



# HOLMDEL TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

## **SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION FEBRUARY 27, 2019**

Good evening, everyone. It is truly amazing how time marches on. This week I celebrated my 5th anniversary with the Holmdel Schools. While the work is often exhausting, all it takes is a few moments in a classroom or in any location in which children and young people are learning and growing to feel energized! As I have said before, this is a truly special school district blessed with many gifts - among these are amazing children, a talented staff, and committed parents - a perfect recipe for excellence! As I reflect on my tenure here, I have to say I am as excited about what is ahead for us as we continue to innovate to elevate as I was on February 24, 2014, my first day on the job.

As referenced in my recent Sunday Superintendent's Message, Social and Emotional Learning have been front and center for students in our schools over the last month. As we examine and evaluate issues related to the social, emotional and psychological health of all students as is the intent of one of our district goals this year, it's worth drawing attention to the Harassment, Intimidation and Bullying Report I will deliver to the board in a few moments and the small number of cases investigated this month - perhaps suggesting that more frequent programming of the kind we have had this month can make a difference in the kinds of behaviors that lead to such investigations. My leadership team will continue to look at this.

With that said, Random Acts of Kindness (RAK) Week was a huge hit at Village School thanks to the efforts of "Character Edna" and "Bucket Filling Brenda" who involved students in a Random Acts of Kindness Challenge by inviting them to pull a predetermined act of kindness from an envelope and then to perform it at some point during the day.

The school also participated in a "You've been RAK'd" activity, partnering with students at Satz. The Villagers had the opportunity to decorate a blank card with a positive affirmation on it. These cards were then sent over to the Satz counselors who placed them in the lockers of the recipients. The students at Satz enjoyed being RAK'd by students at Village so much that they returned the favor and sent messages of their own back to Village which were shared with students there.

Not to be outdone by their younger counterparts in terms of Random Acts of Kindness, the Holmdel HS Youth Alliance held a RAK Luncheon for staff to show their appreciation for all

that the staff does and offers them. The Alliance has also asked students to share acts of kindness they have witnessed which are being displayed on the Youth Alliance bulletin board.

Indian Hill just completed a two week “Look for the Good” campaign which was designed to emphasize gratitude and kindness. As we know, gratitude and mindfulness are closely related, and as such, Indian Hill’s work furthered our efforts to implement mindfulness practices,

During the campaign, students on all grade levels participated each day by posting things that they were grateful for on the school’s “Gratitude Wall.” Inspiring morning announcements were read each day of the campaign and students also had the opportunity to stand on "Gratitude Spots" throughout the school, sharing something for which they were thankful whenever they stood on one of the spots.

To help Indian Hill students transform their gratitude into kindness, teachers and students handed out "kindness cards" whenever they saw the good in someone. Since these cards have "You Matter" on them, the students were encouraged to explain why someone matters when they pass on the card. As if that weren’t enough, the students also wrote "You Matter” letters. The purpose of the letters was for students to practice sharing their gratitude with someone who matters to them. As such, I want to express my gratitude to the entire Indian Hill staff for their work on this initiative. Truly they matter!

Indian Hill will continue to explore social and emotional learning and the theme of perseverance when the school hosts a visit from former Rutgers University defensive tackle turned inspirational speaker Eric LeGrand next week. I have heard Eric speak and his story of battling back from a fractured C3 and C4 cervical vertebrae and from the resulting paralysis from the neck down is truly inspiring. LeGrand is a great example of what it means to have a growth mindset and I am sure our students will enjoy hearing from him.

Faculty and staff from across the district are also getting in on the Gratitude action with sentiments of gratitude being shared via google that will eventually end up on a virtual Gratitude Wall.

Finally under this district goal of social, emotional and psychological health, all students in grades 7-12 shared in exploring the topics of “overcoming adversity” and “coping skills” through our Peer Leadership program. The student-led discussions focused on an activity called, “Famous Failures” exploring the stories of exceedingly successful people who at first failed such as Michael Jordan, Albert Einstein and J.K. Rowling. One of the things we are trying to impart

on students throughout the district is the power of adding the word “yet” whenever they say they can’t do something. This recent Peer Leadership discussion highlighted what can happen when you do just that!

Shifting to the district goal focused on increasing the practice of collecting and using accurate data to inform decisions in all aspects of the school district from the classroom to the boardroom, our staff members in grades 1-8 as well as teachers of Algebra I have been busy analyzing Winter MAP data.

At the district level we have been looking at the data in a variety of ways, including the percentage of students who have met growth projections, predictions of state assessment performance and a comparison of the 2018 and 2019 mean RIT scores from the Winter administration.

It appears as though the Benchmark series is having a positive impact as the grade levels that have had this program in place for two years have seen more mean growth since last year than those that are using Benchmark for the first time. We would expect this to continue as Benchmark expands into grades 4 and 5 this year and as teachers in grades K-5 become more adept with using it and as students reap the benefit of this standards-based program.

In Mathematics, the predictions for state assessment performance increased over 2018 predictions in every grade, with substantial increases in grade 4 (10%) and grade 5 (7.9%) - grades in which we were very intentional about rostering classes with a cluster grouping approach, set a class size limit and increased the time allotted for math instruction and interventions in a new rotating 4th and 5th grade schedule. It’s great to see data that affirms the decisions that we are making for all students.

We continue to review quarterly data on grades with the second quarter results remaining consistent with those reported after marking period 2. For example of all grades earned, 52% of them at the high school were A’s with 64% and 81% of those earned at Satz and Indian Hill respectively also A’s or A-plusses. The percentage of all grades earned that fell below a B ranges from just 3% at Indian Hill to 15% at Holmdel High School. These are remarkable outcomes and proof of Holmdel Excellence!

We are also continuing to monitor attendance data with an eye towards recommending policy revisions and strategies to see improved outcomes here.

Finally on this goal, Mrs. Bellis shared with me that the High School English department has been examining student achievement trends and behavioral shifts in engagement, particularly among our upperclassmen which has led to meaningful discussions about ways to revise our English 3 and English 4 courses. Our work includes researching comparable districts to disclose alternatives, identifying what matters most for our students, and brainstorming options based on those parameters. This is exciting work designed to elevate our students' experiences in English courses.

And now for a few "thank you's" and congratulations:

Special thanks to Kindergarten teacher, Deidre Varga for working with the NJEA and having the Cat in the Hat visit the Village School Kindergarten students this past week! This was a nice way to get everyone excited for Read Across America which is next week!

Congratulations to Music and Voyager teacher Meredith Thomas. Mrs. Thomas was invited to be a featured clinician at the National Association for Music Education Eastern Conference, where she will present a seminar on teaching music to creatively gifted children.

Congratulations to our February Hornets of the Month including fourth graders Shoshanna Pedrick and Drew Klinefelter, fifth graders Madison Fletcher and Finnegan Buchanan and sixth graders Megan Flannery and Ire Adesina

Congratulations to the 5th and 6th Grade Continental Math League Teams. They are both currently state leaders. The 6th Grade is also tied for 6th place in the United States. Special congratulations to Ishani Singh, who is the state leader!

Congratulations to the Satz Students of the Month: Nidhi Nair, Andrew Harrison, Avery Tatro, Ryan Ni and Jack Conte

Congratulations and good luck to both the Satz Math League and Satz Science Olympiad teams who will be participating in upcoming state finals later this month.

Congratulations to all of our Winter Sports athletes! Both the Boys and Girls High School Basketball teams are playing in the quarterfinals of the Central Jersey Group III championships tonight! We are wishing them good luck. Congratulations to our Wrestling team for finishing the season at 20-11 and qualifying for the state playoffs. Congratulations to our Ice Hockey team on an outstanding season and for making it to the state semi-finals in their group and

congratulations to our Winter Track athletes who continue to perform well. We look forward to hearing about individual accolades as all-shore and all-state teams and the like are announced. You can count on seeing Hornets among those listed.

Satz too has had a great winter sports season. The Wrestling team placed 4th overall at their season-ending league tournament, while the Boys Basketball team won 5 of their last 6 games to finish the season with a 10-8 record overall and a 1st round win at the “Run for the Roses” tournament. Last, and certainly not least, our Girls Basketball team remains undefeated at 17-0 and will next play in the quarterfinal round of the “Run for the Roses” tournament next Thursday, March 7th.

Finally, congrats to the Holmdel High School teacher and students of the month - Mr. Ambrose, Ethan Josephson and Natalie White

As always, I want to close with a few notes of gratitude.

Mr. Howard asked me to thank the Village School PSA for coordination of two fun-filled Bingo Nights for our students and families.

Mrs. Marino asked me to send out a huge thank you to the Indian Hill PLG for contributing to the Eric LeGrand assembly. She also asked me to give the PLG another huge shout out for providing students with art materials used to produce Valentine’s Day cards for the senior center and for providing this year’s Battle of the Faculties t-shirts. The staff is hoping these will bring us luck this year! The T-Shirt designs have truly become a competition within the competition.

Mr. Loughran asked me to give a shout out to the Satz PSG for hosting an outstanding night with the Harlem Wizards! While the teacher “all-star” team lost a heartbreaker at the buzzer, over \$12,000 was raised to support the students and staff of the Satz School!

Mr. Schillaci asked me to give thanks to the PTSO for continuing to support HS initiatives. A big thank you for their willingness this year to also provide shirts for staff competing in the Battle of the Faculties!

And lastly, thanks to everyone for supporting our students and staff in all they do. Thank you.