

Cape Schools Open Minds and Open Doors

Community • Academics • Passion • Ethics

Marcia Weeks
Business Manager
mweeks@capeelizabethschools.org

Catherine A. Stankard
Director of Teaching & Learning
cstankard@capeelizabethschools.org

CAPE ELIZABETH SCHOOLS

320 Ocean House Road
P.O. Box 6267
Cape Elizabeth, Maine 04107
Phone: (207) 799-2217 Fax: (207) 799-2914

Del Peavey
Director of Special Services
dpeavey@capeelizabethschools.org

Donna Wolfrom
Superintendent of Schools
dwolfrom@capeelizabethschools.org

I have been reading and responding to many emails this week about various concerns as well as support for how things are going so far. Though some families are able to manage the schedules and changes that have been in place for quite some time now, I can fully understand the difficult times we are in and how each family has its own unique challenges. Both sets of emails are a reminder of the importance of communication and how there is always room to improve. We are working to create an FAQ and a document of bullet points with important information that will both be located on the school website. As well, at the request of a parent, we will be bringing a regular Covid update to our Regular Business meetings.

For those who are wanting more information right now, the nurses presented an excellent update and spoke to the closure of the Pond Cove and the Middle School at our meeting this past Tuesday night. You can find the link [here](#). I have also been receiving concerns about students falling behind in what they are learning and fear that they may not be prepared for next year. The Director of Teaching and Learning, the middle school principal and the Pond Cove principal spoke to us of the impact of the pandemic on Cape Elizabeth students K-8. It offers a lot of reassurance, based on data, that we are continuing to serve our students academically quite well. This link can be found [here](#).

We are very fortunate that Cape Elizabeth School Department was awarded \$600,000 from the State of Maine's Coronavirus Relief Fund for a ventilation project. This project has to be completed and invoiced by March 31, 2021 in order to receive the grant. Though the district has scheduled the majority of the installation during the vacation and on Wednesdays, we are having to close school for a day to coordinate with the contractor's schedule and meet the March 31st deadline.

On February 3rd, the Cape Elizabeth teachers and staff participated in a professional development with the *Racial Equity Institute*. It was a 3-hour presentation and I was fortunate to attend. The *Racial Equity Institute* is an organization based out of North Carolina and the presentation was led by co-founder Deena Hayes-Greene. We spent the time listening and hearing how deeply racism is a systemic problem. It is seen in the health care system, the economic system, the criminal justice system, and educational system to name a few. Deena explained, through the *Groundwater Approach* metaphor that was the structure of the presentation, that we can't improve what we can't see. We were shown a picture of one dead fish in a lake and asked our reaction. Most responded with, "What happened to the fish?" Then we were shown a picture of hundreds of fish dead in a lake and asked for our reaction. Most participants wanted to know what was wrong with the lake. The *Groundwater Approach* is looking at the lake instead of the fish; it is a questioning of the environment and how it may be the cause of harm for its inhabitants.

This was a powerful metaphor for systemic racism. Deena and her colleagues were not trying to convince us of anything. They were working to point out facts as they proceeded to present studies and data for the next few hours about disparities between white people and black people. The graphs and research were alarming, to say the least. The approach of the *Racial Equity Institute* is to get close to the problem and question what we find. The data showed that we can help individual black students, and we absolutely should, but until we go deeper, into the groundwater, into the systems and start to question and make changes, the cycle will continue. We heard that in the criminal justice system, a black man who is wealthy and educated with good legal representation is more likely to go to prison than a poor, uneducated white man. We are all aware that more black people are dying from Covid-19 than white people.

Jo Perad, a Boston-based high school science teacher and a student at the Harvard Graduate School of education writes, "Systemic racism is so embedded in our societal interactions that racism has become normalized and rendered nearly invisible. So invisible that people deny its existence and instead cast blame on the individual. This is

by design.” He continues by saying, “We have to remember that although systemic racism appears invisible, its effects are clear to see. When we look at the results across racial lines, we start to see a pattern. We start to question the validity of exclusively blaming the person, and we look deeper into what the system is doing to certain populations of people. Through the acknowledgment of its existence and taking action (with the oppressed communities), we can be the force that dismantles and breaks through these racist systems.”

The facts are undeniable. Racism is a 401-year-old problem in our country. The time has come to look deeper, to get proximate to the situation where we can see beyond the surface, beyond the individual. It is time for white Americans to recognize their advantage simply because of their skin color. Can we as whites let go of our defenses? As was mentioned by Deena, these ideas were put into our brains without our consent. They were taught to us through skewed history lessons. It is not necessary our fault that racism is so strong in our country, so prominent and so systemic. It WILL be our fault if we let it continue. It is our calling, our responsibility to look closely, to be courageous and honest and to see the undeniable data that is extensive for the truth that it conveys.

I am proud to be in a district that is examining the truth of racism. I am proud to be a part of a community that values life, all life regardless of skin color. I am proud of our administrators, teachers, staff, students, and parents who are willing to be uncomfortable and be curious about this very complex issue that touches us all, whether we are aware of it or not. Deep gratitude to Cathy Stankard, the Director of Teaching and Learning, for making this happen as well as the 200 administrators, teachers, and staff who participated.

Finance Update

The FY22 budget review process is now underway, beginning first with a joint workshop between the Town Council and School Board on January 20th and the first budget workshop held on January 26 where the school board heard presentations from building principals and department directors. The process opened with good news as the state released its preliminary education subsidy figures, with Cape Elizabeth projected to receive \$6,000 more than it did last year. This will be the third year of slightly increased subsidy, following three years of significant cuts. The Board will next hold an intensive Question & Answer period with administrators to review the budget proposals on February 23.

Policy Update

The Board is set to adopt a new policy regarding use of cell phones and other electronic devices. Policy JICJ reinforces the ability of teachers and principals to create appropriate guidelines for students, as well as addresses photo and video privacy issues. The committee is updating policy IMB, which addresses teaching about controversial issues. We are also working on regulations that accompany budget policy DB, which will officially establish our current budget review process as the one the Board should always follow. All policies are posted on the school department website in the School Board section.

Upcoming Meetings

February 22, 2021 at 3:00 - Policy Committee
February 23, 2021 at 6:30 - School Board Workshop - Budget Q/A
March 2, 2021 at 6:30 - School Board Workshop - Budget Q/A
March 9, 2021 at 6:30 - School Board Regular Business meeting
March 23, 2021 at 6:30 - School Board Workshop - Budget Q/A

I wish everyone a safe and wonderful vacation,

Heather Altenburg
School Board Chair