



## SANDWICH PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dear Parent/Guardian,

I hope you have been enjoying your summer and that your child(ren) are starting to get ready and excited to head back to school. As you likely know, we start this year after Labor Day. But we want to make sure you noticed on the District Calendar (see attached) that because of the primary elections on Tuesday September 4<sup>th</sup> and the voting taking place at Oak Ridge and Forestdale schools, our students will not be starting school until Wednesday September 5<sup>th</sup>.

I don't typically send a letter to parents during the summer as I know principals reach out during this time. But there are a number of things that I thought were important enough to communicate with you before school starts. The first two things I will communicate to you involve safety and security and facilities upgrades. I will also relay to you work we are doing with our curriculum and teaching and learning that you should know as a parent/guardian. And finally, I am going to share with you some interesting reading our administration did this summer.

Some of you may remember back to late last fall an area of concern brought up by some parents was some deficits in our safety and security within our buildings, specifically the elementary buildings. I had a meeting with some parents back in December 2017. It was a very good discussion that highlighted areas that parents thought needed addressing. I was happy with the result of the meeting because it gave me the impetus to push for more things than what was already in the works, things I had noticed since my arrival here in Sandwich back in July 2016. To that end I want to share with you what has been done in our buildings since last fall. Some of the things you will notice, some are a bit more behind the scenes:

- Replaced all of the locks at both FD and OR (STEM/HS locks are good right now)
- Added security cameras at all three buildings
- Installed card access for entry doors at all three buildings
- Installed security windows at both FD and OR
- Contracted with the Fire Dept. and a company to provide a real-time, two-way chat portal between those under threat directly to local, first responders (staff will hear more about this as the school year starts)
- New PA speakers in gym, pool at high school and gyms at FD and OR
- Fire strobes in 14 classrooms at FD and OR

Another area that has had some significant work this summer is our facilities. I want to commend the hard work done by the entire facilities department. I don't think I can even relay in this letter how hard they have worked to maximize the summer months to make sure our buildings are ready to go and look great. Things that have been done this summer include:

- Locker rooms at STEM/HS – painted and some boys' lockers replaced
- Weight Room at STEM/HS moved to a bigger area and enhanced
- Painting done at all buildings – inside and out

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- Carpeting replaced in some areas at FD
- Faucets fixed at FD
- Library renovations at OR
- Step repair outside STEM/HS cafe
- 4 classrooms re-carpeted at OR
- Epoxy floors repaired in STEM/HS cafe
- TV's installed in entrance in all three schools for announcements
- Re-cabling and internet wiring at FD
- New computer lab wiring in OR library and at HS
- Playground swing repairs and new stone at OR and FD
- All windows in the STEM wing will now have screens in them

Another area that I wanted to write about is what we are doing with regard to curriculum and teaching and learning. This is an area that you don't necessarily see specifics of every day but an area we have been working very hard at. When I arrived in Sandwich two years ago as your new Superintendent one of the first things we did was begin a strategic planning process that would guide our work for the next five years. We are now one year into that five-year plan (see attachment). As a beginning to that process we conducted a survey that sought feedback from all constituents we could think of: students, parents, staff, administration, town officials, and community members. We gathered some fantastic information from that survey. One of the areas that struck me with the results was a perception from parents that we were not reaching all children academically, specifically the high achieving student. I have spent the past two years looking at this. I do think there are some misperceptions of the high level work that is happening, but I also know that there is more work we can do in this area. I am going to be communicating with you over the course of this year specific work we are doing, specifically using data to inform our instruction and then differentiating our instruction to best meet the needs of each of our students. I will explain that more to you all in my next communication to you.

Finally, I wanted to share with you a book that I had our administrative team to read this summer. The book is *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in a Digital Age*, by Sherry Turkle. Many of us have lived with this technology transition over the past 10-15 years. I don't know about you, but the pace of change in technology (specifically our cell phones!) has alarmed me. I have been watching our society, our kids, how we communicate with each other, etc. change significantly over this time period. So I bought the book for all of the administrative team figuring this would give us some ideas that would help with our students. A funny thing happened when we had our administrative retreat in July. I started the conversation asking what they thought about the book, anticipating that they would come up with some ideas in our working with our students. What shocked me was that we spent over an hour talking about how we, as adults and parents, are dealing with this with our own children and families. What struck me was that this issue is so layered. One administrator said that he is struggling because he and his wife find themselves sitting on the couch with their kids after dinner and the kids are begging them to stop looking at their phones. The kids want their parents to talk to them, to pay attention to them. Once the admin opened up and talked about this, it was amazing how many of us were also dealing with the same things. This isn't how many of us grew up.

So why am I telling you this story? I think what hit me that day was that this might be happening to some (or all) of you as parents. So I thought I would share the name of the book with you in case you might be interested in picking it up. One of the things Turkle talks about is that we have very quickly become addicted to these little devices. She brought up something that I am guilty of. She questions whether the cell phone is the first thing we touch in the morning and the last thing we touch at night.

That has become me. I say it is because of my job, that I am “on” 24/7. This is somewhat true, but I need to acknowledge that this little device is ruling my day. So I have identified this as an area I want to work on!! The other administrators also acknowledged this. Part of the reason they feel the pressure they said is because there is this feeling that they are supposed to answer the text, the email, or the social media post immediately. That has definitely become something we all feel in society. But the worry is that this pressure to answer immediately, even after work or on the weekends, is impacting our families. We made the decision as an administrative team that we are going to work very hard to not answer emails after a reasonable time at night (say around 7pm) or on the weekends. I am also going to relay this to our teachers and ask them to follow this decision. Of course if something is an emergency we will absolutely respond, but we are going to work to put our families back into the forefront when we are not at work. We ask for your patience as we try to balance work and our private lives and respond in more reasonable timeframes. I truly believe that we will all be better and less stressed workers if we can find this balance again.

We certainly have far more work to do within our administrative team to figure out how we engage with our students with all of this, but I know it has started some intense conversations. My initial thought is that I would love to have this be a community-wide discussion. It certainly impacts all of us! I meet with a group of students, grades 7-12, monthly. We call it Superintendent’s Council. I am thinking that I will be talking about his book with them to see what they think. I want to ask them their thoughts about how all of this impacts them. I am sure that will also be an interesting conversation. If any of you have any thoughts, or would like to get involved in this with me, please just send me an email at: [pgould@sandwich.k12.ma.us](mailto:pgould@sandwich.k12.ma.us).

Thank you for reading this communication. As you can see, we are working very hard to make our schools the best they can be. If you have questions, or thoughts, please feel free to reach out to me.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Pamela A. Gould', written in a cursive style.

Pamela A. Gould  
Superintendent