



# HOLMDEL TOWNSHIP SCHOOLS

## SUPERINTENDENT'S REPORT TO THE BOARD OF EDUCATION DECEMBER 20, 2017

Good evening and happy holidays to all! This past weekend I wrote to our parents about how the holidays and the Winter Break provide a great opportunity for reflection on the past, but it's also a time of anticipation of what's to come. Tonite, I'd like to provide a glimpse of what's yet to come for our students as the calendar turns to 2018.

The *Benchmark Advance* literacy program, which you've heard me mention before as it's being implemented in grades K-3 this year, includes inquiry-based projects in each unit. In the new year we can expect to see the gradual integration of these inquiry-based projects in classrooms. For example, while exploring the concept of an author's point of view, our youngest learners will explore the essential question, *Why do people tell stories?* As they engage with this question, they may conduct a radio interview, tell stories about the environment, or make a history picture book. And in the same unit, our 2nd grade students will consider the essential question, *How can a story change depending on who tells it?* They may create a family history map, a then-and-now collage, or describe in their own words how to keep an ice cube cool. Every student, regardless of their grade level, will also have the option of creating an inquiry project of their own.

Our 6th grade literacy teachers will continue piloting *StudySync* in the new year. This is an online balanced literacy program for middle school students that uses 21st century tools to support student achievement. This includes 144 character 'blasts' a la old school twitter, peer reviews via student-to-student posts, on-line reading and annotating using tech-tools, online research and writing, as well as online assessments.

In the new year, we can expect to see students across the district continuing to take virtual trips around the globe with the use of the already wildly successful Google Expedition program. In this program, students are able to virtually visit locations on Earth and beyond. As a former music major, my favorite expedition in recent weeks was the one Village music students took to the stage of Carnegie Hall! if only it were that easy to get to Carnegie Hall!

In anticipation of the coming months, teachers at Indian Hill met this month with our Math and Science Supervisor, Mrs. Killean, to develop evidence-based, thought provoking assessment questions to support our new science program. This was an enriching professional development experience that yielded impressive results which will be put into place in the new year.

Meanwhile, in the jam packed Technology Education cycle course at Satz, the new year will see 7th graders designing and creating electric cars to learn about gear ratios. They will then race their cars against each other. In 8th Grade Tech Ed., students will use simple machines to design and create Roman onagers to launch a marshmallow. They too will compete with their classmates to see which design can launch a marshmallow the furthest.

Supervisor of Technology, Engineering and Media Centers has shared a great many coming attractions from our media centers with me.

In January, students at Village in kindergarten and grade one will be learning about staying safe online through Common Sense Media, learning to code by using Beebot robots and human robots, and participating in various STEM activities.

Students in the 2-3 library will be continuing to learn how to use online databases for research as well as other tools like Atlases and Almanacs. They will also continue to explore how to effectively use Pebble Go, Explora, and World Book Online to locate information. Remember when going to the library meant learning the Dewey Decimal system and selecting independent reading books?

Michael Northrop, author of the recently released sci-fi/horror/historical fiction mashup (yes mash-ups are not just for music anymore) will be visiting Indian Hill on January 10th. Students will be able to enter a writing contest to win a chance to eat lunch with him. Meanwhile our Indian Hill Media Specialist Mrs. McTague has been working with Science classes and teachers to investigate STEM activities that were purchased through a grant from the HFEE. This exciting work will continue in the new year.

In an ongoing Digital Literacy initiative that will take us into the new year, Indian Hill students are working on Infographics to educate their peers on digital literacy topics and when they return in January they will also be starting a unit on coding.

Based on recent concerts, it's clear that we can expect more great performances in 2018, and in the new year, several of our students will perform in highly select groups such as All-Shore Intermediate Band, which will include Indian Hill flutist Rebecca Wang, Region Symphonic Band, which will include HHS senior Jessica

Kuleshov on the Bass Clarinet, and the All Shore Orchestra which will include Satz eighth grader Rayan Jawa, who incidentally earned the second highest score of all violists who auditioned and thus will sit second chair in the viola section.

A revamped Program of Studies for Holmdel High School and William R. Satz is something to look forward to in the new year, as these are in the final stages of development and will be published in January. These guides will include, for the first time, a section on our new Career Concentration program at HHS. These documents will be posted on our website once they are finalized.

The BOE C&I Committee reviewed and is recommending approval for 2 new courses for further development at HHS in 2018, Geometry Lab, an extra period of study of the subject to support students who need it and Medical Terminology, the second course in our Rutgers Health Care coursework.

We can expect continued success in academic competitions given that our 6th grade students who participated in the Continental Math League just tied for 1st in the nation (out of 224 schools),

We also look forward to continued good news in the new year from our Robotics team, as the team is already off to a great start. The team participated in a qualifier in Williamstown, NJ called the Southern Scuffle where they finished in the second-place alliance! The team has also traveled to several other meets, including the Brunswick Eruption at North Brunswick High School and Fall Harvest VII at Marlton High School. The team made it to semifinals in each. I am sure we can expect more exciting news from Team Robotux in the future.

We are also looking forward to Satz student William Liu competing in the 34th Annual Asbury Park Press/Home News Tribune Spelldown as the Holmdel representative. William won the school competition earlier this month.

And of course we look forward to continuing to congratulate the Hornets of the Month from Indian Hill such as December's winners, Michael Marzarella and Bella Buffa from 4th Grade, Noah Ochojski and Elena Chu from 5th Grade and Anthony Paulino and Myra Dutt from 6th Grade and to recognizing our Satz Students of the Month as we do tonight for December's winners Brendan Worobel, Annie Wang, Samantha Youssef, Jonathan Wen and Trinity Han.

In 2018, our teachers and students will begin to develop and submit their proposals for innovative practices they hope will be funded through HFEE mini-grants. The application information is being sent out this week and applications will be due at the end of February.

In alignment with our Character Education district goal, committees at each school have collaborated, and are embarking on enhancements to programs throughout the district, including the Buddy Benches at Village (although I can tell you from personal experience it might be a good idea to wait to seek a buddy using this tool until the benches warm up in the spring) !

Indian Hill School looks forward to celebrating themes for each month in the new year, such as February, which will be known as "Open Your Heart" to others Month and April, which will be known as "Showering" each other with kindness Month. Character education lessons will be taught during Library period each month.

And at Satz and the HS Complex, our new Peer Leaders program that you have heard about before will continue and in 2018, Holmdel High School, in conjunction with the Middle States Association, will conduct a comprehensive investigation into the level of school connectivity felt by all stakeholders in our school community. Among others, some key questions we will seek the answers to will include, "What exactly defines 'school spirit'?" and "What steps can we take to cultivate it in our school community?" We expect to, by June 2018, collect data, conduct focus group sessions, report our findings and develop action plans based on those findings.

Of course we are looking forward to an exciting Winter Sports season for our Hornets. Winter Sports are already underway and we look forward to a successful season for all of our student athletes. Early success such as the wins by Dean Gallo and Nick Ammirati at the Ewing High School Tournament (with Nick being named tournament Outstanding Wrestler) are early indicators of more good news to come from the Athletics department this winter!

Finally, we can all look forward to some visual signs of our moving forward to realize our 2020 vision later this spring as planning is well underway with the various projects. Please visit our 2020 website for updates.

And of course this is also the time of year for expressing our gratitude, and as I do every month, I would like to thank our parent groups for their support. Thanks to the PSA for coordinating with Mrs. Kenney on a successful Giving Tree initiative again this year. The PSA also worked with teacher representatives from the building to host a successful Barnes and Noble Night for our families. This is one of the great fundraisers they run during the year, as well as it being a nice opportunity for families to enjoy a night out.

A big thank you to our PLG for assisting with the funding of an amazing assembly program by Dr. Michael Fowlin, "Even Small Crayons Make Bright Marks," which I previewed in my report last month.

Thanks to both the PSA and the PLG and their volunteers for organizing successful Holiday Shoppes at Village and Indian Hill.

Thanks to the PSG for their constant support of the Box Tops for Education Contest and the monthly winners and to the PTSO for their sponsorship of a raffle for reserved parking spaces - these are always "hot" items for our students, and the funds raised through both of these endeavors will help the PSG and PTSO to help the students and staff - a win, by any measure!

On behalf of the administration, faculty, staff and students of our great school district, I wish you all a wonderful Winter Break, I look forward to all of the great things that are ahead for our students in the new year.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Robert A. McGarry". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being the most prominent.

Robert A. McGarry, Ed.D.  
Superintendent of Schools