



Superintendent's Update

March 13, 2018

Dear Shrewsbury Families & Community Members,

Well, crossing my fingers didn't work, as we are in our sixth snow day of the year, and this one is a doozy. Spring will come soon, though, and I expect that you, like me, are looking forward to sunshine and warmer weather.

Please take some time on this snowy day to read the information below, including:

- The myth of “only five snow days”
- Our schools' plans for the student “walkout” tomorrow, March 14
- Recommendations to the School Committee regarding fees and tuitions for next year
- Several student successes!

The myth of “only five snow days”

Going back to my own childhood, when I learned if there was no school by listening for the Clinton Fire Station's horn to blast the code (yes, a small town), or by turning on the TV and waiting for “Clinton Public Schools – Closed” to scroll across (no Twitter or automated phone calls!), I remember that there was something about a maximum of five snow days that had to be made up at the end of the year. Since today is our sixth (!) snow day this year, I've had enough questions about the “five snow days” that I wanted to clarify for everyone. Here's the scoop:

- **Massachusetts public school districts must build in *at least five***

snow days prior to July 1 in their official calendars. For example, for this year a district couldn't have created a calendar that had an originally scheduled last day of school any later than June 22, as the remaining five weekdays prior to June 30 would need to be held in reserve for snow days.

- **Every Massachusetts public school district is required to hold at least 180 days of school**, during which middle/high schools must have 990 hours and elementary schools 900 hours of “instructional time.” If due to snow or other circumstances, a district needed to close so often that would make it impossible to fit in 180 school days prior to June 30, the state expects the district to hold school on April vacation days and/or Saturdays in order to fulfill the 180 day requirement by June 30. (A waiver might be granted if a district loses a day after April vacation, for example due to a power outage or other circumstance).
- In Shrewsbury, since we begin prior to Labor Day and don't take as many professional development days and holidays as many other districts, our original last day of school was June 13. **This means that this year our schools could absorb as many as 12 snow days and still meet the 180 day requirement**, without going to school on vacation days or Saturdays! Let's just hope that we're done after this storm!
- **If today is our last snow day, the last day of school for Grades 1-11 will be Thursday, June 21.** For Kindergarten, it would be Tuesday, June 19. For Grade 12, it remains Friday, May 25 (members of the SHS Class of 2018 are big fans of snow days!).
- You can always check for information on the last day of school as well as **this year's and next year's school year calendars at [this link](#).**

Our schools' plans for the student “walkout” tomorrow, March 14

As I communicated previously, a significant national movement is underway to amplify the voices of students on the topic of school safety, including a proposed “national school walkout” to take place on March 14. Over the past weeks, our school principals at SHS, Oak, and Sherwood have spoken with student, staff, and parent representatives to consider how to best determine how this will be addressed in our high school and middle schools (elementary schools are anticipated to have “business as usual” tomorrow). Please note the following summary of what is expected tomorrow, the details of which Mr. Bazydlo, Dr. Jones, and Dr. Lizotte have already communicated to their school communities via email:

- Student voices were key regarding how each of the three schools will approach the “walkout”; the older the students, the more involved they were for the planning. Each principal reports that students who have been part of these conversations have been very thoughtful and mature about the issues.
- Students at each school will have a clear option of whether to remain in class or to attend an assembly in their school’s gymnasium.
- Student voices will be included in each school’s plan for tomorrow, with the primary focus being on honoring the victims and school community of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School and the issue of safe schools. Examples at the different schools include reading the victims’ names, observing moments of silence, and signing banners of support to send to Douglas High School. These ceremonies will also reinforce messages of kindness and creating stronger, safer school communities by ensuring school cultures of respect that include all students. (Note: Sherwood’s approach will not specifically mention the Parkland tragedy, as we know some students in 5th and 6th grade are unaware of it).
- Staff at SHS, Oak, and Sherwood will supervise students, whether

those who choose to remain in class or those who opt to attend the student assemblies in the gymnasiums. Staff are not “participating” in any type of “walkout” or demonstration.

- Parents and outside visitors will not be part of these activities or allowed to observe, as this is a student event. Given the high profile of the date and time of the national “walkout,” additional police presence will be in place on the middle and high school campuses as an added safety measure should any students choose to physically leave the building (which is not part of any of the plans).
- Parents of SHS, Oak, and/or Sherwood students who have specific questions about those schools’ plans should contact the respective principals.

I commend our principals for empowering our students who wish to honor the Parkland victims and community and to be heard on the issue of school safety, as they have shaped what I think is a thoughtful and reasonable approach to this unprecedented situation. I look forward to what I believe will be a poignant reminder of the importance of keeping our nation’s children safe and sound.

Recommendations to the School Committee regarding fees & tuitions for next year

At the last School Committee meeting on February 28, the administration presented various information and potential options regarding fees and tuition rates for next year (see the links [here](#) for more information). At tomorrow evening’s School Committee meeting (7:00pm at Shrewsbury High School), I will be recommending the following adjustments for 2018-2019:

- An increase of the bus fee from \$275 to \$300 per student (9% increase) to help absorb the increased cost of a newly-bid busing contract (the bid includes a 17% increase in busing costs). Expected additional revenue would be approximately \$62,000. (Note: the full cost of

in-district regular bus transportation paid by the school budget this year is about \$2.3 million, with about \$635,000 of that financed through bus fees; the other \$1.67 million comes from the school district budget).

- An increase in the Oak activity fee from \$50 to \$75 to enable more after-school activities, including more athletic opportunities (no change recommended to Sherwood activity fee of \$50 and SHS activity fee of \$100). Expected additional revenue would be approximately \$11,000.
- An increase in the SHS athletics fee from \$300 to \$310 per season to address cost inflation, including higher transportation costs. Expected additional revenue would be approximately \$11,000.
- A 3% increase in all preschool program tuition rates to address increasing program costs for staffing and materials (for example, for the three-day per week program tuition an increase from \$2,663 to \$2,743). Expected additional revenue would be \$15,750.
- A 10% *decrease* in full-day kindergarten tuition, from \$4,000 to \$3,700 annually. This is intended to begin a “step down” of tuition over the next several years, in order to meet the School Committee’s goal of providing full-day kindergarten at no charge to all students if and when the new Beal School opens. Until that time, we remain one of a very small number of Massachusetts school districts that does not provide full-day kindergarten for all students, and one of a small number who still charge tuition. The reduction in tuition receipts of approximately \$63,000 next year will be absorbed through the projected balance in our tuition account, so it will have no impact on next year’s appropriated budget.

Neither the School Committee nor I like the idea of charging fees and tuitions, but this is a common practice across most public school districts in Massachusetts for financial reasons. If you have feedback that you would

like to send to the School Committee and/or me regarding these recommendations in advance of tomorrow evening's meeting, please email schoolcommittee@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us and/or jsawyer@shrewsbury.k12.ma.us.

Student successes

Shrewsbury students have been recognized for many recent successes. Here are a few highlights:

- **SHS Robotics wins Chairman's Award – again:** At the recent district competition at WPI, the SHS Robotics team earned this award for the third time in the last four years. The Chairman's Award is considered the most prestigious as it is for "greatest impact within their community and how they are helping to spread STEM education and principles."
- **SHS Boys Track relay team wins state & New England Championships:** Shrewsbury High School (SHS) student athletes Joe O'Brien (Junior), Joe Young (Senior), Dasani Prideaux (Senior), and Doug Dias (Senior) were Division 1 State Champions in the 4 x 200 relay in a school record time of 1:30.59, and they also won the New England championship at a subsequent meet. They recently competed at the indoor nationals, with Chris Matthews (Junior) returning from injury, where they finished 13th while beating their own record with a 1:30.06.
- **SHS Speech & Debate wins three major tournaments:** The SHS Speech & Debate team has won three major tournaments and placed second in another during this year's very successful season thus far. Additionally, over 30 members have individually qualified for nationals.
- **Visual Arts award winners:** Over 40 students at the elementary, middle, and high school level had pieces accepted for display at the Worcester Art Museum for their Youth Art Month celebration.

Additionally, the following SHS students earned prestigious awards in the annual regional Scholastic Art Awards: **Gold Key:** Karen Hou, Painting; **Silver Key:** Taylor Brown, Mixed Media; Karen Hou, Drawing and Illustration; and Zachary St. Pierre, Drawing and Illustration; **Honorable Mention:** Isha Chug, Painting; Allison Connolly, Drawing and Illustration; Stephanie Huang, Mixed Media; Lanna Wang, Painting.

- **Performing Arts honors:** 32 SHS band, orchestra, and choral students were selected by audition for the All-Central District Festival, while four choral students further qualified to perform in the All-State Festival : Erin Matozel, Grade 12, Soprano; Angela Rezuke, Grade 11, Alto; Harini Shanmugam, Grade 11, Alto, and Matthew Slaughter, Grade 12, Tenor. The SHS competitive play made it to the semi-finals of the state drama festival, where the following students were selected for All-Star awards at either or both performances in qualifying and semifinals: Emily Brann: Set Design & Stage Manager; John Barrett: Excellence in Acting & Excellence in Original Music Composition; Michaela Kelly: Excellence in Acting; Mikaila Mack, Excellence in Acting; Erik Bakken, Excellence in Acting; and Sam Brownstein: Excellence in Acting. Additionally, the 50th anniversary of the SHS Musical was this past weekend, where the performances of *All Shook Up* were superb!
- **SHS Hockey playoff wins:** The SHS Girls Hockey team advanced to the final eight in the state tournament before losing a heartbreaking double overtime game, while the SHS Boys Hockey team won the district championship for the second year in a row to be one of the final four in the state. Good luck the rest of the way!

Thanks for your continued support of excellence in education in the Shrewsbury Public Schools!

Respectfully,

Joe Sawyer
Superintendent of Schools