



2017-2018

Opening of School, Updates, Looking Forward

August 28, 2017

Dear Masconomet Families,

It is a pleasure to welcome our students back for an exciting 2017-2018 school year, and to welcome our new seventh graders who join the Masco Community on Thursday.

Our students can look forward to an exciting, challenging, and rewarding school year, and parents can be confident that their children will receive an excellent education with many opportunities to explore.

I would like to bring several pieces of information to your attention as your children return for the new school year and families are gearing up their schedules to coincide with their children's schedules and needs.

First, let me remind you that I am always looking for your input and feedback. There will continue to be a **"Message the Superintendent"** link on the [District Home Page](#), through which you can communicate with me, indicating that you want a response, or to message me anonymously. One of my goals continues to be the improvement of school and District communication and to provide easy feedback options for parents and community members.

Please see the [Problem-Solver and Communications Quick Reference Guide](#) for assistance in navigating the District. There is a searchable database of all school staff with email addresses and phone extensions on the [District Home Page](#) and on the School Home Pages.

I would like to make a personal appeal to you for support of the Masconomet Education Foundation. Since its inception in 2010, MEF has funded the installation of WiFi at Masco and the new STEAM Lab at the High School, as well as dozens of other educational initiatives in every field from English to Spanish to Biopsychology. This year's MEF goal is to fund a STEAM Lab for the Middle School, as well as support learning innovations throughout Masco classrooms. MEF needs your help! Please donate online at www.MasconometEducationFoundation.org, or send a check, made out to MEF, to the Middle School office. Your input is appreciated, too! If you are interested in joining the MEF team, email eckertcovino@hotmail.com.

The **Masco App** is a great way to access a number of school resources and lots of information on your mobile devices. You can download the app, **Masconomet RSD**, for iPhones from the iTunes store, and for Android phones from Google Play.

Safety and Security

Safety and Security will remain a priority at Masconomet. We will focus again this year on more training for staff and students and live drills that include students. We have a very safe campus, but we must increase our capacity to respond to different types of safety and security threats. We work closely with Public Safety and Public Health Departments in crisis response planning and practice. Please know that we take safety and security very seriously and constantly strive to improve our plans and practices. Also, we have a third-party managed "Safe School Hotline" for reports about bullying or other safety matters. The 3rd party can guarantee anonymity when it is desired. The link to the Hotline is on the District web page under Helpful Links/Safety.

A.L.I.C.E.

Alert, Lockdown, Inform, Counter, Evacuate. The A.L.I.C.E. active shooter training will be an essential part of our Crisis Intervention and Response planning beginning this fall and going forward. Information will be provided to parents and there will be a community informational forum in late October. The information will be shared with staff and students prior to incorporating the use of A.L.I.C.E. concepts into our drills and practices. School administrators and police officers in the Tri-Towns have been trained and certified as A.L.I.C.E. trainers. Learn more about A.L.I.C.E. at <https://www.alicetraining.com/>.

Evacuation to Fairgrounds

Last June, Masco took a first step toward the goal of a practiced evacuation of all students and staff to the Topsfield Fairgrounds. Seventh graders walked a half-mile toward the Fairgrounds on Washington Street which was closed down to all traffic by Boxford and Topsfield police. In July, Masco administrators met with Fairgrounds officials and public safety officials from the three towns to discuss planning for a major evacuation. If the need occurred to evacuate campus due to any emergency condition of a protracted nature, it is likely that students would be dismissed by regular bus transportation and parent pick-up from the Fairgrounds. The Fairgrounds arena is heated, has excellent communications facilities and can easily house our students and staff on a temporary basis. We have

outstanding cooperation from the Fairgrounds management and personnel and public safety officials in this planning. Parents will be kept informed of our progress and plans.

Practice and Drills

Masco will continue to hold practice fire and other emergency drills throughout the year. Students will have a greater level of participation in training as A.L.I.C.E. concepts are brought into practice drills.

Full-Time Director of Crisis Response and Security

Mr. Steve Burt has been a school year/school day Security Coordinator for a number of years, overseeing crisis response planning and drills. Mr. Burt assumed an upgraded full-time position on July 1st. The School Committee supported this request from administration with the understanding that safety and security is a top priority and that more time invested in our readiness for emergencies will serve our students and staff well in future years.

Vision and Strategic Plan

The District engaged in a vision development process during the 2015-2016 school year that continued into last fall resulting in the formal adoption of [Vision and Values 2025](#) by the Masconomet School Committee. Over the last school year, school staff was engaged at many levels with discussions about how to achieve the vision. Significant work was underway last year, especially in regard to interdisciplinary studies. This year, a Strategic Plan will be adopted. If I could sum up the vision and values and the emerging strategic plan in two words, it would be to say that **personalizing learning** is our number one priority. To promote our staff understanding of what personalizing learning means, we will be doing a District read of the book, *Students at the Center: Personalized Learning with Habits of Mind*, Kallick and Zmuda, ASCD Press, 2017. This book is written for educators but I think anyone could find it of interest. We will have some loaners in our school libraries for parents and community members by the end of September. This is one of many books and articles we are using to develop our District appreciation for and understanding of student (and human) differences.

School Start Times

If you did not follow the school start times news closely in June, I want to give you a very abbreviated version of where we stand. The Masconomet, Boxford, Middleton, and Topsfield School Committees endorsed a plan to start Masco later (and make adjustments to elementary school times) beginning in fall 2018, a year from now. Some highlights of the endorsed plan include:

- Elementary Schools will start first, Masconomet second. (A flip of the 2-tier busing system)
- Masconomet will start no earlier than 8:30 a.m.
- Elementary schools will start no earlier than 8:00 a.m.

The endorsed plan is a goal for the Superintendents and the school administrations of the Tri-Town Union and Masconomet. The Superintendents are to work on gaining the greatest advantage of transportation opportunities and schedules while the schools are to work on schedules that would make their unique curriculum and activities work best with anticipated changes in start times. The Superintendents are ultimately responsible for presenting the specifics that best support the endorsed plan back to the School Committees during the FY18 budget development window.

This is a [graphic](#) of the selected “Option Y” and the current school schedules. The Superintendents will be sharing progress reports at School Committee meetings during the fall.

Homework

One objective in our Strategic Plan is the development of a homework philosophy in each school and the establishment of best practices. Best practices would include thoughtful guidelines about the volume of homework, the purpose and type of homework, and the role of homework in final grade determination. Homework is a year one priority and our goal will be to have draft philosophies and guidelines by late spring for implementation in fall 2018. Principals will establish a committees or team and the strategies required to get input from staff, students, and parents.

Digital Sign

The new Masconomet Digital Sign is hard to miss as you drive by Masco or enter the property. It has been a long-standing desire of the District to have this communication tool in place. We are grateful to the students and alumni whose gifts made this sign a reality. It will play an important communications role and I think you will agree that is a nice fit, visually, with our campus and entrance. Special thanks is due to Essex Tech seniors who did the masonry work last spring.

Social Emotional Learning – a PK-12 Initiative

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) “is the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions.”¹

The senior leadership of Masco and the Tri-Town School Union has been meeting regularly over the course of the last couple of years. Last year we focused our thoughts and efforts around the Tri-Town Community Read, *Life is Good: The Book* by the Jacobs brothers.

This year, in recognition of the fact that the “whole child” was at least somewhat lost in the past fifteen years of focus on testing and accountability measures, our joint leadership has set an SEL agenda for 2017-2018. We have several objectives:

- Assess the emotional and mental health well-being of our students, pre-kindergarten to grade 12 and deepen our own understanding of the issues today’s students bring to school.
- Audit the current programs and classes that have a focus on SEL and catalog these to gain understanding of strengths, weaknesses, and gaps in our curriculum and activities.
- Bring together our emotional and mental health experts from both Districts to work on common solutions and to share successful programs and practices.
- Develop strategic goals for SEL in future years to better prepare our students for the future and to develop strategies that will help students who struggle with significant anxiety, depression or other illnesses, and to help all students develop the “adult” skills needed to thrive in a rapidly changing, and more challenging environment.

¹Source: Casel.org (<http://www.casel.org/what-is-sel/>)

Digital Resources and Social Media

Technology and social media continue to be both a wonderful educational opportunity as well as a challenge to help ensure their appropriate use. This is a great opportunity to teach our students responsible digital citizenship (using technology and media for the good) and the harm possible to both others and self through misuse. Please talk to your children about the dangers of social media including

the fact that almost everything done on-line contributes to an individual's "digital footprint" that may be viewed in the future by potential schools or employers.

We need to be sure that all of our students understand that misused social media is a common culprit in bullying, civil rights violations, and expressions of hate — none of which can be tolerated. Both schools and families must continuously reinforce this message with our children.

Masco continues to engage students on this subject and is working to strengthen curriculum about internet safety and citizenship. This year, the School Committee, through its Policy Subcommittee, will be working with students and staff to develop a new policy and guidelines that reflect rapidly changing technology our dynamic, society society, and the ever critical need to provide safety for and guidance to student and staff users.



Masconomet is a great District and I hope to work with you to make it even stronger—more exceptional.

During this school year, I will continue to meet individually, or in small groups, with as many staff, students, parents and community members as possible to explore your expectations, aspirations, and what you value most.

Masco's Vision 2025 can bring out the best in all of us if we take its message to heart and absorb the vision into our school practices and have the community's support for its underlying values.

Again, welcome to the 2017-2018 school year. It promises to be an exciting and rewarding one.

Warm regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kevin".

Kevin M. Lyons
Superintendent of Schools

Follow Us: [Web](#) , [Twitter](#), Like us on [Facebook](#),
[WBMT 88.3 FM Masco Student Radio](#)
[Morning Update \(High School\)](#)