

To: School Committee
From: Michael Sullivan, Superintendent of Schools
Date: November 27, 2016
Re: Report for November 29, 2016 meeting

1. Election day, November 8, went smoothly for Hillcrest Elementary thanks to the extra efforts put in by the staff members of Hillcrest and Sheffield. See Principal Burstein's summary at the end of this report.

2. The Gill Montague Education Fund recently announced its grant recipients for the 2016-17 school year. The list of enrichment activities our faculty will be able to offer is our students is impressive and I would like to thank those who made donations and to thank those who work hard each year to provide our students with these opportunities. Here is the list of this year's 10 grants:

Gill 5th Grade Field Trip to New England Aquarium in Boston - will be taken in May at the conclusion of their Life Science units of study.

Gay Straight Alliance - TFHS 9th through 12th grade - The grant will allow the members to participate in various activities from parades to conferences, and school wide activities such as the Day of Silence.

Looking Toward Our Futures - Sheffield Grade 5 & 6 - The grant will allow the fifth and sixth grades in Gill and GFMS to visit the college campus of UMASS Amherst. This trip is to begin making students aware of college possibilities and that college is in reach of all students.

Let's Bookmark a great poet! - Sheffield Grade 4 - The Grant will allow the teacher to purchase biographies of poets.

No Strings Marionette Company - Gill School K-6 - The grant will support GES contracting with the company to perform at the Gill school. The emphasis is for the students to get a better understanding of art and theater and how it connects with their everyday life and to their school curriculum.

Old Deerfield Field Trip for 3rd and 4th grade students - Gill -This experience will enhance both grade levels curriculum on early American studies.

Painting for Relaxation - Hillcrest Therapeutic Classroom - The Grant will allow the teacher to purchase paint supplies in which the children can explore their self-awareness and self-expression through the 'art' medium. Participating in the arts actually changes the child's bodies in which they become less stressed and anxious.

Reader's Theater - Sheffield ELL students in grades 2-5 - The grant will allow for the purchase of a reader's theater kit. This will supplement materials for the ELL students in which they can practice their fluency, comprehension, and vocabulary.

Self-Regulation and Sensory Tools for Learning - GFMS Life Skills Class - The grant will allow the classroom teacher to purchase various materials which would provide students with sensory stimulation. The materials would be introduced gradually and the students would be taught how to use them and how the materials may help the student to self-regulate.

We Like to Move It Move It - Sheffield Grade 3 one classroom - The grant would allow the teacher to purchase an under the desk elliptical machine. Research has found that some students need more movement than others, and that this movement has shown improved literacy scores. It will allow for extra body breaks without interrupting or disrupting other students who can focus more readily without extra breaks.

3. MCAS Update: The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted unanimously on October 25, 2016 to implement the 10th grade next-generation MCAS tests in spring 2019 (for the class of 2021). Members of the class of 2021 are currently eighth graders and will take the eighth grade next-generation MCAS this year, giving them some experience with the next-generation version before encountering it as a graduation requirement. Students in the class of 2019 (current sophomores) and 2020 (current freshmen) will take the existing 10th grade MCAS tests to meet their high school competency determination.

4. Educator Evaluation: In his meeting with the Board of Education this week, Commission Chester will propose changes to the state's educator evaluation system related to rating teachers' impact on student learning. As you may recall, calculating such impacts, sometimes called value-added measures, with validity and reliability, has been controversial across the country. There now appears to be consensus among the major stakeholders that retaining an impact rating separate from the rest of the evaluation components and reporting this rating to the state is a bad idea. What is still being debated is what will replace this system. The commissioner will be asking the board to put out for public comment this winter, his compromise proposal which would create a student learning element, as just one component of Standard II - Teaching all Students. But how this element would get judged is remains a bone of contention among DESE, state administrator organizations, and state teachers' associations.

5. On Friday, November 18th I went with Principals Pitrat and Burstein and Director Fitzpatrick to a conference in Williamstown, MA on District/School Action Planning for Literacy. It was led by two presenters who have had significant success helping improve student reading performance across multiple schools. The presenters have a very systematic approach to improving literacy with a focus on teacher professional development, coaching, being informed by student performance data, having a strong intervention system for struggling readers, and clear leadership from administrators. We were pleased to see we are already working to put in place most of the components the presenters discussed. We are pursuing further support for our work in this area through a project with DESE called the MTSS Literacy Academy. If we are selected for this project we will provide you with more details.

6. On Wednesday morning this week Principal Leonard and I will be visiting Four Rivers Charter School in Greenfield. I felt that now that the charter school referendum question has passed it would be a good time to see if they might have some practices we can learn from.

Principal Peter Garbus has been most encouraging about our visit and we are looking forward to starting a conversation with Four Rivers.

7. On Friday, Principal Leonard and I will both be attending a conference of the Coalition of Essential Schools in Providence, RI. This is the last national conference of an organization started by Ted Sizer in 1984 which promotes student-centered whole school reforms. Our two visits this week may suggest that we are exploring ways in which we might consider reinvigorating the way things are done at the middle and high school. If these visits generate more than just some percolating ideas we will soon invite faculty, parents, and school committee members to engage in further exploration.

From: Sarah Burstein, Hillcrest Principal
Re: Election Day feedback

On November 8, 2016, Hillcrest preschool and kindergarten students had a No School day due to the use of Hillcrest as a voting site. Our first grade students attended school at Sheffield. Of our fifty-seven first graders, fifty-five were present at Sheffield on November 8th. Due to a significant amount of planning and an overall can-do attitude on the part of Hillcrest staff members, the day went very smoothly. Each first grade class was supported by a teacher and two paraprofessionals ("borrowed" from our preschool and kindergarten classrooms). Arrival, dismissal, lunch and recess duty staffing was increased by adding special education paraprofessionals and unassigned classroom teachers at these times. Our first graders were assigned "homeroom" spaces in the auditorium and their academic instruction took place in the third grade and fourth grade classrooms. The third grade teachers and students included the first graders in their morning meetings and their math lessons for the day. The fourth grade classrooms were used during fourth grade lunch and recess. First graders ate breakfast with the Sheffield students and had lunch and recess at their own "special time" (10:15 recess, 10:45 lunch). Our specialist teachers (Sarah Adolph/Technology, Jocelyn Castro-Santos/Art and Ron Wood/PE) each taught three first grade classes, creating an afternoon of specials for our students. Every Hillcrest staff member at Sheffield was equipped with a walkie-talkie in order to coordinate student movement throughout the building. Our school nurse, Janina Thayer, was at Sheffield all day to manage Hillcrest students' needs. The plans for the day were communicated to Hillcrest families over the course of several weeks through Friday News, the October Newsletter, grade specific letters, Facebook posts, the school website and a One-Call to Hillcrest families. These efforts were generally effective in keeping families informed. Only one kindergarten student arrived at Sheffield unexpectedly (apparently due to a miscommunication between the family and the YMCA). A Hillcrest staff member supervised this child until 9:00 when his grandmother came to pick him up. Hillcrest staff members reported that the day was successful for them and for their students. And, at the end of the day, the election workers at Hillcrest reported that the absence of our students made their day much easier.

There were approximately 1500 voters at Hillcrest on Tuesday, November 8th. While the day generally successful for staff, students and voters, it involved a significant amount of planning and coordination to reach that point. Looking ahead to future election days, the district should certainly consider following the practices of many local communities by building a district-wide Professional Development Day into the calendar for the first Tuesday in November. Alternatively, the district could partner with the town to identify a more suitable polling location for the two thousand voters who are part of Precincts Three and Four.