



# Delran Township School District Parent Newsletter



December 2016 Edition 2

Editor in Chief: Kari McGann, Director of Curriculum and Instruction; [kmcgann@delranschools.org](mailto:kmcgann@delranschools.org)

## GREETINGS!

As we move into the month of December and into our 2<sup>nd</sup> marking period of school, our students are true experts at their school day and making great strides! Even our kindergartners are navigating the school hallways like pros and seem quite confident in their surroundings. Please read further in this newsletter for smart tips from amazing kindergarten teachers.

The NJ Department of Education is continuing their strong focus on student attendance and shared the article I've included later in this newsletter. Our teachers and administrators are asking for your continued assistance in ensuring that your child attends school regularly and arrives on time for classes. Chronic absenteeism and tardiness negatively impacts children's academic progress, and puts children at risk for retention in the elementary and middle school years – and loss of credit for classes and delayed graduation in high school. The school personnel will speak with you if they become concerned about your child's attendance record.

Please accept my warmest wishes for a terrific December and a happy and healthy holiday season.

## IMPORTANT PARENT TECH NEWS

Be on the lookout for Ask.fm – a social site that lets kids ask questions and answer those posted by users – sometimes anonymously. Commonsense Media offers this guidance: “Although there are some friendly interactions on Ask.fm -- Q&As about favorite foods or crushes, for example -- there are lots of mean comments and some creepy sexual posts. This iffy content is part of the site's appeal for teens. The British news website MailOnline reported that the site has been linked to the suicides of several teens. If your teens do use the site, they'd be best turning off anonymous answers and keeping themselves out of the live stream. Syncing with Facebook means that a much wider audience can see those Q&As.”

## CHRONIC ABSENTEEISM AND LEARNING

Half of all students who miss two to four days of school in the first month will go on to miss nearly a month of school in excused or unexcused absences, according to a study released in July by the Baltimore Education Research Consortium.

The study examined chronic absence and found a striking pattern. Remarkably, nine out of 10 students who missed

five or more days in the first month went on to be chronically absent—defined as missing 10 percent of the school year in excused and unexcused absences—for the year. If poor attendance is allowed to persist, the impact can undermine children's prospects for academic achievement. In the early grades, students who are chronically absent have lower reading and math scores, as well as weaker social-emotional skills than they need to persist in school.

In fact, in a study of California students for *Attendance Works*, the organization that Hedy Chang oversees, only 17% of the students who were chronically absent in both kindergarten and 1st grade were reading proficiently by 3rd grade, compared with 64% of those with good attendance in the early years. Weak reading skills in the 3rd grade translate into academic trouble ahead: Students who aren't reading well by that point are four times more likely to drop out of high school. Chronic absence in middle school is another red flag that a student will drop out of high school. By high school, attendance is a better dropout indicator than test scores.

A recent report, "Absences Add Up," also from *Attendance Works*, documents what many know from common sense: At every age, in every demographic, and in every state and city tested, students with poor attendance scored significantly lower on standardized tests. In school, this translates into weaker reading skills, failing grades, and higher dropout rates. Rather than looking at attendance as an administrative chore, schools can use the same data as a warning sign to change the trajectory.

Poor attendance can be turned around if schools work with families to monitor who is at risk for poor attendance, nurture a habit of regular attendance, and identify and address the challenges that prevent students from getting to school. The key is using data to identify and intervene early, before students have missed so much school they can't catch up. We need to start right away to connect the students struggling with poor attendance to positive, engaging supports and to activities that will motivate them to attend class every day.

*Hedy Chang is the director of Attendance Works, which is located in San Francisco and seeks to improve the policy and practice around school attendance. John Gomperts is the president and CEO of America's Promise Alliance, which promotes reduction in chronic absence as a key to improvement in graduation rates. Leslie Boissiere is chief operating officer of the Campaign for Grade-Level Reading, which focuses on reducing chronic absenteeism and improving reading skills in the early grades.*


## A PEEK INTO KINDERGARTEN

What a delight it has been to watch our amazing kindergarten teachers welcome their students into kindergarten the past few months. The teachers began the year by arranging their classrooms to be very child-friendly, with spaces to play and explore, a carpet area for stories and quiet lessons, a beautiful classroom library, and age-appropriate seating for instruction.

Looking for ways to extend the terrific learning at home? The activity below makes use of magnet letters and a cookie sheet. It helps to reinforce letter identification and is a great “what can the children do while I’m getting dinner ready” activity.

**WHAT ELSE CAN WE DO?**  
Materials: Metal Cookie Sheet and Magnet Letters

- Have child match letters to a template:
- Write the letters for child to match:



- Can you spell your name?
- Can you spell \_\_\_\_\_?
- How many words can you make from the word \_\_\_\_\_?

## **IMPLEMENTING MATH STANDARDS**

New Jersey Learning standards, finalized and adapted from The Common Core Standards earlier this year, represented a shift from the focus on skills and procedures toward a conceptual understanding of mathematics, blending content with an expectation that students explain mathematical reasoning. Specifically, the new standards expect students to:

- ≈ Make sense of problems and persevere in solving them;
- ≈ Reason abstractly and quantitatively;
- ≈ Construct viable arguments and critique the reasoning of others;
- ≈ Model with mathematics;
- ≈ Use appropriate tools strategically;
- ≈ Attend to precision;
- ≈ Look for and make use of structure;
- ≈ Look for and express regularity in repeated reasoning.

Our teachers worked this past summer and are continuing to work throughout the school year and into next summer to ensure that learning standards match grade-level expectations and teaching in the classroom. The Common Core State Standards, and ultimately, the New Jersey Learning Standards purposefully shifted concepts to other grade levels. For example, the 8<sup>th</sup> grade standards largely represent algebraic concepts. The primary grades are enjoying fewer concepts, with the expectation that depth and practice allow students to really hone their skills as mathematicians. Certainly, math class is not the only place where these concepts will be taught. Much of our science

instruction requires math problem-solving and reasoning skills.

## NEW JERSEY LEARNING STANDARDS IN READING & WRITING

The New Jersey Learning Standards reflect college and career readiness by reducing the traditional emphasis on narrative writing and placing a greater emphasis on informational and explanatory writing. Personal narratives are often a staple of schooling, but except for college application essays, students will seldom be required to write personal narratives in college or the workplace. Information writing, in which the author attempts to explain something or to inform others about a topic, is a much more important skill in these settings. In reading, the standards place a greater emphasis on the ability to comprehend complex texts. This emphasis stems from research that shows that students who can comprehend complex texts are more likely to be successful after high school. The complexity of workplace materials and college textbooks have held steady or increased over the past 50 years; meanwhile the level of text complexity in high schools has actually declined over time. In some schools, teachers don’t require students to read or comprehend these easier texts, and may attempt to make comprehension simpler for students by presenting material via PowerPoint or reading aloud (Educational Leadership, April 2012, p. 14).

## **DELRAN ECOSYSTEM STEM ALLIANCE**

In September Delran Township Schools was awarded a Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (educators just say “STEM”) grant from New Jersey Pathways and the Teaching Institute For Excellence In Stem (TIES) organization. The Delran STEM Ecosystem Alliance will assist students to graduate with STEM knowledge, skills, and applied learning capabilities necessary for success in STEM college education and careers. Aligned with the mission of the New Jersey Department of Education, the alliance will serve all 3,000 students in Delran, Burlington County by preparing them to achieve proficiency in STEM fields (particularly women, people of color & special needs populations) while supporting educators who teach STEM subjects to ensure they have access to the resources they need. Delran was one of four communities selected by the New Jersey STEM pathways Network to participate in a statewide campaign to reimagine STEM learning and prepare New Jersey’s future workplace for STEM fields. This initiative was modeled after the STEM Funders Network STEM Learning Ecosystems Initiative, which is designed to promote the cultivation of STEM learning ecosystems in communities throughout the country. If you would like to learn/watch more about the national STEM Learning Ecosystems initiative here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gr4HMj5ayZY>. Additionally, if you are interested in joining our STEM Alliance and becoming a partner in this program, please contact me. [kmcgann@delranschools.org](mailto:kmcgann@delranschools.org)