



August 2021

Dear BMS Families,

It is hard to believe we are looking to the start of another school year just around the corner! I pray you have enjoyed a restful and fun summer break with friends and family so far. We have been extremely busy and focused on a myriad of tasks and exciting goals here in the office and across our buildings to prepare for the upcoming year and beyond, and I would like to take a moment to share with you some important updates...

First and foremost, I want you to know that we will carefully be returning to "normal" here at BMS. For a year and a half, we walked together through a historic and trying season with our community and world at large - a time in my administrative career that I will not soon forget. We learned so much during that time doing everything we possibly could to keep BMS open and safely serve our students and families to the best of our ability with swirling unknowns and constantly changing information at all levels. I am grateful for the capacity that was built with you during that time and all that we persevered through and accomplished as a team for the wellbeing of our students and staff!

While we are seeing continued Covid concerns with mixed feelings, beliefs, and emotions across our nation on what seems to be a never-ending rollercoaster ride that folks are more than ready to get off, I believe it is time for us to move forward once again and find a sensible, realistic track that is best for our students and staff while respecting others around us. That being said, the board has fully supported my interest to make mask wearing optional on campus regardless of vaccination status, allow teachers to rework their classroom settings to better facilitate vital social interaction and natural collaboration among students, and welcome healthy guest speakers and visitors back into our buildings to nurture our students' spiritual development and academic growth. We will continue to sanitize our buildings and learning areas diligently while working to appropriately navigate any necessary quarantines as we did last year. Again, we are striving to remain careful, respectful, and informed in all of our efforts - making adjustments as needed and communicating along the way as God leads us this year.

Even though we are separate from other schools and organizations as a private entity, I do feel further affirmed in this movement with the state of Pennsylvania, Mifflin County, and our neighbors at Mifflin County School District adjusting and shifting further back to normal given the decreased Covid presence in our community. That being said, if you are intending to utilize our shared transportation with area schools, masking will be required until further notice on buses. This is an existing federal mandate for any public or shared transportation, and I fully support MCSD and our bus companies in what they are requiring in partnership with us. If students do not follow this expectation, they will not be permitted to ride the bus and will need to have alternate transportation to and from school. This particular mandate is estimated to expire and be reassessed in September, at which time I will provide an update accordingly if necessary. We will continue to work collaboratively with those around us and show respect as Christians to all, as Jesus did.

I also want to establish my personal interest to focus further on our core school values as they relate to what we are teaching and preparing our students for beyond the walls of BMS. Over the past few years, I have been working with a multidisciplinary team consisting of fellow administrators, board members, teachers, committee members, and facilitators to dive into an extremely meaningful and focused strategic planning process that helped us to pinpoint a number of short and long term goals for BMS. A common interest coming out of that dynamic process is that of program improvement and expansion as we move into the future with generations of students and families to come - desiring to increase our overall sustainability and improve in areas as identified by various stakeholders like you over the years. As the current Superintendent at BMS, I want to continue the positive momentum and energy that began during strategic planning and intentionally push us into territory that further establishes as well as enhances our biblical worldview approach while improving and expanding our academic and vocational programming here with excellent teachers.

That being said, one of the most exciting goals that I am desiring to see come to fruition with the help of many key players over the next few years is an internal vocational program at BMS - providing students with a unique track built on preparation for vital trade and vocational career pathways in our community and beyond as overall need for those positions increases on a global scale daily. As with our other academic programming, rigor and quality will be ensured as this effort becomes more and more concrete over the next few years. While we have some real planning in place for what may serve as viable instructional locations, we will need to have a great deal of assistance from our family and community partnerships to grow our classrooms with quality instructors, materials, resources, and safe equipment along the way. It is my goal that we see this happen with 3-4 specialized programs ideally being offered on campus within the next few years alongside a co-op program with area partners working directly with us and our students. This will realistically take a great deal of work, dedication, and prayer in order to get such a program off the ground in a good way, but I trust that it can be done with your support and God's faithfulness to BMS!

Directly connected to all of this planning and goal setting are our new mission and vision statements developed through a true team effort - reflecting our shared interest to highlight the importance of nurturing student growth through a biblical worldview approach in a unique, challenging, and supportive educational setting. I shared our new statements with an excited faculty last spring along with a more recent personal vision to see us really set ourselves apart from other secular schools by honing in on what we can and should do differently here as Christians. My philosophy is that learning never stops, and growing never stops - whether that be what we feel from the Holy Spirit, glean from others in our midst, through falling down, experiencing trial and hardship like we did last year, or simply taking a risk or stepping outside a comfort zone for others. Growing does not take place when we are complacent. Positive change happens when we move, reflect, evaluate, and work together to take action and make informed decisions that will ultimately benefit our students and their lives beyond this place. We have no other purpose as a school than to be focused on that very notion and doing so in a way that not only prepares our students academically, socially, and emotionally, but also spiritually.

Our new mission and vision statements that I am very proud of are as follows:

The mission of the Belleville Mennonite School: Belleville Mennonite School provides a Christ-centered education and biblical worldview that inspires students to develop minds, build faith, and be disciples.

The vision of the Belleville Mennonite School: Empowering students to cultivate academic excellence and a passion for Christ.

Some key wording there that really resonates with us that we pray will hold great meaning for you as you partner with our family... Biblical worldview, inspire, develop, cultivate, passion... You will soon see and hear these powerful words as they take shape in what we share with those in our community and beyond. You may have heard a radio ad that I recently did to promote our special school and the vision and interests that I have shared with you in this letter. This is currently airing on Merf Radio and Bigfoot Country, and we are praying that the ad reaches the ears of folks who are ready to be a part of something different with their child. I ask that you consider joining us in spreading the word of what BMS stands for and what we are striving to focus on and work for into the future - growing and improving along the way. I welcome you to share your testimony and experiences with others - illustrating the reasons why you partner with us and pay for your student(s) to attend a place like this that is not like many schools out there that are void of Biblical teachings and moving further and further away from Christ and truth.

Before I close, I would like to also request that you look for some recent updates and changes to student dress code policy (included in the summer mailing packet you have received). Feel free to compare former policy to what is now board-supported policy that I felt was a necessary change for our school to add clarity, examples, and re-work a few points within appropriate Christian bounds for our day and age that is not fixed or stagnant.

Last but certainly not least, I want to let you know that we are moving in promising directions for our two elementary positions and have a solid plan in place for coverage of our high school science classroom. Mrs. Williams is doing an excellent job adapting to her new elementary principal role while working with me, our teachers have been hard at work preparing their classrooms, and our maintenance team has been working diligently the entire summer to make improvements across campus while incorporating new technology with us!

Great things are happening, and great things are coming... We are truly blessed that you are along for the ride! Feel free to reach out to me anytime, as I would love to talk to you.

Yours In Christ,

Nicholas J. Wilson

Superintendent

Secondary Principal

Belleville Mennonite School