

Evesham Township School District

Meland Administration Building, 25 South Maple Avenue, Marlton, NJ 08053

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Dr. Justin Smith, Superintendent
Mr. John Recchinti, School Business Administrator

Ms. Danielle T. Magulick, Director of Curriculum & Instruction
Mr. Richard G. Dantine, Jr., Director of Personnel

February 5, 2021

Dear ETSD Families,

Highlights this week: Black History Month and Town Slogan Search. While I still wish the Eagles were playing this weekend, if there is a silver lining in the fact they're not, then maybe it's that indoor gatherings this weekend in our area may end up smaller and safer. Daily cases in our town are decreasing since the post-holiday bump, a sign to me that safety measures of social distancing, masks, keeping to our "pods," and more are working. This community effort helps our kids and schools. We got this, let's keep going!

Black History Month

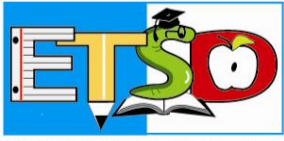
What an incredible privilege for me to get to email you each week. And I feel that privilege even more deeply today, my first weekly update during Black History Month. Black History Month has never felt more important to me than now, with increased awareness of and dialogue about social justice and our nation's history--past and present--and with our country's first black, female, and Asian-American Vice President, Kamala Harris, whose "first-ness" I mention not as anything political or partisan, but as a historical fact.

Every week I write, "Dear ETSD Families," and every word in that line is sacred to me. We are families, and we are a family. As I write it today, thinking about Black History Month, I think of untold families who were torn apart, sold away, mothers from children, husbands from wives, and, well, I just cry. That is part of our country's history. I feel so fortunate I can come home every day to my family. Just that privilege is something I try not to take for granted, similar to how when I wake up every day, I am thankful just for that.

Black History encompasses so much more than any one period of history, including slavery, one of the most egregious sins I can imagine. Black History is a multifaceted history of stories, contributions, positive influences on who we are today as fellow Americans that began well before our country was even an idea.

The topic of the pandemic can seem to take up all energy and attention, and it is true that the effort to keep learning going, in-person and remotely as effectively as possible, consumes inordinate resources. That effort, to provide as many opportunities as possible for all students, is connected with Black History Month, as it is an effort to provide equitable learning opportunities for all families, to provide choices and resources so all children can learn and grow, as education enables our children to achieve their dreams, our dreams for them.

That mission of equity and opportunity for all has been a driving force behind our decision to open for in-person learning on the first day of school in September, and to use a full day schedule, and to bring in our youngest grades and students in specialized programs for 4 days a week of in-person learning, and to use livestream to enable the most direct and timely support, and to continually seek to increase opportunities for in-person learning through the present moment and beyond. And more.



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This week, through our Board of Education's Community Engagement committee, along with several Board members, I had the opportunity to meet with DEON (Diversity & Equal Opportunity Network), a Marlton organization, and begin dialogue about topics relating to our district's work that will continue. It is vital for all our students to be seen, heard, and valued.

Among the individuals our students may learn about related to Black History, there is a local person I would like to share about here, dear to me, who may not otherwise be mentioned, with whom I got to work before joining our district, and who just recently retired after 62 years in education. And, through his work and person, he has impacted the lives of many people. I am talking about Dr. Lawyer Chapman, who held administrative positions in the Philadelphia School District and Cherry Hill Public Schools, and who was principal of the school that housed my office, giving us opportunities to connect.

Ms. Melanie Burney, journalist for the Philadelphia Inquirer, penned this wonderful [article](#) about him, which I am sharing here in case you missed it, as it does much greater justice to his contributions and person than anything I might add. I would just say that, similar to how I am grateful every day for waking up, and grateful every week for getting to write "Dear ETSD Families," I am thankful for his influence, all the influences, the fingerprints, of great people whose paths mine crossed.

Town Slogan Search!

The Evesham Township Human Rights Advisory Council is looking for submissions for a Town Slogan that articulates how Evesham, as a township, desires to celebrate our diversity and the human dignity of all residents. Submissions should include a short phrase or sentence, preferably in the active voice, that succinctly summarizes our aspirations of a better world. Submissions will be accepted through February 20, which marks the World Day of Social Justice. To email a submission, please use: events@evesham-nj.gov. Any submissions from those under 18 are asked to include their age/grade/school.

Sincerely,

Dr. Justin Smith
Superintendent of Schools