friend. Connecting with someone else will help you stick to your plan. For example, educators in Shrewsbury that participate in peer support groups or even walking clubs find that they are more likely to show up for a partner than for themselves.

Remember that connecting with others is a benefit in itself. Sometimes when we are stressed, perspective is what’s called for. Consider focusing

CONTINUED, see page 7

SPS alumni invited to “come back”

MICHELLE BISCOTTI & KATHLEEN KEOHANE
Coordinators of
Development and Volunteer Activities

DR. JANE LIZOTTE
Assistant Superintendent
for Community Partnerships & Well-Being

Are you a Shrewsbury Public Schools (SPS) alum? If so, we would love to hear from you! Whether you attended SPS schools from kindergarten through high school, or just a few years along the way, we would love to know more about you.

Over the past few years, we have been gathering alumni information and interests to share with our teachers and students. Over the past 18 months, many alumni have “come back” to SPS to share their interests, careers and general life experiences with our students. It’s been an invaluable experience for all.

During the first weeks of the pandemic, in March 2020, we engaged over 30 alumni to host virtual group chats with high school students who were mutually interested in a particular subject. For example, we joined alumni with career experience in computer science with students who

had an interest in it. During a time when schools were shut down and interaction with other students was minimal, these virtual chats were a welcome bright spot for many students, as well as for our alumni.

Last fall we invited alumni to return to our elementary classrooms to lead a 30-minute discussion on a subject they knew well. For example, a recent alum spoke to a fourth grade class about environmental science and another spoke to a kindergarten class about cultural holidays. Other

CONTINUED, see page 7

The SPS Colonial Fund supports programs that have an impact

MICHELLE BISCOTTI & KATHLEEN KEOHANE
Coordinators of Development and Volunteer Activities

DR. JANE LIZOTTE
Assistant Superintendent for Community Partnerships & Well-Being

Over the past year, the Shrewsbury Public Schools Colonial Fund has raised the most money ever for our schools and we are excited to start spending it! At the beginning of the school year, we asked teachers to identify projects that would have the biggest impact on our students this year and into the future.

- When a project is brought forth for funding, it is evaluated for these key factors:
- Does it support one or more of our district’s Strategic Priorities?
 - Could it be expanded to all students of a certain age/grade?
 - Does it impact the entire district?
 - Is it financially sustainable past the current year?
 - Is there sufficient personnel to sustain it in the future?
 - Is it approved by school or district administrators?

We strive to fund projects that are multiple thousands of dollars, ranging from a few thousand, to tens of thousands. We do not consider these awards to be “grants” but rather allocations for projects that could not otherwise be funded through the general operating budget.

- Some of our biggest projects in the past have been:
- Upgrading the high school TV Production studio to HD (High Definition) to increase the reliability of their broadcast transmissions and allow the adoption of current broadcast/cablecast technology standards
 - Transforming the Oak Middle School’s Technical

- Education classroom into a new Design Lab and a makerspace for 7th and 8th grade classes
- Providing inspirational speakers and presentations on relevant topics, for thoughtful discussions with our parents/guardians
 - Funding part of the Whole-school Mindfulness Director position for the past two school years

Due to the overwhelming need for continued mental health support for our students and the challenges facing our educators, the Colonial Fund will once again support the Wholeschool Mindfulness Director position. Jordan Grinstein, the Wholeschool Mindfulness Director, has already introduced himself to classrooms across the district, teaching ways to integrate mindfulness (inclusive of yoga, meditation, breathwork, visualization, positive psychology, etc) into everyday life. He is looking forward to working alongside students, staff, and families, as we endeavor to meet our district’s strategic priority “*Enhanced well-being of all.*” More information about Jordan and his work can be found on our website, <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/future/spotlight-on>.

The Colonial Fund will also be funding a brand new “coffee cart” for SHS students ages 18-22 in our Special Education Program. Students will use the cart as a retail learning opportunity, selling and delivering hot coffee and snacks to teachers and staff at Shrewsbury High School. Students will gain important experience in customer service, taking and delivering orders, simple math, inventory, planning, preparation, and cleanup. We expect the experience to prepare students for similar real-world jobs outside of Shrewsbury High School.

The coffee cart will be a rolling cart, similar to a drink cart on an airplane, with multiple drawers to hold supplies and

snacks. After the program is piloted at the high school it may be expanded to the middle school, thus providing for our district priority “*Learning environments where everyone’s success matters*” across multiple grades.

The Colonial Fund will also invest in updating the ropes course at Shrewsbury High School. This course is an important part of the Adventure I and II physical education classes that all high school students experience before they graduate. In 2011, the district was awarded a very generous Physical Education Program (PEP) grant that was used to design and build the ropes course. After 10 years of consistent use, the ropes, helmets, safety equipment, and rescue equipment need to be replaced. Additionally, SHS staff need to be retrained and recertified to operate the course. Once this all happens, the facility can be rented out to local colleges or businesses for education, training and team building exercises. The revenue from these rentals will go towards future maintenance, making the ropes course self-sustainable. Updating this popular facility supports our district priority “*Space and resources to support effective learning.*”

The three projects described here are just the beginning! We are currently evaluating other project proposals and are confident that we will be able to announce at least two more new projects within the next few months.

Every year, different needs arise within our schools and there are challenges in providing for all of these needs. If you would like to see more projects like these implemented in the future, please consider making a contribution to the Shrewsbury Public Schools Colonial Fund by visiting <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/future>. We thank you for your support!

something new. Chances are, what starts small will grow over time into a more strategic practice. No matter our age or role, we will continue to experience outside pressures like relationships, caregiving commitments, workload and the impact of social media. At the same time, it’s important to focus first on adjusting the things that fall within our control. As we head into the season of giving, give yourself permission to prioritize self-care.

Welcome new staff

CONTINUED from page 2

New Paraprofessional Staff

ABA Technicians
Jody Davini, Eleni Athanasiou, Sunitha Kondabathini, Kevin Maldonado, Jeannette Vasquez, Krishnaveni Balasubramanian, Jasmin Correa, Kayla George, Julia Hoffman, Jacqueline Borella, Tiffany Catino, Adina Vgili, Viola Nabuwambo, Christian Nieves, Caroline Reid, Eldira Simarano, Gabriella Sodano, Lindsey Chamber, Anthony Delgado, Amanda Molina

Child Specific Aides
Brianna Dodd, Timothy Jansson, Allison O’Neill, Rita Reidy, Jennifer Christainsen, Vineetha Krishnan Kurumanghat, Sarah Kowaleski, Manila Noori, Kathleen Proulx, Julie Santiago, Christine Morris, Fabiola Rodriguez-Silva

Special Education/Instructional Aides
Afsheen Rao, Laura Berg, Mahalakshmi Durai, Juliana Howry, Angela Morgan, Lucinda Orne, Fatema Shariff, Mallory Caruso, Shaivi Divatia, Anne Miller, Laxmi Mopidevi, Cori O’Rourke, Vidyalakshmi Rajamani, Heidi Schoenfeldt, Oaj Shahid, Mikayla Sheehan, Candice McRae

Media Aides
Leah Eagle, Susan Shaughnessy, Anne Turner, Stephanie Fox

New Administrative Assistants

Elizabeth Lombardi, Major Howard W. Beal Elementary School
Nicole Nye, Parker Road Preschool
Elizabeth Todisco, Central Office
Nicole Turnblom, Calvin Coolidge School
Jennifer Williams, Shrewsbury High School

SPS alumni

CONTINUED from page 6

topics included: being a veterinarian/fireman/policeman; journalism; solar energy; space; and musical theater. The topics were varied and the alumni were engaging, making the experience very rewarding for both adults and students.

We are exploring more opportunities like these for our alumni. While we realize not everyone will want to be in front of a class of young students, we hope to be able to engage all of you in some way across all of our schools. Even if you can’t volunteer now, or if you live a good distance away, we can find a way to tap into your knowledge or have you connect with us remotely. Let’s work together to find a way to keep you involved!

To make a connection, please complete this short survey to tell us a little bit about yourself: <http://bit.ly/387nZom>, or visit our website to see what we have been up to: <https://schools.shrewsburyma.gov/alumni>.


THANK YOU for joining the hundreds of other SPS alumni who are already making a significant difference in the lives of our current students.

Wellness

CONTINUED from page 6


less on your own needs by looking to aid others. Here’s a link you can use to access a volunteer project to engage your family in: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W8SfbOMCOYw&list=PLi4c64DmU-DUE3zcJleEXdWO46AMd0a2J> Working on projects together is a wonderful way to form lasting connections.


We really can’t do it all - and we shouldn’t try
In New England we are known for having a strong work ethic. It’s unlikely that as individuals we will change the culture- or even that we will want that. Rather than feeling pressured to excel at wellness, focus on making one small change in your habits.
Based on your personal reflection, identify one time in the day when you need a break. Think of this as an opportunity to try



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