

Welcome back for our new school year. At our August Board meeting I described improvements being made to our campuses and buildings in some detail, and I'm happy to report that almost all of those items are complete. That includes new paving at Daniel Warren, new carpet and furniture at the DW library, a new enrichment space at Bellows, new interior turf in the fitness center, and a new bike path at the MS/HS. Nearing completion is the fencing project at DW and the front parking lot right here bordering Hornidge Rd.

We also have some exciting new things going on in our schools this September. A brand new fish tank now welcomes you as you enter Daniel Warren. The tank will continue to be a place for students to visit, and they will "dive" into new research and learn more about aquatic life. DW has already started a schoolwide QFT, or Question Formulation Technique, process to stimulate their thinking. With the addition of the new paving, DW will be seeing some new courtyard designs on the pavement. From conflict resolution, to cooperative play, physical fitness and classroom connections, the designs will be interactive fun.

At Bellows, we have new enrichment units being developed for all grades in our Library Media program. Matching our 5th grade experience, grades 3 and 4 will follow a semi-departmentalized model for both Science & Social Studies. Also, we are strengthening our social emotional learning approach through the pairing of Second Step with the RULER approach anchor tools in classrooms and Town Hall Meetings.

The Middle School has created a "Panther's Den" connections space for students to build relationships and focus on their social emotional wellness and has also trained additional staff in the RULER approach. Extracurricular activities are part of our social emotional wellness, so the MS has a new Comic Book club, an expanded Kindness club, and a student advisory committee is in the works. You may hear more about those in the MS newsletter, which will now be weekly instead of biweekly.

Rye Neck High School has some new courses, including Differential Equation, Introduction to Python, and Broadcasting. To broaden our inclusivity, the Counseling Department is piloting *Wordly* at their presentations, which allows attendees to listen to translated audio in realtime. Also, both the Varsity Girls and Boys Soccer teams are piloting Student-Athlete Mental Health workshops offered by the Rye Youth Council.

I also need to address some safety items to make sure we start the year with confidence in our learning and working environment. As you know, communications are critical before, during, and after emergencies. To make sure we are capable of reaching everyone with information when we need to, the District tested our emergency notification system yesterday evening. You should have received a phone call, an email and a text message of the alert. If you received an incomplete series, for example, a phone call but no email, please log in to your Parent Portal account to update your contact information.

One communication change called for by the NY State Department Of Education is that parents and guardians should be notified the week before a drill takes place. Drills fall into two types, evacuation and non-evacuation. The first category includes drills for fire, gas leak, rapid dismissal, or off-site reunification with parents. The second category includes holds-in-place for simple hallway management; shelter, for weather; lockouts, for external or distant threats; and lockdowns, for active threats. Bomb threats and “swats” have variables that could put them in either category: depending on the information we may or may decide to evacuate the buildings. For example, this week’s MS and HS weekly messages will be telling you that this campus will have a lockdown drill sometime next week. Part of that practice involves our Informacast system, which would allow me to initiate a lockdown right now from my

cell phone.

We continue upgrading our physical security. Bullet resistant window film has been installed in various locations around the district and more is scheduled for install this fall. The second phase of the interior electronic door lock installation, completed at DW and Bellows last year, will begin at the MS/HS this year.

On a more practical safety note, everyone who read my September monthly message knows that I promoted careful driving. This coming Monday, our Junior and Senior classes will be attending a "Hang up and Drive" presentation about the dangers of distracted driving. Driving decision making is easier if given ample time, but when we’re speeding we have fewer options when the unexpected happens. So I issue a challenge to everyone who hears or reads what I’m saying: our parking lot speed on this campus is 10 mph and Hornidge Rd. is 15 mph. Try that tonight on your way out or the next time you’re on campus. It’s very difficult. I have to remind myself every time I’m in my car and it takes concentration and effort, but it’s important. Seriously--try it.

