

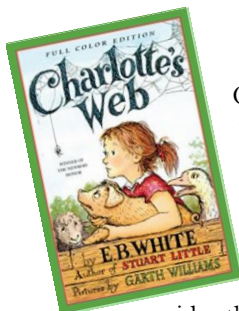
Flemington-Raritan School District

Parent & Community Newsletter

June, 2022 Edition 11

Editor in Chief: Dr. Kari McGann, Superintendent of Schools kmcgann@frsd.k12.nj.us

Co-Editor: Mrs. Laura Bruhn, Executive Assistant to the Superintendent lbruhn@frsd.k12.nj.us



END-OF-YEAR CELEBRATIONS

One of my favorite books to read aloud to my students was "Charlotte's Web" by E.B. White. Published in October of 1952, two of the famous book's main characters are a loveable livestock pig named, Wilbur, and his courageous friend, Charlotte, a barn spider that lived in the rafters of the barn above

Wilbur's stall.

Charlotte's Web is recognized as one of the best children's books of all time providing lessons on the nature of loss, friendship, death, and innocence. The text tackles serious topics but through the viewpoint of characters with whom children easily identify.

As a teacher in the classroom I read "Charlotte's Web" aloud to students in multiple grades; kindergarten students, first graders, second graders, and even my third graders loved the story and the messages that E.B. White provided through his book. (I also read this book aloud to my children at bedtime when they were very young.) My classroom read-aloud time was after recess each day and always led to conversations about themes in the book. In Charlotte's Web, themes of friendship, love, family, celebrations, helping others, and times when loved ones had to part ways for various reasons, are all present.

Each school year, I purposefully read Charlotte's Web during the last six weeks of the school year. As a class we would take time to slow down and reread quotes from the book, closely analyzing the words of the characters. The purposeful slowing down while reading the text, reading for a while then stopping to think aloud, would help students to focus on the words and actions of the characters.

In Charlotte's Web, Wilbur loves living in the barn. He shares with Charlotte, "I just love it here in the barn," said Wilbur. "I love everything about this place." This quote would lead to discussions about what students were grateful for and what they appreciated in their lives. At the end of the school year, my students would talk about the friends they made during the school year, their favorite holidays, and the celebrations we had together as a class.

Using Charlotte's Web as a reference we would examine the perspectives of multiple characters, analyzing quotes to determine how the feelings of a character might relate to our

own lives. Regardless of the grade level, kindergarten, first, second, or third grade, one quote that students would pick out highlighted the friendship between Wilbur and Charlotte: "Friends can come from different backgrounds and have varying personalities and interests. Just because they're not the usual people you interact with doesn't mean you can't be friends. Look at Wilbur—he found a friend in the most unexpected creature: a barn spider." This quote was poignant because it helped students to see that having friends from different cultures helps us to accept people for their uniqueness.

In 1995 my second and third-grade multi-grade level class had students with diverse backgrounds. Some students were children of military families so they moved from school to school and between states and even to different countries frequently. Other students lived in the same neighborhood with families that had lived in the area their entire lives. All of the students wanted to have friends, be accepted by others, and be loved for the uniqueness they brought as an individual.



*1995-1996 Dr. McGann (Miss Jones), on the left, with her split grade level class of second and third graders. Mrs. Evette Smith, on the right, was the paraprofessional in the classroom.

The end of the school year was always bittersweet for teachers and students. My class and I would celebrate the accomplishments we had together and the activities we were looking forward to during the summer. The final day of school was always filled with tears; many tears were happy as teachers and children hugged one another. My students shared excitement about the next grade level, a summer camp, or just being at home during the summer. Other students had tears that rolled down their cheeks as some realized they might not see their teachers or friends for many months or possibly never again, as some students graduated the elementary school and were off to various middle schools. We were grateful for the time we had together.

In Flemington-Raritan, the end of school is also bitter-sweet. We celebrate the year with a full-fledge of festivities to culminate the end of the school year. The year has been challenging for many students. The aftermath of the pandemic challenged the resiliency and perseverance of many members of our school community. At Flemington-Raritan, students, teachers, and staff members returned to in-person celebrations with kindergarten sing-alongs, field trips, end-of-the-year picnics, trips to Camp Bernie, scholarship award ceremonies, farewell parties, and more. The 2021-2022 school year had much to celebrate!

The final ceremony in the District celebrated the promotion of J.P. Case Middle School eighth-graders on the evening of June 21. Two of our eighth graders, Joshua Fisher and Aileen Wilson, spoke to the 2022 8th grade J. P. Case class about perseverance and their next steps into high school. It was a pleasure to witness these two students represent the students of the 8th grade 2022 class of J.P. Case Middle School. (See the last page of the newsletter for Joshua's speech and possibly an upcoming issue for Aileen's speech.)

At the promotion ceremony, Mr. Castellano also shared a message with 8th graders offering words of wisdom as they transitioned into high school. He spoke to 8th graders about the next steps as a student; five things to enhance their future as a high school students.

1. Embrace your "unique-ness" for it will serve as your own SUPERPOWER!! Use it to conquer personal, academic, and life challenges. And don't be afraid to be yourself. There is only 1 of you in the world, so simply putJUST BE YOU!

2. Learn from your mistakes and keep moving forward!

We never learn to move out of our comfort zone if we don't overcome our fear of failure. If we learn to fail forward we will cement an unstoppable perseverance to shape our own success. Bottom line? Failure is an important component to achieving success.

3. As you enter high school and make new friendships, make an honest attempt to seek the good in people, surround yourself with those that have your best interest at hand and do the same for others. Simple put....Be the difference in someone's life!

4. Social media has a grip on almost every facet of our lives from being social and sharing moments in life, doing research, banking, on-line learning, and branding and marketing. But be aware of the quicksand often associated with the misuse of this tool.

- Don't let others determine your worth when posting online. Know your value in the world!

- Be present and have in person communication whenever possible. (Do things that enhance positive aspects of your mental health!)
- Protect your digital footprint by being responsible when engaging in conversations and posting. Live your values, and be true to yourself! Moral of the story? Use social media and the internet as a tool for the good. Be conscious of the mis-use and at times the abuse of technology.

5. It is with a sense of pride and confidence that I wish you all congratulations. Today is your day! Enjoy it and be proud.

Take a moment to reflect on times that you climbed a personal challenge and knocked it out of the park. Just as valuable, remember the times that didn't go as planned, yet you learned from it and moved forward. Life is about adapting and changing. So never stop learning, growing and most of all celebrating!

~ Mr. Bob Castellano, Principal of J.P. Case Middle School

From all of us at Flemington-Raritan Regional School District, we wish our families and students a wonderful summer. We hope that your summer is filled with reading, writing, and most of all... summertime fun! The summer goes quickly, so enjoy every minute. Before we know it August will be here and messages will be arriving about the 2022-2023 school year. As E.B. White wrote in *Charlotte's Web*, "*The early summer days on a farm are the happiest and fairest days of the year. Lilacs bloom and make the air sweet, and then fade. Apple blossoms come with the lilacs, and the bees visit around among the apple trees.*" We hope that the summer is one of the happiest and fairest for you and your family.

LOOKING FOR A BOOK(S) FOR YOUR CHILD TO READ THIS SUMMER?

The District has available to students free, downloadable books from SORA. SORA is a student reading app that provides access to ebooks and audiobooks from your child's school library. The SORA app provides students with summer reading materials for both leisure and class-assigned reading. It's easy to use and takes just one tap to get inside a book. Use the directions [here](#) to download a book for summer reading. Visit the District's Summer Sweet Reads website for summer 2022, [here](#). There are books both in English and Spanish. Find directions in Spanish, [here](#).

SAFETY AND SECURITY IN OUR SCHOOL DISTRICT



This month I advocated for security in an Executive Session at Raritan Township in a committee meeting. My purpose was to advocate for extending the partnership between Raritan Township and Flemington Raritan Schools for the security of Class III Officers in all our schools.

I am grateful to Raritan Township for their agreement to fully fund two additional Class III Officers beginning in September. As our partnership continues, I commend and applaud Raritan Township for continuing to collaborate with the Flemington-Raritan Schools to uphold school security as a community priority.

I am grateful for their support in assigning two additional Class III Officers to our district which will provide all six of our district schools with equal protection and resources. This is a critical step toward preventing or thwarting potential threats to our schools; offering an immediate response to crises and emergencies; monitoring and assessing on-site situations in real-time; enabling schools to isolate and de-escalate issues as they unfold; fostering a sense of comfort and reassurance in children, parents and employees; and allowing teachers to focus on students' academic, social and emotional growth in a safe and secure learning environment.

I appreciate the Raritan Township committee's time, dedication, and effort in maintaining the importance of school security and their ongoing pledge to remain vigilant in keeping our children and community safe.

DISTRICT EQUITY RESOURCES ON THE WEBSITE

Hooray for us! On the State of New Jersey Department of Education weekly broadcast issued the week of June 13, Flemington-Raritan Regional School District was featured in the "In the News" section with the headline, "District Creates New Diversity, Equity Websites as Resource Tools."

The Flemington-Raritan Regional School District was spotlighted for creating resource tools for diversity and equity. When readers click on the link on the New Jersey Department of Education broadcast the link takes the user to a Tap Into article: ["District Creates New Diversity, Equity Websites as Resource Tools."](#) The new web page is linked under Our District, under Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion and under Quick Links.

The District's website will soon receive an update and refresh per ADA compliance requirements. The refresh is needed to enable our District to comply with state requirements for ADA compliance. ADA compliance

means that all electronic information and technology must be accessible to those with disabilities. Our Equity Resources webpage will continue to have a prime location.

CULTURE AND CLIMATE SURVEY

It is the intent of the Board of Education and the Superintendent to continuously improve student achievement, the working environment, and professional opportunities provided to staff. The purpose of the survey was to analyze opportunities for improvement identified by the survey data. The survey provided a tool to highlight progress made against previously discovered opportunities for improvement.

The School climate survey is a survey that seeks responses from parents, staff, faculty members, students, and community members. The Culture and Climate Survey provided information on topics such as the cleanliness of our buildings, The Culture and Climate Survey provided an opportunity for open-ended responses to be categorized for a systematic analysis. The Culture and Climate Survey provided all survey responders the opportunity to comment about their learning environment. The Culture and Climate Survey provides an opportunity for community members to provide feedback on student learning.

There were many positive comments by parents, staff, and students that were positive for schools, administration, & for the District as a whole.

1. All schools had comments from staff and faculty about appreciating their administration.
2. Students wrote about liking specific teachers & their school. A Copper Hill student wrote, *"I like school so much! School is a very great place. I like learning! I like Copper Hill a lot."*
3. Parents wrote about their love for teachers and how teachers do a great job. One RFIS parent wrote, *"Our FRSD teachers are amazing and always go above and beyond to support my children."*
4. Many positive comments referenced a specific person or group of people.

All comments weren't positive. Parents, students, staff, and faculty members shared their concerns about a variety of topics.

1. Staff and faculty wrote about feeling overwhelmed with the workload.
2. Students wrote about too much homework with one student writing, *"School should start at 8:00 and no earlier. And no homework on Friday and Monday (at least consider it.)"* Students wrote about feeling isolated and, at times,



unaccepted at school because they felt different than other students.

3. Parents wrote about the amount of homework, both for and against. Parents also commented about behavior of students citing bullying and lack of communication by teachers and administration.
4. Technology was cited as overused, not used enough, and firewalls that, according to one student, "were annoying" because they blocked too much information.
5. Some negative comments referenced a specific person.

According to Rutgers University and the New Jersey Department of Education, the New Jersey School Climate Survey is help schools to understand school climate needs and strengths from the perspectives of students, families, and staff, but will also provide insight into a school community's relationships, safety, sense of connectedness, teaching and learning, and measures of an equitable and supportive learning environment, including supports for social and emotional learning."

The District will use the survey again in the spring of 2023 for faculty, parents, and students. Parents, faculty, staff, and students are highly encouraged to participate to assist the district in reinforcing positive conditions and addressing vulnerabilities for learning.

FLEMINGTON-RARITAN REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT WEBSITE; AN UPDATE IS COMING

Our FRSD web site is nearly 13 years old. It's time for a refresh, by why now? The refresh is needed to enable our District to comply with state requirements for ADA compliance. That's short for Americans with Disabilities Act Standards for Accessible Design. ADA compliance means that all electronic information and technology must be accessible to those with disabilities. Our current partnership with Blackboard will continue; however, we will transition to a new web site template this summer. An upgraded template



ensures graphics, fonts, features and information are accessible to all users on various platforms, including mobile devices. Stay tuned for updates as we're excited to launch our new template soon!

ADA Compliance Components

When writing content for web, emails, and social media, information must be accessible for people with four types of disabilities: visual, hearing, motor, and cognitive. When creating web content, four specific elements should be considered to ensure ADA compliance. These four categories of issues are outlined here and below:

- **Perceivable** issues are those that affect a user's ability to find and process information on a website (i.e., providing audio descriptions for video content).
- **Operable** issues are those that impact a visitor's ability to navigate and use a website (i.e., ensuring that all site functions and navigation can be operated via keyboard-only commands).
- **Understandable** issues concern a user's ability to discern and comprehend all information and navigation on a website (i.e., composing error messages that include a clear explanation of the error and direction for correcting it).
- **Robust** issues involve a website's ability to adapt and evolve to meet the changing needs of users with disabilities (i.e., testing compatibility with all leading screen readers and ensuring that capabilities can be upgraded in the future).

ADA compliance can be achieved just by using certain colors, fonts, video tools and other features. You can learn more here: [What does ADA compliance mean for my website?](#)

ADA Compliance Checklist

Below are 18 steps organizations should follow to ensure ADA web site compliance:

- Read the law documentation
- All media files and maps should have an "alt" tag
- All online forms should have descriptive html tags
- All hyperlinks should have a descriptive anchor text
- All web pages should have "skip navigation" links
- All the text content should be structured using proper heading tags
- All PDF files should be accessible
- All videos should have subtitles, transcripts and audio description
- The color contrast of web pages should be sufficient
- All fonts should be accessible
- All HTML tables should be populated with column headers, row identifiers and cell information

- All audio files should have a written caption
- All call to action buttons should have an accessible name and an ARIA label
- All website pages should be accessible with keyboard navigation
- Have a website accessibility policy page
- Have easily locatable contact information to allow users to request accessibility information
- Test website accessibility according to the Website Content Accessibility Guidelines
- Automate the website accessibility check to prevent missing critical accessibility issue.

Fortunately, our upcoming upgrade to a new web site template will help our District address much of this work. We're still learning and it will take some time to adjust our site accordingly.

Source: <https://www.siteimprove.com/glossary/ada-compliance/>

SUPERINTENDENT TALK-A-LATTES

The last Superintendent "Talk-a-Latte" Roundtable discussion for the 2021-2022 school year was held last month. The session was held Tuesday, May 31, in the Copper Hill School Cafeteria beginning at 6 p.m. and concluding around 7:45 p.m. Principal of Copper Hill Elementary School, Mr. Jesse Lockett joined me to greet parents and stay for the Talk-a-Latte session. There were sixteen parents present for the session.

During the session, community members and I discussed topics that were on the mind of those who attended. We talked together about redistricting in our community and the capacity at Francis A. Desmares Elementary School. The group was particularly interested in the topic of school security-- specifically the ways that staff, faculty and substitute teachers are trained in security protocols.

As a group we also talked about the number of individuals affected by mental health illness, especially female adolescents. The United States Surgeon General's 2021 advisory report on Protecting Youth Mental health noted that for children in the United States, the alarming trend continues with various reports indicating that 10% to 25% of children are affected by mental illness. Parents spoke about ideas to help students be more social by participating in-person activities.

Participants in the May Talk-a-Latte also had a conversation about the school budget and how the salaries for additional Class III Officers. Parents at the meeting were predominately in favor of additional Class III Officers being hired for security in the District.

Roundtable discussions are designed to be open-forum conversations with members of the community about issues that are on the minds of Flemington-Raritan residents. Our discussion items will evolve with the interests of the members of our group with a bit of time devoted to information I would like with those that attend. Refreshments are always available; usually coffee, tea and a delicious dessert provided by our food services provider, Maschio's Food Services.

I am very grateful for the time attendees are willing to share with me. I recognize that time is one of the greatest gifts one can give.

SUPERINTENDENT RIDES THE BUS DAY



As the Superintendent of Schools, once a month I ride a school bus on either a morning or afternoon route. On May 4th I had the opportunity to ride the PM bus at Reading-Fleming Intermediate School. Bus driver, Mary Beth Walsh, drives Bus #19.

On "Superintendent Rides the Bus Day" I build relationships with our bus drivers, listen about any concerns they may have, talk with students about how their school days are going, and greet parents at the bus stops.

On May 4th on Bus #19, I spoke with many fifth and sixth grade students. They told me about lunch, recess, subjects they liked, and their friends in school.

INCREASING STEM OPPORTUNITIES FOR OUR YOUNGEST LEARNERS IN GRADES K-2

As mentioned on the previous page of this newsletter, each week the State of New Jersey Department of Education distributes a weekly broadcast to school districts throughout the state. Twice in June the Flemington-Raritan Regional School District was highlighted by the State of New Jersey for the work in the district.

Again in the June 29th broadcast, the District was highlighted on the "In the News" section. When readers click on the link on the New Jersey Department of Education broadcast the link takes the user to a Tap Into article with the headline "[Flemington-Raritan School District Increasing STEM Offerings in the Coming Year.](#)" In this article you'll learn about the new opportunities available to K-2 students in the 2022-23 school year in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM).

The District will implement a robotics and coding curriculum at the kindergarten level using CodeLicious, a computer science curriculum. In grades 5-8 students already use Scratch. All students in grades K-8 have instruction by technology integration specialists.

STRATEGIC PLANNING



The District has rescheduled strategic planning which was postponed last winter due to COVID-19. Coming up in the fall on November 4, 2022 from 6 to 8 PM and Saturday, November 5th from 9 to 3 PM, the District will engage in Strategic Planning to identify strengths and challenges, define a new five-year vision, set objectives and goals, and establish action steps. The board of Education is using the New Jersey School Boards Association to lead the work. If you are interested in participating in this process to volunteer as a representative from our academic community by serving on the Strategic Planning Ad Hoc Committee, please email Mrs. Laura Bruhn with your interest. If you are interested, please mark your calendars.

IMPORTANT UPCOMING DATES

September 1st- First Day for Teachers (All staff and faculty present for a Professional Development Day)

September 2nd – Second Day for Teachers (All staff and faculty present for a Professional Development Day)

September 5th- School Closed for Labor Day

September 6th- First day for Students

September 26th – School closed for Rosh Hashanah

Find the link to download the 2022-2023 academic calendar [here](#).

Flemington-Raritan Regional School District
2022-2023 SCHOOL CALENDAR

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