The Case House Gazette

WESTON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

June 2021

Message from the Superintendent:

Dear Weston School Community,

Thank you all for the patience and resilience that each of you have displayed over the past 15 months. Living, working, and schooling during COVID-19 has been extremely challenging. Working together on behalf of all children, we've endured many difficulties and overcame many hurdles. We responded to fluctuating infection rates and changing public health and DESE guidelines, staying flexible and nimble, persevering, and striving to ensure safety and maximize educational opportunities for all students. Along the way we also learned many new skills and adopted new technologies and teaching practices. We'll continue to use those that've had a positive impact.

As a school district, we know that taking care of the social and emotional well-being of our students has been instrumental to their success. It is now clearer than ever that we must take care of ourselves, each other, and our community. We've all been through a traumatic historical event and we will need to continue healing in the months ahead. As a district we will remain acutely aware of the needs of students and employees as we work through the summer to prepare for the reopening in September.

First, I want to thank our students. Through all the schedule changes, the safety guidelines and protocols, and the remote and live learning, our students braved academic and emotional challenges, persevered, and regularly put forth their best effort under extraordinary circumstances. I appreciate all the support our students received from parents and guardians in this difficult time.

I want to thank our school committee, Board of Health, nursing staff, and town officials for all their work and guidance throughout the year. I want to thank WEEFC, PTO, BWMPO, SEPAC, Boosters, and other community groups for helping our schools to bring some normalcy, enrichment and recognition for students and teachers. I want to show appreciation to all of the faculty and staff for their impressive bravery and creativity in tending to and teaching our students. Finally, I want to recognize our families and community for their partnership and feedback, all your collaboration made a real difference.

I feel so much appreciation to all of you, and hope that you find time for joy and fun this summer.

With Deep Gratitude,

Dr. Midge Connolly

About the Case House Gazette:

The Weston Public Schools Administration works in the historic Case house building, and we publish this newsletter to share some seasonal and annual highlights with WPS students, staff, families, and all our community members.

Click here for older February and November 2020 Gazettes

Weston also has a weekly district PTO newsletter, called Westword

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School Nursing Team: A Year in Review

"This has been an example of teamwork, determination, and a passion for nursing that is unrivaled in all of my experiences." remarks Jamy Gaynor, Director of Nursing Services.

Director Gaynor also added, "the lengths to which this team extended and transformed while navigating this pandemic have amazed and inspired me.... we came together as individuals, and have grown into a team that can survive anything. Proud, does not approach the overwhelming feeling of accomplishment experienced by this team."

Weston's school nursing team knows as well as anyone that the 2019-2021 school years were unlike any other. March 12th 2020 marked a big shift for us all, as rising COVID case counts forced school closures and led to widespread remote learning.

Disaster soon struck again with the tragic passing of Weston's irreplaceable school nurse leader Laurie Melchionda, leaving a wake of loss that rippled across the district. The sudden loss of their leader, and the loss of normalcy due to the pandemic, could have left our nurses feeling defeated.

Instead of feeling defeated, our school nurses have risen above the chaos to help lead us all through this uniquely challenging year. Despite these challenges, the nursing team marched forward, partnering with the Weston Board of Health to coordinate COVID-19 response initiatives and to perform contact tracing for the town.

Weston Middle School nurse Denise Schwerzler stepped up to lead the nursing team until Director Jamy Gaynor came on-board in August, helping lead us all through the past year.

Thanks to testing programs run by our school nurses, our schools have conducted over 7,000 individual PCR tests since January 11th 2021, and completed over 700 pools since the start of the new pool testing program on March 15th.

A Year in Review

Our school nurses can do it all! As they collaborated across various teams to reopen schools in the fall and expand in-person time over the year, they developed and implemented several key initiatives including a districtwide prescreening tool, two different districtwide COVID testing platforms, vaccination clinics, and so much more.

All this comes in addition to the myriad of routine nursing tasks, building-based and district-wide responsibilities, regular health screenings and evaluations, and more. Weston's school nursing team has always been essential, but this year has been a reminder of just how vital and outstanding each of our school nurses really are.

As the year comes to a close, and planning begins anew for the fall and beyond, the nursing team are donning their multidisciplinary hats again, this time to strategize and rethink safety and learning in a post-COVID-19 era. Like their fellow educators, the school nursing team is always ready and willing to adapt at a moment's notice, shifting to meet the needs of ALL students, staff and families. That kind of growth mindset helped them successfully serve all of our students all throughout this year and earlier.

National School Nurse Day is on May 12

The team was also supported by others including district nurse Jessica Kilcoyne, Joseph Karbowski, and many other invaluable support staff helping with the COVID-19 testing programs and more. Presently, the school nursing team provides individual weekly PCR testing to staff, weekly pool testing to staff and students, drive-up symptomatic and early quarantine release testing, as well as supporting the weekly town vaccination clinics, and so much more.

In addition to developing and implementing the testing platform, the team also served as role models for other district's testing programs, providing mentorship and education to nursing colleagues throughout the state. That leadership has been recognized by their peers in other districts, and Denise Schwerlzer was even awarded the 2020-21 Massachusetts School Nurse of the Year by the Massachusetts School Nurses Association! Congrats to Denise!

Meet The Nursing Team

Each Weston school nurse is far from typical and brings unique perspectives to the team. Their extensive research and development experience in fields like neuroscience, epidemiology, and more helped set them up for success. However, it was their expert collaboration together that enabled them to adapt and to redefine their own practices.

Beyond boo-boos and bandaids, this year in particular our school nurses have risen to the challenge, and succeeded throughout the year, despite the odds. They exceeded the expectations for school safety, excelling and distinguishing the Weston Schools team as national leaders in the school nursing field.

Please take a moment to get to know your building-based school nurse, you might be surprised by what you find. Thank you!

Jamy Gaynor, Ed.D., MS, RN, NCSN, serves as both **Health Services Director** and also Field School Nurse. She is new to Weston (August 2020), and is a nationally certified school nurse, as well as a life-long learner.

She began her career as a neuroscientist investigating learning and memory at UMass Amherst, then transitioned to nursing where she has spent the last 15 years in both intensive care and school settings. Jamy enjoys traveling, gardening, and spending time with her husband and her two children.

Meet The Nursing Team

Michelle Rizza, BSN, RN, has been the **Weston High School** Nurse for the past four years. She has a BA in psychology and a BSN in nursing from Framingham State University, where she is presently working towards completion of her Masters in Education. She is a veteran of the United States Navy, where she served five years in Hawaii. Michelle enjoys reading, her cats, and spending time with her husband and their daughter who currently attends University of Rhode Island.

Denise Schwerzler, a master's prepared, Nationally Certified School Nurse, is excited to be part of the team caring for the students and families of **Weston Middle School** for the past four years. Before entering the field of nursing, she worked for 18 years in environmental lab research at the Harvard School of Public Health. For all of her expertise and successes in the field, Denise was the recipient of the Massachusetts School Nurse of the Year Award for the 2020-2021 year. Denise's personal interests include life-long learning, exploring, camping, hiking, skiing, and just being outdoors. She loves SCUBA diving, and she also spends many summer days enjoying time with her family on the Ashland reservoir near her home.

Jennifer Riggs, MS, RN, and **Field School** Nurse is both new to Weston and new to school nursing. Jennifer has a BA in Speech Communication and a MS in Human Resource Development. Having come from a Human Resources background, Jennifer's nursing experience includes educational development around food allergies, vaping and substance use, and mental health topics including suicide. Jennifer enjoys spending time with her husband and four children.

Meet The Nursing Team

Joanna Sudmyer of **Woodland School** began her school nursing career in the Ashland Public Schools district six years ago. Prior to school nursing Joanna worked in pediatric primary care. She feels it is a privilege to work with families and school staff to provide a safe and healthy learning environment to students, as they grow during their elementary school years. She enjoys spending most of her free time with her two young children and husband, especially if it involves being at the beach!

Janet Weinstein of **Country School** is a master's prepared, Nationally Certified School Nurse, and has dedicated the past 21 years of her career to the Weston Public Schools. Janet has brought an unrivaled commitment and compassion to the families and children of Country School. Janet prides herself on maintaining an open door policy for families in addition to the compassion and dedication to their children. Janet's personal interests include reading, going to the gym, spending time with family and friends, and reupholstering antique chairs.

Kerry O'Brien is the **Health Services Administrative Assistant** for Weston Public Schools. Kerry was originally trained as an Epidemiologist, and after dedicating recent years to her family she has returned to her career supporting the Health Services Team in Weston for the past two years, while continuing to moonlight as an Epidemiologist for the State of Massachusetts. Kerry's personal interests include spending time with her husband and two daughters.

Welcoming Martha Bakken

Please join us in welcoming our new Director of Student Services, Martha Bakken, who will officially start on July 1, 2021. She began her career as a bilingual elementary teacher in New York City, and has taught and held other leadership positions in Boston, Everett, Westwood, Lexington, and Stoneham schools.

She holds a Bachelor of Arts degree in East Asian Languages and Cultures from Columbia University; a Master of Public Administration from the Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University; a Master of Science from Wheelock College; and a Master of Arts from the University of Massachusetts Boston.

"I am very excited about joining the Weston Community. I have already begun to have discussions to learn more about the Weston Public Schools and I am really looking forward to meeting more members of the school community during the coming months."
-Martha Bakken

During her years as the Assistant Superintendent for Student Services in Stoneham, Ms. Bakken prioritized collaboration in pursuit of high expectations for every student. While in Stoneham, Ms. Bakken achieved a long list of successful school and district-wide initiatives.

She has extensive experience supporting the use of data to inform instruction, especially with the goal of meeting the needs of students with special needs. Data has been critical to her work as a district leader, from building professional development and 1:1 coaching programs, to developing district-wide monitoring tools and facilitating a district wide data team. Click here for more info.

Ms. Bakken has shared she is excited to join us and support the success of all students, and we are looking forward to her arrival.

Strategic Planning for 2021-26

This Spring, WPS convened a team of ~20 volunteer students, parents, teachers, administrators and other stakeholders to help develop a new 5-year strategic plan for the district. This Planning Committee met over Zoom, first to go over the 2018-2021 strategic plan, and how the strategic plan guides the school-specific improvement plans and strategic goals into the future. The committee went on to participate in a series of forward-looking focus group sessions in which we shared visions of our ideal futures for our schools and the community as a whole, and discussed what it will take to move us there.

Next, the planning committee and Case House hosted several similar virtual visioning sessions including parents, employees, and other community members. Sessions were co-hosted with school leaders, as well as PTO, BWMPO, SEPAC, WEEFC, WeStar, WCCA, and other local community groups. Committee members took detailed notes on the priorities shared during the sessions.

The image below is based on the frequency that each word came up during ~8 visioning sessions

Over 100 individual adults contributed over 650 different ideas and priorities during these visioning sessions. Furthermore, over 350 middle and high school students participated in a survey asking the same questions. The 1000+ pieces of personal perspectives shared during the sessions have informed the strategic plan in many ways. Special thanks to everyone who participated in the strategic planning process.

Click here for the 2021-2026 Plan Overview and stay tuned for District Improvement Plans!

Weston Athletics

Weston Athletics ROCKED this year! Beginning the school year in uncharted territory, who would have known how important high school sports would have been to returning to normalcy for our student-athletes. With ever changing COVID-19 policies and protocols and the addition of an extra season, WHS student-athletes hurdled every obstacle.

As the only school within the 11 school Dual County League (DCL) to see fewer than three COVID stoppages, our teams were amazing.

There may not have been any MIAA State Tournaments throughout most of the year (the 2021 Spring season will have MIAA State Tournament play this summer), but Weston teams still amassed 12 (DCL) Championships, with the shot to win more in coming weeks!

Our coaches were absolutely incredible this year. The many policies and protocols they were all responsible for, as well as adjusting to the many modifications, proved how committed they are to ensuring a great experience for each of our WPS student-athletes.

Thank you to the Weston School Community for all your support of our student-athletes and coaches through these unusual times.

Athletic Director Mike McGrath would also like to personally thank and congratulate each student-athlete who participated in any athletics at Weston High School this year:

"This was definitely a very challenging year athletically, but tremendously rewarding. I hope that athletics brought a sense of normalcy back into your life and that you enjoyed competing and representing Weston High School. You certainly made us all proud!"

Weston Athletics

The Theodore Chandler Memorial Award is considered one of our most prestigious school awards. It is presented annually to two seniors who best exemplify the following 3 qualities:

- Athletic accomplishment
- Scholarship
- WHS school spirit

The multiple-sport athletes who receive this award have exhibited tremendous athletic fortitude, excelled in the classroom and have been true leaders for their teams. This year's Chandler Award recipients were Jackie Goode and Christios Iatridis. These and **other awards** for four years of joy-filled sports seasons were celebrated together this year at Weston Wildcat Pride Senior Athletics Awards Night. This event was held at Proctor Field on June 1, and was a great way to end the year, pictured right:

Weston Boosters

Boosters is a parent-run organization supporting local student athletes and encouraging community participation in Athletics and other extracurriculars

Please consider getting involved with Weston Boosters to help support our student-athletes and equip our teams.

Visit WestonBoosters.net! Click below to learn more and show your support

WILDCAT TRACKS

Wildcat Tracks is the student-news website for Weston High School. The site features a wide range of different news stories and columns, including recent features on the Spring Sports Season, Seniors' College Plans, Senior Memories, and even info for students about all the differences between MS and HS Sports.

2020-21 Wildcat Sports Seasons by the #s:

- 260+ Students participated in Fall Sports like Soccer, Golf, Field Hockey, XC, and more
- 220+ Students participated in Winter Sports like Hockey, Basketball, Swim, and more
- 150+ Students participated in "Fall 2" Sports like Football, Volleyball, and "Indoor" Track
- 300+ Students participated in Spring Sports like Baseball, Softball, Crew, Track, Tennis, Lacrosse, Sailing, and more.
- 100% of students who participated in sports this past year learned valuable lifelong skills!

2021 Performances and Events

The many great virtual and in person events from over the past few weeks and months were needed. Even amid the pandemic, our school community still found ways to safely connect and honor our students together.

Below is a partial listing of some events and performances. Please follow the hyperlinks!

- WPS Combined Chorus (3-12th), Others
- 6th Grade Chorus *'Colors'* (Winter 2021)
- 8th Grade Chorus *'Let It Be'* (Winter 2021)
- WHS Chamber Orchestra (Winter 2021)
- WHS Chamber Orchestra (Spring 2021)
- WHS Concert Orchestra (Spring 2021)
- 6th, 7th, and 8th Grade Concert Orchestras
- 6-12th Grade Band Spring Concerts
- Country School Arbor Day Celebration
- WHS Theater Performance (Winter)
- Other Theater Performances: 1 -- 2 -- 3
- Asian American (AAPI) Solidarity Night
- Staff Appreciation (2019-20 & 2020-21)
- High School Graduation (Class of 2021)

Summer 2021: Tips for a Healthier Weston

Scan for vaccine info or go to vaxfinder.mass.gov

Get Vaccinated

Vaccines are highly effective and safe! After you are fully vaccinated you can do things you stopped because of the pandemic. Call us to find an accessible vaccine location or for science-based answers to your questions!

Travel Advice

The CDC says to delay travel until you are fully vaccinated. If you cannot delay travel, call us to discuss the CDC testing recommendations. Check international and employee testing/travel requirements before you go!

Wear a Mask

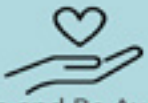
Guidance for unvaccinated people has not changed – wear a mask indoors and if you are symptomatic and awaiting test results. Businesses can be stricter than the State; please follow local and situational requirements. Everyone should wear a mask on a plane, bus, train, or in a healthcare setting.

Relax and Restore

It has been a hard year – please take time this summer to care for yourself, and to relax and unwind!

Seek Testing

Watch for symptoms and wear a mask if you are sick. Symptomatic individuals and those not fully vaccinated who have had close contact with an infected individual should get tested. Note: It's rare but possible to get COVID-19 after you have been fully vaccinated.



Care and Be Aware

Prevention and treatment of infectious and chronic disease for low-income people and communities of color is woefully insufficient in our country, and the COVID-19 pandemic has been no exception.

Gather Safely

Hosting a party?
Keep it small and outdoors, promote healthy habits like hand washing and distancing.

Attending?
Wear a mask unless you are fully vaccinated, have fun but come together while remaining a few feet apart!

We're Here to Help

Vaccine questions?
Need help with food or housing?
Stressed and worried?
Ask a nurse at the Weston Board of Health!
Call 781-786-5033
or email
COVIDquestions@WestonMA.gov

Trust the Facts Get the Vax

Vaccination against COVID-19 is one of the best ways to protect yourself from infection

Vaccines are available free of charge for everyone in Massachusetts aged 12 and older*

Vaccine questions? Family or Friend need a COVID-19 vaccine at home?
Ask a nurse at the Weston Board of Health
Call: 781-786-5033
Email: COVIDquestions@WestonMA.gov

Scan for vaccine info or go to vaxfinder.mass.gov

** Younger people may soon become eligible*

School Committee Meeting Calendar: **-July 14** **-Aug. 10** **-Aug. 25**