

# MESSAGE FROM THE SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

JUNE 2016

## Happy First Day of Summer Vacation!

I thought it would be helpful to provide families with advance notice of important information related to the upcoming 2016-2017 academic year. There are many changes in the year ahead.

### Change in Delayed Opening Times Due to Inclement Weather

Across the state, school districts use differing times for weather-related delays. The most common are a 90-minute delay and a 2-hour delay. A trend to shift from a 90-minute delay to a 2-hour delay has occurred in neighboring communities.

Beginning next year, South Windsor will operate on a **2-hour delayed opening** schedule when weather or other conditions require us to postpone the opening of our schools. The additional half hour will allow for even safer conditions during inclement weather. In addition to providing more time for snow to be removed, for ice to melt, and for our school buses to be cleared, it will allow safer travel times for students, parents and staff. As always, announcements of delayed openings will be sent to all families via SchoolMessenger, posted on our district website, and appear on news outlets such as WFSB, WVIT, FOX and WTNH.

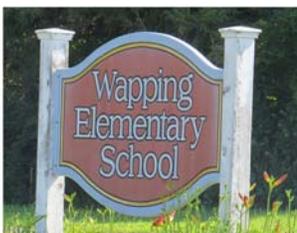
Please note that the hard copies of 2016-2017 calendars distributed with report cards still reference the 90-minute delay. A separate reminder with the new 2-hour delay times will be sent to parents from each school in September. (Early dismissal times across the district remain unchanged.)



### Closing of Wapping Elementary School

As announced in the Ten-Year Elementary Facilities Plan released in 2013, Wapping School will be closing in June of 2017. We are committed to clear and timely communication regarding this closing, including redistricting. It is important to note that the closing of Wapping School will impact all of our school communities. Our other elementary schools will be receiving students from Wapping School, and there will be changes in staffing across the district.

Over the summer, professionals will work on enrollment projections and begin drafting redistricting maps. Wapping School families can expect to receive more information this September regarding timelines for disseminating this redistricting information. As of now, we are targeting November as the month during which we can present the newly drawn elementary schools district maps; however, we must assess the progress over the summer before we can commit to that timeline.



While school closings have become common across Connecticut due to declining enrollment in many suburban communities, the commonplace nature of such closings will not result in a cavalier attitude about the emotions and sentimentality that surround the closing of one of our schools. We will take extra care to ensure that we move forward in a thoughtful, caring way that recognizes change is difficult for students, staff and families.

## New Transportation Contract with DATCO Bus Company



Every five years, we are required by state law to go out to bid for bus company contracts. Earlier this year we went out to bid and the result was to award the new five-year contract to **DATCO**. Beginning July 1, parents should be aware that the company name identified on school buses for South Windsor Public Schools will no longer be *First Student*; you can expect to see buses identified as **DATCO** vehicles. Please note that the bus drivers will remain familiar to you

as DATCO has hired the vast majority of the drivers previously employed by First Student.

Bus routes for the 2016-2017 school year will be published on the district website in late August. Special transportation requests are due to the Transportation Office by the end of June; forms and details are also available on the district website or from the school's main office.

## Update on Orchard Hill School Construction Project

If you have not driven by the site of the new Orchard Hill School on Foster Street, I hope you have an opportunity to view the progress that will be made over the summer. While you cannot enter the construction site, you can view the building from the current Orchard Hill campus. It is an exciting time for our community! This construction symbolizes South Windsor's commitment to our children and families. Thus far, the project is on time and on budget. We are targeting May 2017 for substantial completion.



## Exciting Changes Coming to Food Services!

I am pleased to announce that South Windsor Public Schools has entered into a new partnership with Chartwells, a food services vendor who will now oversee our cafeteria program. Partnering with a vendor such as Chartwells is a growing trend among school districts, and Chartwells, in particular, already partners with 23 other Connecticut school districts.

The benefits of this new program include a more cost effective model, higher quality presentation of food, more variety in meal and snack selections, access to a mobile food truck to support special events, an app to assist parents with researching food allergy concerns, cafeteria facility improvements, and access to an on-site professional chef and dietician.

Additional information regarding these changes will follow this summer. Please note that the board of education continues to set the price of meals and the prices will **not** increase for the 2016-2017 school year. We hope that you will ask your children about their perceptions of the positive changes to our food service program after school begins.



chartwells  
eat. learn. live.

## High School Late Arrival Days Move to Mondays



Beginning in September, we ask high school parents to note that late arrival days will occur on select Mondays instead of Thursdays. Late arrival days are reflected on the district calendar which is available on our website. Mr. Sullivan has also communicated this change in the June *Bobcat Tracks* newsletter.

## Reunification Plan Debrief

We recently responded to a bomb threat at Timothy Edwards Middle School. While the threat was not deemed credible by law enforcement, we did follow our evacuation and reunification plan as a precaution. Although a disruption, the exercise did allow us to observe the process and further refine our emergency plans. Please see the following Questions and Answers designed to guide parents in supporting schools to keep our children safe during emergencies.

Please note that these questions and answers are not meant to be an exhaustive list associated with our emergency procedures. They are a sampling of the questions parents have asked and I thought it would be helpful to share feedback immediately following a specific incident.

### Emergency Preparedness Q & A

#### **During an emergency dismissal, is it helpful if parents meet their child at the bus stop or at home rather than at school?**

Yes. Fewer cars result in less confusion for students, staff and first responders. Fewer cars also prevent vehicle congestion for bus drivers, which in turn leads to safer conditions for school transportation vehicles and first responder vehicles. We recognize that it is a natural instinct to want to be where your children are; however, if parents resist coming to the school and allow students to be transported home by school bus, it will allow us to focus on maintaining a safe and orderly dismissal process for all children. We also recognize there are considerations unique to the age of students associated with each school level. Decisions related to elementary schools may differ from those associated with middle or high schools. If there is ever an emergency situation that causes us to rely on parent pick-up, we will communicate that at the time.

#### **How can I receive the calls and emails that come from the Superintendent regarding emergency information?**

Emergency communications come through SchoolMessenger. We urge parents to customize their SchoolMessenger account to include daytime phone numbers and emails to ensure you receive important communications in real time. Customizing your account proactively allows you to be in the best position to receive information in a timely fashion when there is an emergency. You can customize your SchoolMessenger account through Parent Portal, or contact your child's school for assistance.

#### **Will I always learn of emergency information from the school district first?**

No. In fact, it will be rare that communications from the superintendent's office can be made in advance of the chatter on social media or the reporting from news outlets. News outlets monitor police scanners and report immediately, regardless of their access to the facts and without consideration for whether their reporting compromises student safety. Our commitment is to disseminate information as quickly as we can, but in an accurate, thoughtful and safe manner.

#### **Will communication about emergencies always come from the Superintendent?**

Typically yes, especially when the communication is going out to all families and not just to those associated with an individual school. There are exceptions however. Depending on the situation, you may hear from the school's principal or another member of the Central Office administration. When an incident impacts only one school, I often elect to communicate with all families to ensure that our entire community has access to accurate information. The recent threat against TEMS is an example of such a communication. Although the evacuation was specific to the middle school, I did not limit my communication to TE parents. I chose to share this information with all parents in order to mitigate rumors and prevent circulation of misinformation.

I hope notifying families early of upcoming changes is helpful. School staff will remind parents of this information again when the new school year begins. I wish you and your children a summer filled with peace, joy and laughter.

*KATE CARTER*

Kate Carter, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools