

Cape Schools Open Minds and Open Doors

Community • Academics • Passion • Ethics

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Happy New Year! Here we are in January 2021 and I am so proud of the students, families, teachers, staff and administrators for helping us arrive at this point with so much success. It is certainly not perfect, but I believe we are doing an excellent job of keeping people safe while maintaining as much learning as possible. Back in August, I was fearful we would be forced to shift to full time remote learning throughout the fall, but we maintained our hybrid schedule, largely uninterrupted. Thank you to everyone for your part in this important communal effort.

The start of a new year does not mean our new way of educating our students is going away. Our administrative team and the superintendents of Cumberland County each meet once a week to reevaluate and make any possible tweaks to enhance the current educational system. Any feedback received is considered as the district continues to operate under the guidelines of the Maine CDC and DOE. The weekly meetings among Cumberland County Superintendents assures that we are not in a silo, but a supportive and collaborative environment.

Our calendar for the upcoming year, usually decided on by now, was delayed due to the pandemic by all neighboring districts as well as Cape Elizabeth. One of the biggest challenges in forming a school calendar is for districts participating in PATHS (Portland Arts and Technology High School) to agree on dates with no more than 5 dissimilar days. PATHS has been a wonderful opportunity for our students and has provided coursework that we cannot support here in Cape Elizabeth due to staffing and physical space. Students participating are bused into PATHS for these particular classes, spending half the day at PATHS and half the day here at CEHS. Our district participation has grown over the past several years, supporting the following Strategic Plan Goal: *Multiple Pathways and Definitions of Success: Our schools will value, promote, and celebrate multiple pathways and definitions of success.*

Our hope on the Calendar Committee is to have the proposed calendar completed and ready for School Board vote no later than the April Regular Business Meeting.

It is very exciting that after several years of work, the Building Committee brought a proposal to the School Board during the December 2020 Regular Business Meeting that was unanimously supported. The proposal was: *Having carefully reviewed the Facility Needs Assessment; Having thoughtfully considered recommendations of industry experts; Having discussed and debated goals, pros, and cons of the options presented; The Building Committee recommends that the Pond Cove / Middle School structure be replaced, and that ample funds be allocated for the renovation of the High School in order to allow it to function appropriately as it nears the end of its useful life. In particular, the committee recommends concurrent new construction of our lower school / middle school with a single bond and expedited time frame.*

Next steps are to hire an architectural/ engineer firm that will create a schematic design. This design will include much more detail about the project and provide a more accurate cost for the project. Once the cost of a schematic design is approved in the June 2021 budget, the detailed work can lead us to a bond vote in June 2022.

Since October, administrators have been preparing for the budget process that begins this month. Last year's process was very smooth and will continue with a similar model. Our first workshop on January 26, 2021, will be the extended workshop in which all administrators will present their department's budgets that include their needs and hopes for the school year 2021/2022. If you are interested in the budget process, materials can be found on the school website and you are always welcome to join the budget meetings, which are open to the public.

Finally, it is with regret that I share the retirement of Superintendent Wolfrom as of June 31, 2021. Superintendent Wolfrom came to us from Maranacook School District on July 1, 2018. She has gained tremendous trust and respect from those who work in the district and has shifted the culture and climate to one of more collaboration. She has worked tirelessly, "putting 5 years' worth of work into 3," according to one of her colleagues and kept Cape Elizabeth steady during the pandemic. Upon her arrival, she set up a weekend long workshop, the Future Search, with combination of around 100 students, teachers, administrators, board members, parents and community members participating. This work was to gauge the hopes and desires of the town for our school district as we move forward into the future. The information gained was synthesized into 5 Strategic Plan Goals. These goals have guided Superintendent Wolfrom in her work and will continue to guide the work we do as we welcome the next superintendent to Cape Elizabeth. After 40 years in education, we wish Donna the best as she enjoys more family time with her beloved children and grandchildren.

Heather Altenburg
Cape Elizabeth School Board Chair