

CHAPLIN ELEMENTARY SCHOOL NEWSLETTER

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May/June 2023

From the Principal...

K. Chavez

May/June 2023

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We have made it to the close of another school year. I wish I could say it has been a perfect year, but I know that perfection does not exist. It is our quest to reach great measures that keeps us in constant progress as each year brings new challenges.

This final newsletter for the 2022-23 school year will focus on the Parent/Guardian Survey that all families were invited to respond to. This year saw the most respondents since my arrival at CES in the 2018-19 school year. We had 70 participants.

Thank you for taking the time to let us know what your experience at CES was this year. Your feedback continues to provide us with information about areas for continued strengthening as well as letting us know where we are meeting your expectations. I will address comments that were made by some parents/guardians. Some of the comments that I am addressing had opposite feedback from other parents/guardians, but I want to ensure all of you that you are being listened to. I will share our reasoning and logic with you about some of our decisions and address areas where changes can be made. I will address comments that affect the whole school and not an individual. After reading through this newsletter, please contact me with further comments, questions, or concerns.

K Chavez

At Chaplin Elementary School, we strive to cultivate a strong, collaborative school climate and culture that is focused on high academic development and achievement for all students. – High standards for curriculum implementation and student learning.

Important Dates

- May 29—No School: Memorial Day
- SBA and NWEA throughout the month of May; please refer to the calendar attached to this newsletter
- Saturday, May 6—PTO Plant Sale & 6th Grade Car Wash
- Upcoming—CES Road Race



When children are conducting testing in the fall, it would be helpful for students to have access to additional help after school during the fall, instead of just towards the end of the school year when you folks are just trying to get your test scores to where they need to be at the state level.

CES conducts benchmark assessments throughout the school year in order to evaluate students' knowledge and skills relative to a set of long-term goals (end of year expectations). The information gained through the instruments used inform instructional planning and decision making. Students are expected to demonstrate the greatest knowledge and skill sets at the end of the school year. These results indicate the interrelationships between learning targets assessed within the classroom and the end of the year goals. However, many students demonstrate summer slide as they return to school at the end of the summer. For many students, there is a lack of reading, writing, and math during the vacation. Without the consistent retrieval practice, "mastery levels" will not remain the same as the school year begins. Fall assessments offer valid data about what the students have a deep understanding of and are able to retrieve without instruction just prior to an assessment.

Fall assessments, also known as benchmark assessments, inform us as to where our students are ready to begin their instruction at the beginning of the school year. We do not offer additional instruction time at the very beginning of the year as we want to determine what has really stuck with the students. In other words, what can they retrieve and apply on their own? This helps us to pinpoint areas that need to be retaught in order for students to be able to use the skill or knowledge with automaticity. These first assessments also help us to determine which students would benefit from additional instructional time with the interventionists.

The goal over the years has not been to jump to additional learning time for students by adding onto their school day at the beginning of the year. Our students, who are determined to be Tier 2 and 3 students in Math and/or Reading, will spend extra time with the interventionists or classroom teachers during the Math and/or Reading Intervention block. Our students are given the progress monitoring assessments again in January to see their present levels of mastery and what has been recouped. Students who are showing greater difficulty in advancing, due to a learning gap, are offered additional instruction time by being invited to participate in after-school learning. We offer these times to close instructional gaps and move students toward mastery of the end of year goals.

The scale for this survey needs to be redesigned. There is really no good way to measure incremental improvement year over year using this scale. Additionally you should allow a comment box for each question. Even when a question is marked favorable you would get way more context into why someone answered favorable and this helps to get specific feedback on what's going well.

We are looking to learn about what we have done for our families in this current year. Results cannot and should not always be compared from year to year. Similar to our assessment data, we cannot compare this year's X graders to last year's because they are two different totally different groups. Instead, it helps us to follow a grade of students across the years to understand the progress being made and the struggles that continue. For example, there may be a grade who has a very different reaction to one of the questions than the other grades. When this happens, I must look to find the cause of this for that particular grade. If the same issue comes up each year, I must again work to determine the reason for this.

If this parent has a suggestion to redesign the annual survey, I would appreciate hearing from them. I understand and agree with wanting more information from parents. I will include more places for people to comment. This may be a comment box at the end of the survey, or it could be a comment box after a subset of questions.

CES should subscribe to the prep test for NWEA in IXL, so parents can have their children practice exactly what will be on the test consistently throughout the school year.

Test prep should come from learning experiences. Over recent years, the certified staff at CES has spent time in professional learning to revise the way we use dialogue and questions in the classrooms across all subjects and grades. We have learned in-depth, the methods that foster effective student engagement in learning (engagements be defined as students taking responsibility for their choices, utilizing feedback, analyzing responses, and making revisions to one's thinking based on the evidence presented in class by others).

This may come as a surprise to parents, but teachers and other school staff are not allowed to look over our students' shoulders to read the passages and questions they are asked on the SBAC. When we receive student results, we know the standards addressed but not the specific questions in order to analyze. We have to strike a balance between how we prepare our students for the assessments and learning time. The teachers who administer the SBAC will give guidance to the students in terms of the assessment by practicing the question types through the online resources offered to us, but we do not want to put so much time into this that we begin to limit the amount of learning time for our students.

That being said, all of our students have IXL accounts and Lexia accounts through grade 3 with a select few still having the additional practice opportunities in grades 4-6. Our students use these programs during the school week but not necessarily daily. The teachers sent home usernames and passwords at the beginning of the school year in order for children to access these resources any time from home. If at any time parents are concerned about how to access these platforms, they should contact the child's teacher. In addition to these apps, your child's teacher may have the students use other apps for skill practice.

The following students have been chosen as a Soaring Eagle or Bucket Filler (kindergarten) during the months of May and June:

(K) Ivy, Courtney, Sadie, & Charlotte (1) Colton, Avery, Anna, Noah, & Jillian
(2) Catie, Kalina, & Tirza (3) Terralyn & Maximus (5) Jaharvi, Isaac F & Ambrosia (6) Sam

Congratulations!

The recipients for the Integrity and Cooperation Spirit Sticks for May and June are: K– Emma; G1– Ava, Noah D, Elise, Alyvia, Anna, & Colton; G2– Emmeline, Jackson, Connor, Catie, Catie, & Hinton G3– Maximus, Arianna, & Rena ; G4– Olivia & Zach; G5– Michael, Nora, & Andrew; G6– Aneila, Jayce, & Hadleigh

Then according to the handbook, "disciplinary measures will be appropriate to the offense". If the principal disciplined the students appropriate to the offense, then why do the same issues keep happening?

Student discipline will always be an area that has opposing opinions. A number of people believe it is as easy as telling a child not to do something. All parents know this is not the case. Over the past few years, children have regressed in social norms and self-regulation. In other words, the behaviors that allow a group of people to work with one another are not at the levels they used to be. For example, our youngest learners at CES do not have a strong sense of personal space or turn-taking. On any given day, I can be in the middle of a conversation with a student or giving directions to a group of students, and our learners (of any age) will not wait their turn to be heard. They will put their face right in mine if I happen to be at their level and start talking while I am in the middle of an interaction. If that does not work, these same students will tug at me and tap me to get my attention. Another recent example from our youngest learners was when a sandal fell off a foot. Rather than trying to put the sandal back on, the student broke out in tears because his sandal was not on his foot. He expected another person to put it on for him. Crying was his way to gain attention for someone to do what he ended up doing all by himself. When these interactions occur with peers, the result is often two learners arguing or acting out toward one another because many of the children do not have the patience, awareness to realize there is a different point of view, or the willingness to work with another person. We have an increase in the number of students who, when they do not get the answer they want, act out aggressively, attempt to elope from the environment (this could be storming off to the other side of the room, leaving the classroom, or even trying to get outside).

I recently saw the quote, "We need to stop just pulling people out of the river. We need to go upstream and find out why they're falling in." This is a direct connection to discipline- the ability of students to know the rules and apply the strategies and practices that allow them to manage their behavior. Behavior management should be about what is best for our students, not what is easiest or the most convenient for us. Every behavior is telling us something about that child, and handing out a punishment is not the way for children to learn self-regulation. It may stop a behavior in the moment, but it also sends a message to a child that they are bad.

We work hard to determine patterns of behavior and the function of the behavior. The staff at CES take time to explicitly teach about self-awareness and how to respond to different emotions and situations. Breaking a cycle of behavior takes time, and most often children's behaviors escalate in intensity and frequency when we work to extinguish such behaviors. Schools use planned distraction as a technique to get children to regroup, but then they must return to the demand at hand. Proactive practices that foster positive habits are tricky. I am sure you have all seen the parent who gives the screaming child their phone or a tablet to quiet them. That may be a short-term solution, but it is not a way to teach self-regulation. Instead, children learn that if they cry, they can get what they wanted. We need to teach children there are other ways to handle disappointment while be respectful to others who are with us.

This is not to say that all behaviors can be handled by disrupting the behavior. If a behavior is chronic or severe enough, it is dealt with in a more intense fashion. However, that does not mean that I will share such consequences with people outside of that particular student's family. All students deserve respect and to keep their dignity. Embarrassing a child is not going to teach them. Instead, restorative practices are used in attempts to break the cycle. We will support the victim as well as the student who needs greater accountability. We will try to restore a relationship but only at the time it is appropriate to do so. We will attempt to strengthen the student's skills and avoid punitive approaches that call for suspensions and detentions. We want students to regain self-control and problem solve, so we can keep them in school.

Safety: was dropping off my children as they were late, not knowing the instructions/rules of the school, I brought them into the office, got mixed in with a pack of children entering at the same time, ...being mistaken as a substitute teacher, thinking all the children were my class. I think the security is subpar considering other schools we have attended. AND Children need to know what to do if there is an active shooter in the building, for example. Hiding in the corner of the room is not acceptable anymore.

Safety is taken very seriously by the staff at CES. I am outside daily to receive the students when they arrive by parent/guardian drop off or school bus. I greet students and keep a watchful eye for adults nearing the entryway into the building. I wish I could say that I see and know every detail about what is happening at all times, but the truth is that when I am addressing student or bus driver concerns, I am certain to miss something. To this end, I have to trust parents/guardians have reviewed the CES Student/Parent Handbook as they signed off that they reviewed the material at the beginning of the school year. Parents should know what to do for morning drop off, and when they are not sure, they should approach me in the bus loop. At the same time, this parent should have been questioned and staff should not have jumped to a conclusion. I hope this parent will share with me the details that, in their opinion, make CES subpar. I know we can always improve in everything we do to make CES a safer place. I invite parents/guardians to give me their concerns as soon as something happens.

We practice safety drills at the school. The idea of a violent intruder incident is a scary thought for everyone. During my address to parents at this year's Back-to-School Night, I shared information from the summer audit performed by the CT State Police, local fire personnel, the first selectman, and school administration. TFC Craig Brezniak, the trooper in charge of the audit, had actionable feedback which we moved on. Some precautions are noticeable to a visitor while others are not. We do not share all parts of our safety plan with the public as this could give information to a person planning to act.

I have been involved in many ALICE "Train the Trainer" courses across the years. I train CES personnel yearly and design various scenarios, involving active violent intruders, for the CES staff to learn from. Our scenarios have involved active shooters or a violent intruder in different parts of the building or school grounds. These training situations are extremely emotional for staff and would not be replicated with elementary age children. Our steps for safety go beyond the idea of hiding in the corner and hoping nothing happens. We have enhanced lockdown protocols. We are prepared to do far more than what many people may think about. Again, we will not share all of our precautions because we are not looking to inform a potential intruder about what to expect. At the same time, we need to recognize the emotional maturity of our students when conducting drills. While we talk with the students about dangerous people that we need to protect ourselves from, it is a difficult topic for many students to process. I have conversations with grades/students that have questions about their safety and that of the rest of the people in school. I will always be honest and frank with the students.

I would have loved the opportunity to join my son for lunch or for my son to bring a special person to school (grandparent, uncle, etc).. if there could be a screening process for such activities to allow lunch visits.

I am so happy that parents have asked about this. Prior to the pandemic, this was a common occurrence. We will absolutely put this in place again. I cannot give you the logistics at this time, but I will make sure that something goes out at the beginning of the school year.

An online grade book would be a great service AND I would like more communication about what my child is learning in class on a regular basis. They don't bring home any work, so it would be nice to get an update once in a while aside from parent teacher Conference.

A few parents commented about an online gradebook. I would like to hear more reasoning from them about this. I can tell you from teaching in both elementary and intermediate schools, that there is a huge difference in the idea of a "gradebook" at the different levels. CES uses a standards-based grading system which does not use averages in order to arrive at grades for our students. Teachers assess and report on student progress in relation to end of the year goals. Teachers send home score sheets of various types for parents to see how their children do on curricular-based assessments. Teachers may also send work samples home as well as the rubric being used to guide and grade the student's use of skills and content. This work could come at the beginning of a unit, mid-unit, and end of the unit. The work samples can include work that students have revised to show their thinking after learning more about the skill or topic. I believe what needs to be considered in greater depth are the work samples that come home with the appropriate type of feedback that allow parents to gain an understanding of students' strengths and areas that are in need of improvement. This builds a portfolio of learning for our students. From experience, I can tell you that an online gradebook causes confusion as parents can see a grade but not the work. "Grades" alone do not give parents the information they need about their learners. We will work harder to inform our parents and guardians about progress being made throughout the school year.

Academics

If parents have questions that concern the curricula being taught and materials being used, they should first reach out to the child's teacher. If they continue to have questions, I ask that they bring their questions to me.

Our goals at CES include: solving problems using creativity, critical thinking, and effort; moving students toward asking their own questions in regards to their learning- this moves them toward being engaged learners; having students collaborate with one another in their quest to learn; to listen, engage, consider, revise, and converse about all topics; to use persistence and an open mindset when challenges occur; to use metacognition in their learning because when students understand their own working minds, they have the ability to transform their mental processes through planning, goal-setting, reflecting, be self-critical, self-monitor, self-assess, and self-regulate; AND to understand multiple perspectives. These are some of the academic goals but not all of them. Then there are all the social-emotional goals that are focused on each day.

Over recent years, we have brought new curricular materials to the school as they offer more rigor for our students. We have a new phonics program for all students in grades K-3. We have a math problem solving library that requires students to do much more than provide a numerical answer. We have a new reading program that not only brings rich texts to our children, but also focuses on student communication skills through discussion and writing. We are improving our science program by carefully selecting units of study that require students to think like scientists and engineers.

No matter the subject or grade, the teachers at CES are constantly seeking ways to help our students master the basics for their grade level as well as challenge them to think beyond the literal and the answers. We are preparing our students for a world in which they will have to be able to think on their feet and change their thinking as more evidence comes into play.

Curious about learning environment. A newsletter with pics of students at work may help give glimpses into classroom environment.

Grade level teachers send newsletters to the families of their students. The newsletters contain information about the topics of study currently underway, topics that may be just around the corner, and suggestions for parents/guardians to support their child's learning. Many of the teachers also use different apps that allow them to send pictures of students and receive comments from the parents/guardians who choose to use the app. I send a monthly newsletter that discusses current issues/topics at CES. If there are topics that parents would like me to address in a newsletter, please send it to me by the middle of any month. I will do my best to address it in a newsletter if it is for the good of all families.

Here are the list of questions with the percentages of responses. I have not included the questions that allow us to determine the demographics; however, I have included the grade levels.

I feel welcome at Chaplin Elementary School.

91.% Agree, 5.7% Neutral, 2.9% Disagree

My child's teacher communicates with me about school work and/or behavioral challenges, whether in person, by phone, by email, or in some other way.

85.7% Agree, 14.3% Neutral

My child's teacher communicates with me about positive accomplishments in the classroom.

71.4% Agree, 24.3% Neutral, 4.3% Disagree

I contact my child's teacher(s) to learn what I can do to help my child learn.

65.7% A few times during the school year, 18.6% Once a month, 10% I have not asked the teacher what I can do at home, 5.7% More than one a month

I know how my child is doing in school before I get my child's report card.

41.7% Agree, 32.9% Strongly Agree, 12.9% Neutral, 7.1% Disagree

My child's teachers treat me with respect.

95.7% Agree, 4.3% Neutral

I feel my child learned a lot in school this year.

54.3% Strongly Agree, 37.1% Agree, 5.7% Neutral, 2.9% Disagree

The school environment supports learning.

51.4% Strongly Agree, 40% Agree, 7.1% Neutral, 1.4% Disagree

My child has access to extra academic help outside the classroom when he/she needs it.

70% Agree, 25.7% I am not sure, 4.3% Disagree

The school and teachers plan activities to engage the families through academic activities during the school year.

91.3% Agree, 8.7% Disagree

My child is safe at school.

52.9% Agree, 34.3% Strongly Agree, 8.6% Neutral, 2.9% Disagree, 1.4% Strongly Disagree

My child has experienced bullying on more than one occasion during this school year. Bullying is defined as, "the REPEATED use of written, oral, or electronic communication directed at another student that causes physical or emotional harm to the targeted student or student property; places such student in reasonable fear of bodily harm or one's property; creates a hostile environment; infringes on the rights of such student at school; AND/OR substantially disrupts the education process. (more information in the CES Handbook found on the school website).

42.8%, Disagree, 25.7% Strongly Disagree, 20% Neutral, 8.5% Agree, 4.2% Strongly Agree

If my child has an issue at school, there is someone at school who can help.

90% Agree, 5.7% I am not sure, 4.3% Disagree

CES is sensitive to issues regarding race, gender, and disabilities.

42.9% Agree, 31.4% Strongly Agree, 20% Neutral, 4.3% Disagree, 1.4% Strongly Disagree

The school facilities are clean and well-maintained.

47.1% Strongly Agree, 47.1% Agree, 5.7% Neutral

The principal communicates with families about school expectations and about current events.

54.3% Strongly Agree, 42.9% Agree, 2.9% Disagree

I am satisfied with the response I get when I contact the CES office with questions and concerns.

54.3% Strongly Agree, 38.6% Agree, 5.7% Neutral, 1.4% Strongly Disagree

Did you attend Back to School Night this year?

62.9% Yes, 37.1% No

Did you attend both Parent/Teacher conferences this year?

91.4% Yes, 8.6% No

Did you attend the Family Reading Night in the Fall?

58.6% No, 41.4% Yes

Did you attend the Family Math Night in the Spring?

72.9% No, 27.1% Yes

Which grade was your child in during the 2022-2023 school year?

18.6% 2nd Grade, 15.7% 5th Grade, 15.7% 1st Grade, 12.9% Kindergarten, 12.9% 3rd Grade, 10% Pre-K, 10% 6th Grade, 4.3% 4th Grade