

School Calendar

- *Why is our school year 181 vs 180 days?*
 - The 181 days is contractual and was negotiated between the STEA and the Board of Education. Changes to this will have to be made during contract negotiations.
- *How do snow days work? Why can't we get them back if they are unused? Why can't we use the 181st day as a built in snow day?*
 - If a snow day is used, students/staff will attend school on the day(s) indicated on the make-up day list provided on the yearly school calendar. Snow days usually extend the school year or take away from spring break. Any other day is factored into the 181 days.

School Climate and Culture

- *Concern over number of staff reassignments/transfers. Why so many? What are we doing to reduce the number of transfers? Are we considering the impact these re-assignments/transfers are having on our students? Is it creating a culture that is not conducive to learning?*
 - The staffing plan is the result of a strategic process that allows us to align our staff with the needs of our students. There will always be reassignments so that we properly address the needs of our students, make adjustments based on student enrollment, and retain staff. Additionally, staff members are asked every year if they would like to change assignments. We honor those requests if they are in the best interest of students. In short, reassignments/transfers are done for the benefit of our students and at the request of staff members when appropriate.
- *Why are so many staff members leaving? What is being done to retain staff? Are we considering the impact the turnover is having on our students? Are exit interviews offered to staff members following a resignation? Who conducts these interviews and how is that information shared with the Board?*
 - The national teacher shortage is affecting every district across the country. Because the teachers are leaving to go to other districts or leaving the profession altogether, districts are becoming very competitive. For example, some districts are offering signing bonuses, referral bonuses, and higher salaries. Exit interviews are held to gather information from staff members to help the administration make improvements, as necessary, in order to retain and recruit staff members. The reasons outlined in a staff member's resignation letter are shared with the BOE.
- *The school climate does not feel as warm or inviting as it used to. How can we fix this? What can we do to make coming to work/school more fun and enjoyable?*
 - We have had several family and community events this year, and survey results have shown a high mark with regard to our schools being warm and inviting. We provide a variety of different activities and programs for students to make coming to school fun. Activities include Spirit Days, Bus of the Month celebration, Feel Good Fridays, Wellness Wednesdays, Student of the Month recognition, Green and Gold Days, and themed days. We want to make our school community as warm and inviting as possible. If your

child is unhappy at school, please share this information with your child's principal or guidance counselor so we can address it immediately.

- *How do we determine what staff is pulled to substitute? Are we rotating? Are we pulling too much from RTI or any other department?*
 - We have been experiencing a severe substitute shortage over the last two years that has forced our building principals and their administrative assistants to be creative with class coverage. As an administrative team, we are consistently looking for ways to resolve the substitute shortage issue in our district. We could use the help of our community to resolve this issue. If you are interested or know someone who is interested in working as a substitute teacher in our district, please click [HERE](#) for more information.
- *Why are the water fountains still closed, and when are we opening them?*
 - We moved away from the water fountains and moved to the water fill stations during the COVID-19 pandemic to keep our students and staff safe. The water fill stations have high-performance filters that make the drinking water “cleaner”. For this reason, we will continue to use the water fill stations.
- *Why can't teachers know who is observing them?*
 - The state requires all teachers to have at least one announced and one unannounced observation. If an observation is announced, the observer will contact the teacher so he/she will know who that person is. An unannounced observation remains unannounced. Additionally, although the observation schedule is created in the summer, it may change as the year progresses. To avoid any confusion, it is best practice to share information as necessary.
- *Has some power to make decisions been taken away from our building principals and/or other staff members? Has there been a change in what authority principals have to make decisions?*
 - No, decision-making power has not been taken away from the building principals. Some things are decided as a team, but for the most part, the principals run the day-to-day in their buildings and are expected to keep Central Office in the loop.
- *It is challenging for families to attend school events when they are planned on the same day/time as Seneca's events. Can we check Seneca's calendar when planning our school events in order to avoid doubling up?*
 - We completely understand the challenge this creates, and we try to make sure our families are not forced to deal with this issue. Each year, we do our best to synchronize calendars. However, all events, for either district, are not planned out before event dates are decided on. We will continue to do our best with this.

- *Why, as a parent, does it feel as though our higher administrators are not actively involved in our schools? It feels as though they are not involved in everyday activities and only make decisions on what can and cannot happen.*
 - We have a large number of activities a year. Although there is no requirement on what activities administrators attend, they do a very good job of being present.

Student Achievement

- Concern over the rumor of class sizes going up. Are there plans to increase class sizes by reducing the number of classes?
 - Class size will always fluctuate based on enrollment and staffing. Class size is dictated by policy and enrollment; however, we try to make sure the class size is best for students, staffing, and student needs.
- *Some feel decisions have been made hastily and without proper planning in regards to curricula and implementations. How can we better prepare our staff (adequate training/resources) prior to implementing a new curriculum?*
 - Curricula and implementation decisions are never made hastily. It takes a lot to implement curricula and programs, so there is careful consideration that goes into the process. Below are examples of how we implemented a new program and new curricula this past year.
 - Implementation of the math program included:
 - a full year was taken to review three different programs before one was chosen. This work was done by a committee of teachers and led by the Director of Curriculum;
 - several Professional Development Committee meetings to plan the training;
 - a schedule developed in the summer to address staff needs as well as additional training added throughout the year as needs arose;
 - staff training throughout the year, administrators facilitating discussion sessions, collaboration and focused training with the Director of Curriculum and staff during grade level meetings, and teachers meeting often to articulate as a grade level and across grade levels;
 - consistent consultation and coaching with staff to improve program implementation and resources.
 - Implementation of the Health Curriculum included:
 - a year-long process that included input from and presentations to parents BOE members, and staff members;
 - training for staff both in-district and out-of-district;
 - demo lessons for parents;
 - curriculum development with the PE team of teachers;
 - consistent curricula review and check-ins by the administration.
 - The full implementation plan can be found [here](#).
- *Can the students take consumables home at the end of the school year?*
 - Yes

- *How does Honors Math Placement work? Can students enter into Honors Math in 7th or 8th grade?*
 - A multiple measure rubric (the end-of-year math test, grades, benchmark scores, teacher checklist, etc.) is used to determine a student's eligibility. Students are considered at the end of 5th through 7th grade. Please contact the building principal for more specific information.
- *Why does RTI not start immediately at the beginning of the school year? Is there any kind of progress reporting provided to parents for RTI? How do we measure the effectiveness of RTI?*
 - RtI (Response to Intervention) groups are formed based on the needs of the students. In order to determine those needs, student data has to be collected and reviewed. Starting at the very beginning of the year does not allow the time necessary to collect and analyze the data. We have a new benchmarking system and are working on identifying a report to send home that would be beneficial to parents. Our RtI program is consistently measured for effectiveness. Building administration consistently meets with the RtI team to discuss intervention strategies, programs, student groups, and any areas that need to be addressed to improve and/or enhance the program.

Communication/Transparency

- *Parents are concerned that the school is not transparent enough when communicating about incidents that occur in school or on buses, how can we be more transparent with parents?*
 - We are not aware of incidents on the bus that were not communicated to parents. Whenever there is an incident, the principals notify the parents in a timely fashion. Please feel free to call the building principal if there is an issue in the future.
- *Some staff feel they are the last to know when issues/incidents/leaves occur. How can we improve communication between administration and staff members?*
 - We are aware of this concern from staff and are working to provide information regarding students. When a staff member is on leave, it is typically for medical reasons that we are not allowed to disclose.
- *Can we be more proactive in holding assemblies for things like vaping, drugs, social media use, etc.? Can we communicate with parents prior to assemblies being held and what will be discussed?*
 - Yes. The school counselors have done a nice job researching and having these programs this year. They will continue to provide them for our students, and we can make the parents aware of future assemblies.
- *Is there a way for staff to anonymously make suggestions/complaints? Would we consider implementing some kind of comment box?*
 - Staff members can speak with their STEA building representatives if they have any suggestions/concerns. Principals meet with the building representatives on a monthly basis, and as necessary, to hear concerns or comments. Staff members' names are never disclosed.

- What are we doing to improve school-home communication?
 - Teachers and administrators use various forms of communication such as Remind, Class Dojo, emails, flyers, phone calls, newsletters, webpages, and social media. At the district level, the website is consistently updated and a mobile app and text message feature were added to the mass email and phone system. As an administrative team, we believe we communicate, and have been told that we send out too much information. However, we want to make sure we address any concerns in this area. Please let us know of any specific concerns by calling the school office.
- *When can we expect to have live videos of BOE meetings?*
 - This is still being decided. As stated at a recent BOE meeting, this is a multi-step process that we are still working through. Details will be provided when there is an update.
- *Does the school maintain a list of current library books that parents can have access to should it be requested?*
 - A library catalog can be found on the district website.

School Safety/Security

- *Have disciplinary process changes have been implemented in the past two years?*
 - No, there have been no changes in the past two years. Our disciplinary process follows our Student Code of Conduct.
- *Concern over increase in HIBs and lack of consequences for actions. Will we consider implementing 3:30 and 5:30 detentions?*
 - We have seen a decrease in the number of HIBs in the last few months, and the consequences issued are in line with our Student Code of Conduct. We are not currently considering implementing afternoon detentions.
- *Were changes made to building entry/door lock schedules? If so, were all staff made aware of this?*
 - Yes, there were changes made for security purposes.
- *How can we improve School # 2 drop off? How can we periodically remind parents of drop off procedures?*
 - We would love to hear suggestions on how School # 2 drop-off can be improved. If you have ideas, please contact the building principal. We remind parents of the procedures a few times in the beginning of the year via newsletters and *Welcome Back* material and throughout the year during drop-off/pick-up. Our drop-off procedure is still a new process for the district. We are always looking for ways to make it as efficient as possible for our families.

- *How often is water testing done on the filtered water stations? Where can we find the testing reports? Are the filters able to filter out lead? How often are the filters changed?*
 - Our water is tested every three years as required by the state. If lead is found in the water, or if there is any other issue, testing will be repeated the following year to make sure the problem is resolved. The information can be found on the district website. The carbon in the high-grade filter is said to remove lead. Filters are changed every 6 months.
- *Why do we not have an armed security officer at all after school events?*
 - Specific district security protocol is not shared with the public. We want to make sure our students and staff remain safe at all times.
- *Are there any plans for a gender neutral bathroom to be installed other than the nurse's room?*
 - Our policy states that we will provide a safe and adequate alternative, such as a single “unisex” restroom or the nurse’s restroom, to students who are uncomfortable using a sex-segregated bathroom or to students who are uncomfortable with a student who chooses to use a sex-segregated bathroom. The bathroom in the nurses’ office is both private and unisex.
- *Are we looking into the possible hazardous impacts long term Wi-Fi exposure may have on our children?*
 - Not at this time

Budget/Finances

- *Why was the district not more proactive in finding solutions to the 80% increase in bussing expenses?*
 - We were informed of the increase in August months after the budget was approved in March. It is extremely difficult to be proactive when this happens. However, once we found out, we were aggressively trying to find a solution.
- *Why doesn't the school use its facilities to profit? Do we do anything to generate revenue? (i.e. allow advertising space on school website, rent class space at night, rent sport fields)*
 - Kindercare uses the facilities during the year, and a few teachers “pay” to use classrooms over the summer. Because of our shared services with the Township, we allow them to use our facilities without charge. However, security plays a major role. We have to be careful who we are letting into our buildings in order to protect our students.
- *What was the cost of School # 1 the irrigation system? Where did the funding come from? What is the increased water cost to run the sprinklers? How often do they run?*
 - There was no cost for the irrigation system. The sprinklers run twice a day outside of normal school hours.

- *What was the cost of the new domain name (STSDwarriors.org)? What was the rationale behind the decision to change our domain name? Who chose it? Who approved it?*
 - The new domain name is \$15 per year. The old one was too long and often mistyped as communicated by several stakeholders. The new name was the result of a collaborative effort by the administrative team. The rationale was to choose something shorter that captured the district's identity.
- *Just Words curriculum. How much did it cost? What was the reason behind purchasing it?*
 - The Just Words program was \$8K and paid for with grant money allocated for student intervention programming. It is a remediation program for students in grade 3-8 who are reading significantly below grade level and who do not have basic phonics skills. It is also utilized with students in our ELL program.

Board Governance/Board Relations

- *The Southampton School Board appears disorganized and at odds with each other. What is being done to make the board more united as a team and to run efficiently?*
 - **Board Members' Response:** In June 2023, the Board completed our annual self-evaluation. This was actually one point raised during our discussion of the results of our self-evaluation. We have blocked out 4 dates in July and August for the Board to meet and work through the results of our self-evaluation and work collaboratively to address the areas in which we can improve communication and productivity amongst board members, board committees, and the board as a whole. Board leadership has also attended various NJSBA training seminars, some of which featured strategies for strengthening a Board of Education's working relationships. This year, the Board adopted a Charter of Acceptable Norms into Policy which establishes the expectations of all Board team members. This Policy can be found in the Bylaws section of our Policy Manual which is located on our district homepage (Policy # 0142.7). That being said, there is nothing wrong with board members being at odds with each other. Each board member brings a different set of experiences, knowledge, and viewpoints to the table. As such, disagreement and spirited debate should not be frowned upon. Debate should cause members to re-evaluate their position and adjust as necessary to address or reflect competing needs, arguments, and interests.
- *Why has the school board not surveyed the teachers at all this year, knowing that they are leaving at an alarming rate?*
 - **Board Members' Response:** There is currently a survey in the works for all stakeholders (which includes teachers). While we agree, it probably would have been more useful to have started this sooner, selecting a third party to build and conduct a survey then analyze the results (at a reasonable cost) has proved to be a lengthier process than we had hoped. We would like you to know that we are still moving forward and currently working on getting a survey out, so this is something you will see happen in the near future. Also keep in mind that as elected officials, we are required to adhere to the NJ Code of Ethics for School Board Members (NJ 18A:12-24.1) which prohibits a Board of Education from addressing concerns directly with teaching staff. Typically, a survey is conducted by the administration at the end of each year to garner valuable feedback and address concerns staff members may have. However, since the board planned to

survey all stakeholders at the end of this year, the school administration decided against the scheduled survey so as to not duplicate the board's efforts.

- *What is being done by the board to make our teachers and staff feel secure and appreciated?*
 - **Board Members' Response:** *This is an ongoing process. Now that the Board is aware that this is an area of concern within the district, we are holding events like the Town Hall and working on a survey that will include the staff (as a stakeholder group). We do have an Employee of the Month program where staff members are nominated by fellow co-workers and/or community members. We recognize two staff members each month at our public meetings. We invite these staff members to our meetings where we read the nomination for the audience to hear and present the honorees with a Certificate of Appreciation and an Amazon gift card as a token of our gratitude. The Board is also currently looking into holding some teacher appreciation events, stay tuned for that. We will say, we are tremendously appreciative of our teachers and staff. They are an incredibly important part of our school district and community. We certainly want them to feel valued, because, in our eyes, they are! While we can only speak as a committee of the Board, and cannot speak on behalf of the full board, we are confident that ALL of our board members share this sentiment.*
- *How is the board currently supporting the Superintendent?*
 - **Board Members' Response:** Typically, in July, the Board has a Retreat where the Board members meet with the Superintendent to discuss and assist in evaluating and shaping the District's goals and mission for the ensuing academic year. This is an opportunity for the Board to work collaboratively with the Superintendent on ways in which, together, we can aim to make our District the best it can be. This year, the Board adopted a Board-Superintendent Communications Charter into Policy which establishes communication expectations between the Board and the Superintendent to foster an effective working relationship. This Policy can be found in the Administration section of our Policy Manual which is located on our district webpage (Policy # 1210.02). The Board also provides the Superintendent with various professional development and training opportunities, including travel to this year's AASA National Conference on Education held in Texas. Additionally, the Board recently approved the sponsorship of Mrs. Michael to pursue her academic studies for a doctoral degree in furtherance of her formal education.
- *Does the school board plan to take any proactive steps to implement a policy such as Hanover and Colts Neck did recently?*
 - **Board Members' Response:** At this time, there are no plans to implement policy like that adopted by Hanover and Colts Neck Boards of Education. That is not to say that the Board's Curriculum and Policy Committee would not entertain a discussion as it typically would with any request that is made to the Committee Chair. However, it is important to note that in both Colts Neck and Hanover, the New Jersey courts have issued injunctions prohibiting them from implementing these policies. The Board therefore does not deem it prudent to spend resources to pursue a course of action that has been enjoined by the courts as violative of applicable law.

- *When will the school put into policy that we do not allow and are against any teachings of CRT? I believe we do not currently have CRT teachings in our school, but I feel this would safeguard the community and provide a big comfort to the older population.*
 - **Board Members' Response:** Southampton Township Board of Education does NOT teach Critical Race Theory (CRT) in the classrooms of our school district. This has been stated multiple times by the Board and administration on different occasions. Members of the public may review the District's curriculum online at <https://southamptonk12-public.rubiconatlas.org/home> for verification.
- *Will the board consider creating a policy that states our district does not permit sexually explicit books in the library or school? I don't think our district will ever have books in the school like this, however, I feel it gets rid of any doubt with parents.*
 - **Board Members' Response:** The Southampton Township Board of Education, with guidance from the administration, reserves the right to adopt policies at any time that embrace the collective best interests of the school district, so long as those policies do NOT conflict with state and federal laws. That being said, the suggestion will be taken under advisement to determine whether a policy update is necessary at this time.