

INSIDE SOMERSET / SOMERSET BERKLEY

Superintendent
Jeffrey Schoonover
schoonoverj@sbregional.org

Somerset Public Schools
Somerset Berkley Regional
School District
580 Whetstone Hill Road
Somerset, MA 02726
508-324-3100

www.somersetschools.org
www.somersetberkley.org



@schoonoverjeff
@somerset_ps

A Message from the Superintendent

We are approaching the end of the first quarter of the school year. Leaves have changed colors, middle school and high school teachers have completed parent teacher conferences, MCAS results have been released, and other signs of autumn surround us — summer is now a distant memory. As we move deeper into the school year, I want to address a topic that I have been wrestling with recently — homework over vacations.

I consider extended vacations (Thanksgiving, Christmas/New Year's, February, and April) a time for students and staff alike to relax, refresh, and enjoy the time away from school with family and friends. Each year, we experience more students with diagnoses of stress and anxiety. School is not often the sole reason students experience increased levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, but we may help them alleviate these levels by giving them a few periods of time during the year that they do not have to worry about school assignments.

A notable exception is an extended project that overlaps a school vacation. For instance, if a middle school student is assigned a project in early December with a due date of January 5, a procrastinator may have no options but to complete that assignment during vacation. Another exception is a reasonable expectation for students in Advanced Placement classes at SBRHS to prepare for AP exams that are scheduled shortly after students return from April vacation.

I am not asking teachers to stop assigning homework. I am an advocate for the use of meaningful homework that allows students to independently practice what they have learned in school and to prepare for upcoming assessments. As we increasingly “flip” our classrooms, viewing videos and reading documents are necessary tasks that will better prepare students for the next day's lesson. Homework also provides students with opportunities for time management, organization, and responsibility. However, I hope that during these vacations, students and their families can share their time together without the burden of worrying about what work needs to be completed by Monday morning.

Sincerely,
Jeff Schoonover

Parent Academy

During the 2016-2017, we started a Parent Academy for families. This included a series of presentations addressing topics such as social media use, drug abuse, and student stress, anxiety, and depression. This will continue during the 2017-2018 and I would like feedback from parents about what topics would be of interest to you.

Click [here](#) to be directed to a 3-question survey to gather input from families about topics of interest to you and the best format to receive that information.

Upcoming Events

November 7: No School for Students (Staff Professional Development)

November 10: No School (Veterans' Day)

December 11, 14: Elementary Parent-Teacher Conferences

School Cancellation

Unlike snowstorms, which are largely predictable and provide fair warning, and have a reasonably expected duration, power outages are not very predictable. As parents are aware, I make every effort to make a decision the evening before, which causes the least disruption to you and allows families to make plans for the next day. Sometimes that is simply not possible, as was the situation today.

Power was out in three of our five buildings, but they were all on back-up generators. Two schools had power throughout the storm. While the high school had power through its generator, I learned after 6:00 AM that none of our toilets or sinks at the high school, which are hands-free, automatic systems, were working. While our students and teachers could work with reduced lights in classrooms, I could not reasonably send 1,100+ students and staff to a building with no working bathrooms. Additionally, while having operational refrigeration using the generator, the North Elementary School's kitchen ovens were not working. Since North prepares the meals for each of our elementary schools, if the power outage persisted, we would not have been able to supply breakfast or lunch to our elementary students. Upon learning these details, I made the decision to cancel school. I apologize for the inconvenience this may have caused you.

MCAS

The Spring 2017 Next-Generation MCAS student results (grades 3-8) were either mailed home this past week or were sent home with elementary students on Friday. I hope you find the summary information provided by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education useful, as they show how your child(ren) performed on both the ELA and Mathematics portions of the test. You will notice a few changes this year with the updated assessment: achievement levels now classified as exceeding, meeting, partially meeting, or not meeting expectations, rather than the previously used advanced, proficient, needs improvement, and warning/failing. Please remember that MCAS is only one measure of a student's academic performance and no single test can determine a student's full understanding, knowledge, or ability. We use MCAS along with other assessments in school (teacher-generated, STAR, and other national assessments) to identify students strengths and areas for growth in order to deliver support and to personalize their learning.

