



# The Communicator

Simsbury Public Schools—Continuously Improving Teaching & Learning • Spring 2020



Dear Neighbor,  
These are unprecedented times.  
More than ever,  
we are grateful to  
all of the families

who gave us patience, flexibility, and partnership. Even in less challenging times, we know we cannot do what we do without you.

Since schools closed on March 13th, our district has shown an amazing capacity to mobilize quickly and adapt to changing circumstances. We were able to launch our Distance Learning Plan almost immediately (see details of this plan in this issue). We began with a survey to find out how many of our students might not be prepared with the appropriate technology tools to engage in Distance Learning. Within a week after schools closed, we had gotten Chromebooks and/or wifi hotspots into the hands of any student who needed them. We are so proud of the educators who quickly mastered new skills to deliver education remotely, and in many cases, provide comfort to children who were missing their friends and teachers.

As we continue to adapt and change with this pandemic, we appreciate the tremendous support of Simsbury families and the community. Please continue to stay safe and healthy.

Matthew T. Curtis, Superintendent  
Susan Salina, BOE Chair

## Watch Email for Your Snapcode!

**To All Parents/Guardians:** Our annual online student information verification system will open in late July. **PowerSchool Enrollment** (formerly called InfoSnap) is used to verify demographic, emergency, and medical information for your child. In late July an email from your child's school will contain instructions and a secure "snapcode" for your child's information. Please monitor your In Box (and check your spam folder) so you don't miss this important communication.

## Simsbury Public Schools Adapt to Pandemic

Visit our [Distance Learning Website](https://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us)

Go to <https://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us> and click on "Distance Learning"

Prior to the close of schools on March 13th, principals, department supervisors, curriculum and special education leaders, and others worked together to develop Simsbury's Distance Learning (DL) Plan, the goal of which is to continue to engage students in learning in an equitable and continuous manner. A DL website was created to house all of the information related to the plan, as well as a list of family support resources, information on Grab and Go meals, technology support, and more.

### Distance Learning Plan & Purpose

The plan's developers sought to provide predictable, sustainable, and authentic structures for learning. Preserving a sense of community was a primary goal, thus it promotes connections—teacher to class, student to student, teacher to families. Driven by grade level/content standards, the plan provides for review of recently taught skills as well as introduces new learning.

### K-12 Tools for Learning

Technology is at the center of our DL plan. Just a few of the technology platforms our educators are employing are SeeSaw for grades K-2; Google Classroom for grades 3-12; Screencastify for making videos; Flip Grid for short, video-based discussions on classroom topics; Explain Everything, for students and teachers to share thoughts and ideas in real time; and Google Meet for face-

to-face contact with students and families.

### Structure of Learning

For elementary, we distributed a suggested daily schedule, including guidelines for activities and breaks for children throughout the day. Suggested supplementary activities related to "specials" (art, music, physical education, and Spanish) were posted on the DL website. Each week included teacher instruction videos. Math and English language arts coaches provided support, including standards/learning targets, suggestions for lessons/materials, and grade level Google Hangouts to review learning goals. Via email communications with families, elementary principals encouraged students to be self-directed and motivated learners.

At the secondary level, it is fortunate that SHS and HJMS had fully implemented "1:1 Chromebook Program for Anytime Anyplace Learning" prior to the pandemic, so students were already familiar with the educational online resources and tools harnessed for distance learning. HJMS's plan embraced the school's tenets of Connections, Challenge, and Character. At both SHS and HJMS, weekly planning involved synchronous learning (when students learn at the same time, such as with video conferencing or live chat) as well as asynchronous learning (when students learn at different

*Distance Learning—continued on page 2*

## Simsbury BOE 2020-2021 Budget Summary

Due to circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic, and in accordance with the Governor's Executive Order No. 71, a budget referendum was not held this year. Final authority for adoption of the 2020-2021 budget was granted to the Board of Finance in accordance with the executive order and by resolution of the Board of Selectmen on May 11th. On May 19th, the Board of Finance adopted a Board of Education budget of \$72,309,061, which represents \$1,428,083 in new dollars, or a 2.01 percent increase. The new mill rate will be 37.09, a decrease of .61 percent.

times, such as with email or blog posts).

### Special Education

Distance learning presents hurdles for special education, but guided by the goal of supporting *all* students in their learning, special education staff work with general educators and implement IEPs to the greatest extent possible. Psychologists, social workers, and school counselors are available to address mental health. Students are supported by paraeducators, nurses, tutors, and instructional technology specialists.

### Grading

End-of-year grading plans have been designed to articulate student learning for the 2019-20 school year and are designed to capture student achievement while at the same time respecting our current reality.

Elementary report cards will not include grades (E,M,A,B) for the third trimester. All indicators addressed during distance learning will be coded as DL and indicators not

## Raising Awareness About the Importance of Reading

February 5th was World Read Aloud Day (WRAD), an opportunity for people around the world to celebrate the joy of reading aloud and advocate for literacy as a basic human right. Although WRAD has been going on for several years, 2020 marked the first time we have officially celebrated this event as a district. Planned experiences were implemented at all schools. An impressive number of SHS students—180!—visited K-5 classrooms to lead read-aloud activities. Said Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning **Erin Murray**, “Providing learning opportunities that connect our high school students with our elementary students is so powerful! The excitement from the younger students when working with the visiting high school kids was evident and caused everyone in the room to be so highly engaged!”



*Amoya Francis and Lauren Ampadu read 'The Prouddest Blue, by Olympic medalist and social justice advocate Ibtihaj Muhammad, to 'Tootin' Hills fourth graders.*

addressed will be marked NA (not applicable). K-6 teachers will provide comments aligned to the grade level standards taught during the third trimester through common learning experiences. Feedback will focus on a student’s level of engagement, completion of tasks, and progress toward specific learning goals.

Our 7-12 approach includes the grading of key assignments that demonstrate mastery of learning targets identified by teachers for each course, with no final exams. These assignments will receive numerical grades that will count toward their end-of year grade. As of June 1st, families can elect a Pass/Incomplete option if this DL grade negatively impacts the final grade. This option is in place for all courses to ensure that no student’s final grade is compromised because of circumstances related to DL that are out

of their control.

### Safety & Security

Health and safety of students and staff is a top priority. Custodians work staggered shifts to clean and disinfect all areas. Neil Sullivan, Director of Personnel, and Mark Critz, Director of Safety and Security, participate in weekly Public Safety Committee meetings facilitated by the Board of Selectmen. Playgrounds, fields, and basketball courts have been closed, with large signs placed at school entrances to ask for public cooperation with social distancing.

Nutrition services continues to provide meals for families who need them. Health services inventoried personal protective equipment (PPE) and donated masks and gloves to Simsbury Police, Simsbury Volunteer Ambulance, the Visiting Nurses Association, and Hartford Hospital.

## Stephen Patrina Appointed SHS Principal



On February 25th, the BOE appointed **Stephen Patrina** to the position of SHS Principal. He served as interim principal since July 2019.

In January 2020, staff members, parents, and students participated in focus group discussions about the position. The group’s articulated needs for a new principal matched Patrina’s qualifications perfectly. An SHS graduate (Class of 1980), he returned to his alma mater in 1985 to become a social studies teacher. Patrina contributed to the life of the school as a class advisor and multi-sport coach, including a successful stint leading the program for varsity boys’ basketball. In 2001 he accepted

his first formal leadership position as the Department Supervisor for social studies, and just over two years later, he joined the team as an Assistant Principal. During his interviews with administrators and the BOE, Patrina enthusiastically communicated his vision to collaborate with faculty on a number of current initiatives and challenges: developing the structure and curriculum for the new Capstone requirement, continued emphasis on the school’s work related to equity, implementation of a new schedule for 2020-21, and examining the factors that contribute to student stress. Patrina and his wife Andrea are the proud parents of three SHS graduates—Nicole (2011), Allison (2013), and Jack (2015).

## School Facilities Plan Moves Forward

Work continues to move forward on the School Facilities Master Plan & Reconfiguration Study. During Phase 1, begun in April 2019, existing conditions were analyzed and results shared with the public. The consensus from surveys, studies, and direct input from the community throughout additional phases of the plan’s formulation was that our schools are outdated and at capacity, in particular Latimer Lane. There was little support for either building a new Grade 5-6 school or taking a status quo approach with maintenance projects only.

On May 26th, the BOE unanimously voted to direct Tecton Architects to complete the long-range facilities master plan for

the Simsbury Public Schools by prioritizing the option of a sixth grade addition to HJMS and a renovate-as-new project at Latimer Lane as the first capital improvement projects in the timeline. Once the formal plan is completed, the conversation will turn to the Board of Selectmen and Board of Finance for an analysis of the town’s ability to fund identified projects over the long term. Due to the economic impact of COVID-19, the originally presented timeline for these projects may need to be altered. More detailed communication from Superintendent Matt Curtis will be forthcoming. For more information, please see the website:

<https://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us/facilities-study>

# Achievements

● SHS senior **Sarah Ackels** was named a Connecticut Distinguished Finalist for the Prudential Spirit of Community Award. A Prudential representative presented her with a bronze medal on March 10th. Honoring students in grades 5-12, the awards program is considered the U.S.'s largest youth recognition program based exclusively on volunteer community service. Between 2 and 10 Distinguished Finalists are selected in each state, depending on the state's population.

● For the fifth year in a row, Simsbury has been honored with the "Best Communities for Music Education" (BCME) designation from The NAMM Foundation for commitment to and support of music education.

● Architecture students competed in the Student Design competition at the CT Home Show sponsored by the Connecticut Builders & Remodeling Association (CBRA) of Central CT. In a repeat of the past few years, SHS students swept the top award categories. Awardees were seniors **Owen Wollenberg** (1st place), **Angelina Alessandrini** (2nd place), and **Amoya Francis** (3rd place); junior **Keeley Flaherty** (4th place); and senior **Samantha Fong** (honorable mention). Their teacher, **Dr. Wendy Ku**, was awarded Special Congressional Recognition for "consistently dedicating time to ensure that SHS students not only



SHS senior Sarah Ackels displays her bronze medal.

participate, but often place among the top in the state at the Annual Student Home Design Competition."

● The Connecticut Council of Language Teachers (CT COLT) awarded SHS World Language Department Supervisor **Stephanie Duchesneau** the prestigious 2019 Pegasus PRIDE Award, which recognizes and highlights "some of the many dedicated world language teachers...who, day in and day out, work hard in their classrooms to promote the development of foreign language and cultural skills among their students."

● In March SHS introduced a new National Society, the **Computer Science Honor Society**, into which there were 17 newly inducted student members.

● A total of 39 SHS student-athletes received postseason recognition for outstanding accomplishments during the 2019-20 winter season. **WRESTLING All-State: Ty Finn. All-CCC: Tyler Coiro, Jack Cunningham, Cael Finn, Ty Finn, Tommy Guilfoyle, Nathan Hotchkiss, John Mairano, D'Sean Martin, Saul Pera, Noah Pryzbek** **GIRLS INDOOR TRACK All-State: Martina Benedetti, Olivia Birney, Leila Gary, Jada Mars, Elsa Martin All-CCC: Martina Benedetti, Olivia Birney, Amanda Derway, Leila Gary, Jada Mars, Elsa Martin** **GIRLS ICE HOCKEY All-State: Grace Melanson All-CCC: Mackenzie Chapman, Abigail Harris, Mackenzie Lynch, Anna Melanson, Grace**

**Melanson, Molly Walsh** **BOYS SWIMMING All-CCC: Liam Dunnigan, Ryan Ho, Jackson Matyczky, Colin Russell, Malaki Tatum, Erik Winkler.** **BOYS INDOOR TRACK All-State: Miguel Gutierrez, Noah Pennington, Shamar Sutton, Owen Wollenberg All-CCC: Miguel Gutierrez, Kyle Paterson, Noah Pennington, Shamar Sutton** **BOYS ICE HOCKEY All-State: Cole Chapman All-CCC: Jackson Bulger, Cole Chapman, Rocco Cirilli, Scott Simeon** **BOYS BASKETBALL All-CCC: Ian Calabrese** **GIRLS BASKETBALL All-CCC: Mary McElroy**



To highlight and recognize the Class of 2020, on Friday, May 8, 2020, the scoreboard lights on Holden Field were lit up from 20:20pm (8:20pm) for 20 minutes.

## Measuring Student Success

Connecticut's Next Generation Accountability System goes beyond measuring student success purely by standardized test scores. Instead the State employs a set of 12 indicators that "help tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, careers and life." Here's how Simsbury stacked up against the top schools in its District Reference Group, DRG B.

2019 Accountability (DRG B)	
District	OutcomeRatePct
Greenwich	87.3
Simsbury	85.6
Avon	85.5
Granby	84.8
Brookfield	84.8
Woodbridge	84.7
Cheshire	84.5
Monroe	84.4
Guilford	84.4
Farmington	84.2
Trumbull	83.9
Region 15	83.7
Fairfield	83.5
Glastonbury	83.5

## HJMS Students Connect Kitchen to Community

In her kitchens at HJMS, Family & Consumer Sciences (FACS) teacher **Diane Rigby** teaches her eighth graders a lot more than the skills they need to handle food—she also teaches them that there are folks in their own community who are food insecure and that it is important to help out.

During the fall months and the recent holiday season, Diane's eighth grade "FACS for Life" students held bake sales to raise funds to donate to the Simsbury Food Pantry. They raised a total of \$236, and on February 20th, the director of the Simsbury Food Pantry, **Kristen Formanek**, stopped by to accept a giant check from

the group.

The Simsbury Food Pantry serves approximately 80 households per month, a statistic that may be surprising to some who view Simsbury as an overwhelmingly affluent community. Formanek marveled at how the HJMS students used their culinary skills to benefit others. She said, "With the food pantry, every family gets fresh food. These are families right here in town. It's a way we can really help."





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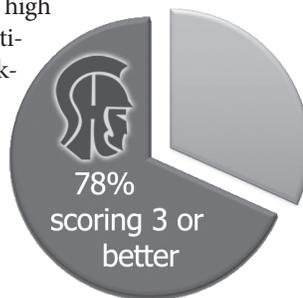
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## By the Numbers

- U.S. News & World Report reviewed more than **24,000** U.S. public high schools; **207** Connecticut schools made the rankings, with Simsbury High School **#6** of Best High Schools in Connecticut and **#326** nationally.

- Simsbury High School offers students **29** Advanced Placement (AP) courses. Of the **477** students who took **1,027** AP exams last year, **78%** of scores were 3 or better.



SHS Advanced Placement Exam Performance

## Community Supports STEM



On January 28th the BOE accepted a gift from the Ensign-Bickford Aerospace Defense Company (EBAD) to fund K-12 Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) programs. The donation will be **\$10,000** a year for **3** years. The primary objective of the grant is to support the Vision of the Graduate competencies of critical thinking, communication, collaboration, self-directed learning, innovation and global citizenship as learned and practiced through STEM. The total donation is **\$30,000**.

## Keep in Touch

### BOARD OF EDUCATION MEETINGS

The BOE meets on the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 6:30PM. Visit our website for upcoming dates and locations. Check out the BOE facebook page, too!

**IT'S ON THE SPS WEBSITE** Wondering about the availability of nutrition services? Looking for information on a board policy? Seeking the latest news on topics in education? Looking for a link to the PTO website? Want to find your child's English teacher in the faculty directory? It's all there on our website at [www.simsbury.k12.ct.us](http://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us) so bookmark the page and check back often!

**IN CASE OF EMERGENCY...** For weather-related or other emergency announcements, go to [www.simsbury.k12.ct.us](http://www.simsbury.k12.ct.us) and click on the Emergency link located at the top of the page.