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### Superintendent's Message by Sandra Gessner-Crabtree

#### Thinking About You

It has been my experience both professionally and personally that lately most adults are having a particularly hard time coping right now. The evidence: little things are irritating folks or setting them off (as in, everyone is close to breaking waiting for the last straw to fall on them), some of the most positive folks I know are a little less sparkly, folks respond with “meh” when I ask how they are doing, and some folks just saying they are resigned to how things are. I am sure you have evidence of your own when you check in with your coworkers, friends and families as we approach the one year anniversary since the pandemic began. It has been a long year.

Guess what? That is okay. It is okay to just be okay right now. It is even okay to not be okay. And it is okay to take time to allow yourself to acknowledge and feel all the feelings related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Whether you label our individual and collective experience as trauma or grief, these last twelve months have changed our lives in big and little ways that have greatly impacted our sense of “normal.”

#### Positivity, Hope, Optimism, and Toxic Positivity

There is a new phrase in our social lexicon that has emerged during COVID-19 and the term is Toxic Positivity. Now, I'm a positive person, so at first, I did a self-check to see if this was all about me. But, I then got over myself and concluded it was not. Toxic Positivity is when you are relentlessly positive in the face of the harsh reality basically ignoring the harsh reality and putting on a happy face. I first read about it on a teacher blog site. They were complaining that one thing they did not need right now from administration was any more toxic positivity. They did not want some cheery district administrator to give them a pep talk and tell them everything was going to be alright when clearly their professional and personal lives had been turned upside down. So, I did another quick self-check and did some work on the differences between toxic positivity, optimism, and hope. (Maybe it really was about me.)

Here is what I found:



There are differences between being hopeful, optimistic, positive, and relentlessly (toxically) positive. And there are also differences between being hopeful and being optimistic.

Positivity is a good attribute. Heck, in education, our PBIS (Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports) is built upon the theory that positive feedback can shape behavior better than punishment. Yet clearly, there are some drawbacks in being so positive, you are perceived to be toxically positive. Notice here that while the intent is a good one - to show positivity in the face of adversity - the impact is perceived as token or not in tune with the current reality. In other words, just putting on a happy face in the midst of COVID-19 is not going to make the pandemic better.

But what about hope?

Hope helps people better cope with stressful times and adapt better to serious illness. People with hope don't just stand by idly and wish for something good to happen – they create a concrete plan to make it happen. There are three components to hope:

- Willpower – The ability to set goals
- Waypower – Finding ways to meet those goals
- Follow-through – The flexibility and know-how to see the goals through

On the other hand, optimism can be construed as being naive about how life works. If someone is overly optimistic they might go around expecting a perfect outcome in every situation.

Optimism is a way of thinking about life, which may include the following beliefs:

- Things will work out reasonably well, just wait and see
- Even during troubles, it's all still good
- There is almost always a way to get the job done
- Life can always be improved through effort

And when we say someone has a positive outlook, it can be interpreted as either hope or optimism. It depends on whether there is evidence to support their outlook or if they are depending on the universe to provide a decent outcome.

And just to complicate things further, while hope and optimism are two completely separate things, one isn't nearly as beneficial without the other. Someone who is optimistic but without



hope could think everything is going to turn out great but have no plans to make it happen, or a pessimist could have a plan but no belief in their ability to see it through. Clearly, to have a healthy outlook on life, there is a need for both.

### **Coping**

*"Life is not the way it's supposed to be, it's the way it is. The way you cope is what makes the difference." – Virginia Satir*

I remember saying last spring that we were going to have to build up our resilience muscles. I also remember saying at the beginning of this year, "Look Up!" Both of these things are not born from my unique wisdom. They are from the science of resilience which is the antidote to trauma and neuroscience which says there are ways we can strengthen the pathways in our brains to build a more hopeful outlook.

In my quick research on how to cope, survive tough times, and build resilience, there are some common threads and themes. Here they are:

1. Reach out to others and strengthen relationships
2. Manage and tolerate strong emotions
3. Practice acceptance and focus on what you can control, not what you can't
4. Be kind to yourself and invest in self-care (exercise is important here)
5. Stay focused, flexible, and productive
6. Build up your community
7. Realize you've come a long way
8. Know what you are grateful for
9. Get creative
10. Look for meaning and purpose along with lessons learned throughout this journey
11. Change it up! Try something new and different!
12. Stay hopeful!

As always, you can connect with me. I am always interested in hearing your perspective and how you are managing and doing and what is working well for you and what isn't and what we can do better continue to move forward with grace and empathy for each other, our students, and families we serve.

If you'd like to read more about surviving tough times, here are some resources I found:



[Surviving Tough Times By Building Resilience](#)

[Why Do We Need Hope and Optimism?](#)

[10 Things You Can Do to Get Through Hard Times](#)



**Salish Coast Elementary News from Principal Lisa Condran**

The 100th Day of School

100th Day of School was February 17th, 2021. This is a big day at elementary school. Celebrations involving the number 100 take place all over the school. Below a kindergarten student imagines in this piece of artwork and writing what it will be like to be 100 years old.





MCS Counseling

Salish Coast Elementary is excited to welcome Ann Murray, a licensed therapist from MCS Counseling. Ann will work with our students one day a week providing individual therapy. Ann is also working with students in Chimacum and Quilcene School Districts. Salish Coast is very grateful to Julie Canterbury at MCS Counseling who received a grant to provide this valuable service to our school.

PTEF Grants

Salish Coast Elementary is also very grateful for grants provided to our staff and students from the Port Townsend Education Foundation.

Grants awarded include:

- SAIL in Color to provide colored instructional materials for Sharon Redmon's classroom
- Augmentative and Alternative Communication Signs for the playground to increase communication on the playground, awarded to Sharon Redmon.
- Social Thinking for Early Learners curriculum, awarded to Emily Gustafson
- Kindergarten STEM Materials, awarded to Sally Shaw
- STEM Crossover, including iPads for younger students, awarded to Tracy Gallegos
- Communication Stations, awarded to Sharon Redmon

Port Townsend Education Foundation is an amazing organization that supports so many wonderful things in our schools. We are very grateful for their support at Salish Coast Elementary.



# PORT TOWNSEND

## School District

LEARNING THROUGH A SENSE OF PLACE

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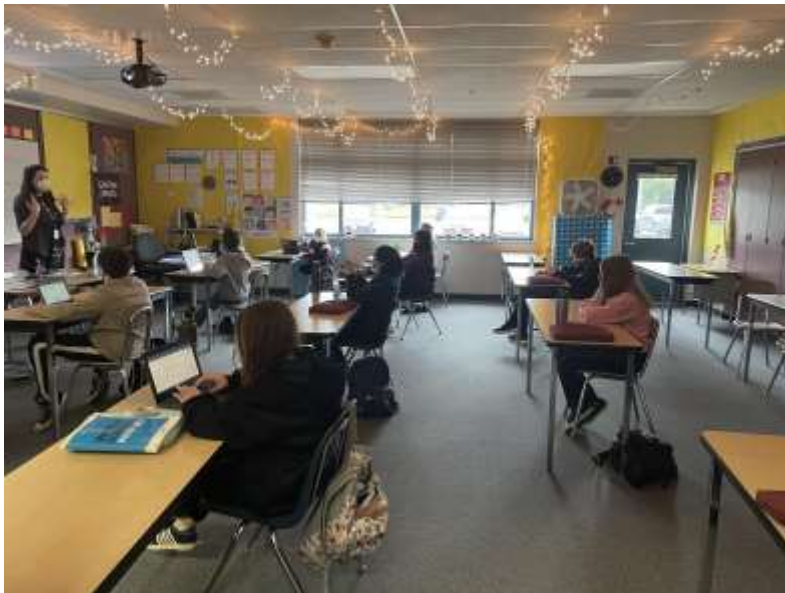
Superintendent's Newsletter

February 19, 2021



### **Blue Heron and OCEAN Highlights by Theresa Campbell, Principal**

Blue Heron students and staff are excited to be back to school after the long weekend and ready to learn. We are looking forward to the spring and more opportunities to get outside and utilize our available learning spaces.





# PORT TOWNSEND School District

LEARNING THROUGH A SENSE OF PLACE

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Superintendent's Newsletter

February 19, 2021

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**Port Townsend High School News by Carrie Ehrhardt, Principal and CTE Director**



**Mock Trial Team are District Champs!**

Congratulations Port Townsend High School Varsity Mock Trial for repeating as District Champions, 2021! The team did an excellent job at the district tournament, held on February 5-6.

1st place - Port Townsend High School

2nd place - Archbishop Murphy

3rd place - Tacoma School of the Arts

Both PTHS squads had intense, fun, and competitive trials with Chief Sealth HS, and North Creek (Bothell) as well as with the teams listed above.

Our JV team also did a fantastic job, earning the opportunity for a potential "at large bid " for us to send two teams to state, which has only happened three times in 20 years.

**Wellness Committee Approves Clubs!**

Thanks to the district Wellness Committee, some student clubs have been able to resume on campus, with safety precautions in place. Drama Club, Students for Sustainability/Garden Club, Mock Trial, Knowledge Bowl, Interact Club, Key Club are back in place and allowed to meet on campus, if they choose to do it. It is such a wonderful opportunity to welcome our students back on campus to have some fun!

**Athletic News**

Season One sports are underway. Coaches, athletic directors, district office personnel, principals, secretaries, parents, and athletes all worked together to get this season started successfully. Over 150 student athletes have turned out for the various sports. Football is leading the way with 58 athletes signed up. We are also offering volleyball, cross country, girls soccer, girls swim, and cheer. The combined effort with Chimacum High School has been a great success so far. Every coach has given positive reports from practices. The consensus is that kids are just happy to be out being kids again. Cross country has completed their first meet and other sports will compete this week. A special shout out goes to our athletic director, Patrick Gaffney, for working to safely bring athletics back to PTHS this year!



PTHS Announces National Honor Society Membership!

Congratulations to our newest members of the PTHS Chapter of the National Honor Society: Aurin Asbell, Tusker Behrenfeld, Maya Dow, Hailey Gallagher, Grace Wentzel, Julia Neville, Jeannette Patric, Savanna Hoffmann, Lia Poore, Lochlan Krupa, and Evan Eades. The NHS is a national organization for recognizing excellence in high school juniors and seniors as determined through their leadership, character, community service, and scholarship as evaluated through academically rigorous coursework.



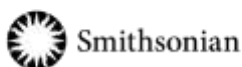
Communications

**Please join us on February 24th! The new superintendent will be announced on February 24 at 5pm. See the main district page for the Zoom link to the Special Board meeting.**

News from Your PT Schools Libraries

February is Black History Month ([africanamericanhistorymonth.gov](http://africanamericanhistorymonth.gov)). The importance of this month can be best described in the article "[Knowing the Past Opens the Door to the Future](#)". Lonnie Bunch, founding director of the National Museum of African American History and Culture ([nmaahc](http://nmaahc)) states "Carter G. Woodson's vision for black history as a means of transformation and change is still quite relevant and quite useful. African American history month, with a bit of

tweaking, is still a beacon of change and hope that is still surely needed in this world. The chains of slavery are gone—but we are all not yet free. The great diversity within the black community needs the glue of the African American past to remind us of not just how far we have traveled but lo, how far there is to go."



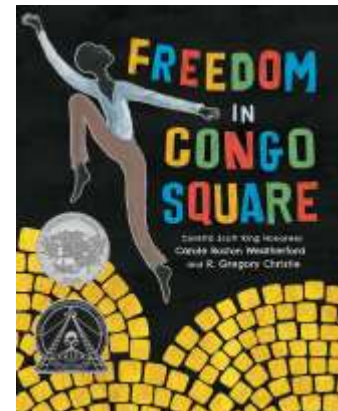
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A guiding question used by the [National Endowment for the Humanities](#) asks, “Who is included in your curriculum and who can be added when teaching African American history?” Check out their collection of [k-12 resources](#) that “center around the achievements, perspectives, and experiences of African Americans across U.S. history”. Some other great sources to check out are [Learning For Justice](#) (formerly Teaching Tolerance) the [National Park Service](#) and the [National Archives](#). Take part in the many online programs through the [National Museum of African American History and Culture](#).

Your libraries can be a helpful partner in finding resources to share this month and everyday of learning. I truly believe in the power of



literature and especially picture books (for all ages). Picture books have the potential to take a challenging topic and open it up for discussion and learning. Read stories of positive change and action like [Freedom in Congo Square](#). Need help [finding the right books](#) for you and your students? Ask us! Our CLEO Library system has a growing collection of books that can be delivered to your classroom. I have started an ever-evolving list of resources that could be just the thing for you and your students. It includes booklist,



websites, podcasts, art exhibits and more. Please email me at [jwentzel@ptschools.org](mailto:jwentzel@ptschools.org) or visit me during daily office hours to get more information. You can also [Join Jason Reynolds](#), current National Ambassador for Young People's Literature, on his virtual book tour. His aim is to empower students to write their personal stories and connect with each other through our narratives.

Remember that Shannon, Denise, Derec and Joy are here to support you and your students every day. Reach out! We are here for you!



**Port Townsend School District Annual Report**

Here is a link to our district's annual report [PTSD Annual Report](#)

Each district in Washington State is required to publish an annual report providing an overview of how financial resources such as levy funds are used.



**Port Townsend School District does not discriminate in any programs or activities on the basis of race, religion, creed, color, immigration status, national origin, age, honorably-discharged veteran or military status, sex, sexual orientation, gender expression or identity, marital status, the presence of any sensory, mental or physical disability, or the use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability. The district provides equal access to school facilities to the Boy Scouts of America and all other designated youth groups listed in Title 36 of the United States Code as a patriotic society. The following employees have been designated to handle questions and complaints of alleged discrimination:**

**Laurie McGinnis, Title IX Coordinator**

**Shelby MacMeekin, 504 Coordinator & ADA Compliance**

**Amy Khile, Civil Rights Compliance**