

Highlight of the Month: Different dates are set throughout the year to show appreciation for various members of the staff. The first week of May is set aside to recognize our staff for all that they accomplish. It goes without saying that we have a wonderful staff and that they hopefully know we appreciate the work they do every day of the year. Buried in the first week of May is National Nurses Day. This day is celebrated annually on May 6 to raise awareness of the important role nurses play in society. It marks the beginning of National Nurses Week which ends on May 12, the birthday of Florence Nightingale. Our nurse, Catherine Roto, has been our “lady of the lamp” as we work our way through the challenges presented to school communities as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although the Eastford staff, working together as a team, allowed us to successfully provide in-person learning to our students for the 2020-21 school year, Nurse Roto’s diligent commitment to the guidelines and protocols for provision of a safe and healthy school environment was critical to our success.

News and Notes:

Educational Leadership

- This has been an unusual school year, but thanks to the efforts of all staff, we have been able to provide the best possible learning opportunities for our students. Nurse Roto and I continue to attend the weekly DPH/SDE Tuesday morning meetings. Conversations are now focused on vaccine administration, guidelines for end of year activities and the opening of the 2021-22 school year.
- We continue to make movement on our vision of the Portrait of the Eastford Learner and the direction of a long term strategic plan. Carole will present an update to the Curriculum Committee on May 13. Work on a well-articulated procedural manual for special education is also continuing.
- On April 28, Governor Lamont signed the bill eliminating religious exemptions for mandatory school vaccinations as of the date of the signing. This bill includes a grandfather clause for exemptions in place for enrolled students prior to that date. We have not yet received all the guidelines related to this bill.
- The CSDE released communication regarding “Interim Guidance for Remote Learning 2021-2022 School Year”. A copy is included in your packet. The shaded block in the middle of page one basically states that, for the current year, the CSDE required districts to provide a temporary option to opt into remote learning. At this time, for the 2021-2022 school year, the CSDE and DPH do not anticipate mandating that local districts provide that option. The document includes a statement that guidance may change based upon the impact of COVID-19 or action taken by the legislature. The document also includes a strong statement on the importance of In-Person Education. There is no required BOE action at this time. I am certain additional guidelines will be forthcoming from the CSDE.

Facilities

We continue to engage in conversations with EMCOR concerning small adjustments to our HVAC system. Mark Sheldon organized a team of volunteers; Jim Trowbridge, Hans Wanner and Paul Torcellini, to decommission and remove the old steam boiler from the basement of EES, saving the Town up to \$10,000, which was the amount it would have cost to pay to have it removed. Thanks to Ray Bergeron, owner of Eastford Building Supply, and forklift operator Derek Montigny, the boiler parts were safely removed from the grounds of the school and brought to the transfer station by Mark Sheldon. The \$500 received for the value of the scrap metal was donated to the Student Activities Account of Eastford Elementary School. Thank you Mark, Jim, Hans, Paul, Derek, Ray and Eastford Building Supply. Your spirit of volunteerism is a wonderful example of community members coming together and “taking action” to get the job done!

Collaboration and Communication

We continue to seek out ways to communicate with other districts, the SDE and our local partners. The Junior Achievement middle school programming, which Melissa Lessard will share at the meeting, was the result of a discussion with one of our partner school districts.

After a COVID hiatus, we have reconnected with Pastor Moran (CCE) and Pastor Howard (EBC) to begin moving forward, once again, with collaborative programs in the summer and school year. We applied for an afterschool grant in partnership with the Congregational Church of Eastford. We are hoping to apply for a summer school enrichment grant in partnership with Mystic Aquarium.

Finance

We continue to monitor our budget and advise the board as to needed transfers. We are also carefully monitoring any changes in costs associated with the 2021-22 BOE budget. We continue to apply for competitive and non-competitive grant opportunities. We submitted our IDEA grant and Mary Jo applied for and received a special \$20,000 grant to assist with Extended School Year programming. We did not receive the appropriation grant that was offered through Joe Courtney's office. There were many community project applications submitted and only 10 were moved forward. I continue to remain in communication with Julia McGrath from the office of Joe Courtney regarding any possible funding sources.

Comments on the BOE Agenda Items:

XII. Unfinished Business

A. Proposal to use school electricity for Electric Car Charging Station

This is a follow up to the discussion that took place at the April meeting.

B. Budget 2021-2022, Discussion and possible action

We are recommending that the BOE use \$12,500 of the \$20,000 special education ESY award to reduce proposed spending in the areas of special education transportation and summer camp/tuition. The remainder will be used for costs that were not known at the time of the budget development.

We also received the final costs for our State Partnership plan. We are therefore recommending that the BOE reduce the amount budgeted for benefits by \$7,976. Depending on the BOE decision regarding our recommended reductions, the 2021-22 BOE approved budget could be \$4,215,508, an increase of 4.99% from the 2020-21 budget.

XIII. New Business

A. Set last day of school and graduation

After making up for days missed for inclement weather and/or COVID, the last day of school will be June 17. This will be a half day for students. The 2020-21 school year consisted of 180 student days, due to the need to allocate two additional days for COVID-related professional development and preparation. As our approved calendar notes, we are returning to a 182 student day school year in 2021-22. We are asking that the BOE set the date of June 15 as the grade 8 graduation date (rain date June 16.)

B. Approval of Scholarship Recipients 2021

The scholarship committee will be reviewing all Community Partnership Scholarships prior to May 14. This vote indicates BOE support of the Committee's selections.

C. Regional District 19 contract renewal

Our contract with E.O. Smith ends with the 2021-22 school year. I will be meeting with the Superintendent of E.O. Smith to discuss the terms of contract continuation. I will bring a recommendation to the BOE in June.

D. Annual Health Food Certification

Every year the BOE must vote “yes” or “no” that all food items offered for sale to students in the schools under its jurisdiction, and not exempted from the Connecticut Nutrition Standards published by the Connecticut State Department of Education, will comply with the Connecticut Nutrition Standards during the period of July 1, 2021 through June 30, 2022. If they vote “yes”, they can also vote to allow the sale of exempted food and beverages under certain circumstances outside of the school day.

E. Security Grant submission, Discussion and possible action

We have received word that Round 5 of the State Security Grant Process (R5 SSGP) is open for applications. The reimbursement rate for this competitive, matching grant is 48%. We know there are some items that are needed, including replacing many of our two-way radios, replacing and/or adding security cameras, and replacing the remaining outer access wooden doors with metal doors. The grant could also cover items such as changing to a keyless entry system. Carole is scheduling a meeting of the School Safety Committee and I arranged the required Security walkthrough with the State Police. Master Sergeant William Blanchette, the newly appointed officer in Troop D, will be doing the walk through. We have arranged to obtain estimates for additions to the security system and the replacement of any needed locks and doors. The deadline for grant submission is June 15 and the Security audit must be submitted by June 30. Given this is a matching grant, the BOE must budget for the matching funds. Approved purchases can be budgeted for in the 2022-23 school year or can be included in the Town Capital Plan for 2022-23. The BOE also can release the funds back to the State if they are unable to secure the matching funds. BOE guidance regarding this application is requested. The BOE can approve that the superintendent submit this grant application, or choose to approve the final grant application at the June 10 BOE meeting.

XV. Financial Reports

C. Budget Transfers

We are recommending a series of transfers that will address the negative balances for legal expenditures and for high school SE services. Given that we are currently in the process of negotiations, an additional legal transfer may be required prior to the close of the budget year.