



School Administrative Unit 21

December 14, 2021

Dear SAU 21 parents and guardians,

I hope you had a nice Thanksgiving and start to December. In late November, I had the opportunity to attend an Open House at the [Seacoast School of Technology \(SST\)](#). SST is our regional career and technical education center and is located in Exeter. Winnacunnet High School students along with students from several high schools across the region are able to apply to attend SST for a portion of their school day to participate in a variety of programs (including biomedical science and technology, computer science, pre-engineering, and culinary arts), building valuable field experience, knowledge, and skills. During the open house I was able to speak with a few Winnacunnet students including a senior in the building construction technologies program. She told me about how much she valued the program and about the paid internship experience she had last summer and the job she has lined up for after graduation. This young woman is already finding success in a field that she is passionate about, and her engagement in SST is helping her to sustain her achievement in her academic coursework at Winnacunnet in preparation for her graduation.

I am an optimist by nature, but last January my first thought each morning wasn't about how lucky I was to have my children at home day in and day out. Rather, I was wishing for their speedy return to school. I was tired of helping with math assignments and "peer" conferencing about their writing. I had had enough of playing board games and basketball in the driveway. On my best days, I was able to keep perspective and see the positives. For example, I had bonus time with two adolescents who would soon be busy with jobs and activities and friends and have little interest in time with their parents; my children improved their cooking skills and became more independent as learners. Lately, on days when we are juggling school/work/sports schedules and logistics, I have thought about how easy things were back in January. I guess my point is that we always have challenges in life. The more we can see those challenges as opportunities and look for the positives, the more content and productive we are. We can't control lots of things that happen in our lives--even without a pandemic--but we can control our response to the things that happen. I think that the control over our responses is the real skill we want to pass on to our children. We will face challenges. We can meet them by feeling frustrated and helpless, or we can try to shift our perspective and embrace the opportunities. Looking at challenges with a different perspective, one that sees opportunities, helps us to remain constructive, creative, and successful.

I know that the current circumstances are not ideal. I don't like that we are still in a place where we need masks and where students and staff have to miss days of school for illness and testing. I am tired of everything Covid-related. Yet, I see so many positives in our schools. Full-day, in-person learning is available to all of our students, and they are making the most of it. I see high levels of engagement and joy and enthusiasm for learning in the vast majority of young people. We are building community, supporting one another, and focusing on the most important work in our classrooms. As we enter into 2022, we will continue to seize the opportunities. Through the spring we will undertake preparatory work toward the goal of developing a "portrait of a learner" for our school communities. That "portrait" will serve as the foundation for a strategic plan

2 Alumni Drive
Hampton, NH 03842
603-926-8992
sau21.org

Meredith S. Nadeau
Superintendent of Schools

David T. Hobbs, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent for
Curriculum, Instruction and
Assessment

Caroline P. Arakelian, Ph.D.
Assistant Superintendent of
Student Services

Matthew C. Ferreira, Ed.D.
Business Administrator

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to guide the work of our districts over the next few years. I see this process, which will continue into the 2022-2023 school year, as an opportunity to bring together stakeholders from across our communities to focus on the competencies, skills, and attributes we want to see our students develop in their journey through our schools. This work will be full of hope and connections, and I can't wait for us to get started.

A few other brief notes:

- SAU 21 schools will be closing for the December vacation with an early release on Thursday, December 23rd. Schools will reopen on Monday, January 3rd. Our offices will be closed on December 24th and 31st and will be open during regular business hours from December 27th through 30th.
- Each of our district's has held initial budget meetings and Boards have adopted their recommended budgets to move forward to budget committees and/or public hearings in January. Citizen votes on district budgets will take place in March. In each community, there has been thoughtful deliberation about meeting the needs of students in our schools and recognizing the challenges faced by taxpayers. I greatly appreciate the work of our building principals and business administrator in the budget development process, and I thank our school boards for the many hours they have spent reviewing, line by line, the budget details.
- As of today, there are 2 active cases of Covid-19 at Lincoln Akerman, 5 at North Hampton, 10 active cases at Seabrook Elementary, 18 active cases at Seabrook Middle, 0 active cases at Barnard School, and 6 active cases at Winnacunnet. NH DHHS continues to report high levels of COVID-19 clusters and cases in schools with 88% of those cases in children. They continue to recommend masking for everyone when indoors, regardless of vaccination status, to help slow community spread.
- News flash: the holidays can be stressful. This is also true for our youth, a population in which we have seen significant increases in anxiety, depression, and suicide over the last decade. These rates have only worsened since the start of the pandemic. Nearly 1 in 2, or 45% of youth today are experiencing symptoms of anxiety or depression. Emergency room visits for suicide attempts also rose in the 12-17 year-old age group with significantly higher increases in young women. Warning signs for anxiety and depression include changes in behavior such as excess sleep or a lack of sleep, withdrawal or isolation from friends and activities, increased irritability or anger, and other changes in daily behavior. If you see these changes in your child and are concerned, please trust your instincts and seek help--from your child's school counselor or an outside agency. The National Suicide Prevention Hotline can be accessed 24 hours a day, 7 days a week by calling 1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255).
- Congratulations to South Hampton's Sara Casassa who was honored recently as New Hampshire's Teacher of the Year. Sara is an excellent representative for her colleagues in our district and across the state. She is passionate about education, dedicated to her craft, and determined to make a difference. We are so proud of and happy for her!

Best wishes for a happy and healthy holiday vacation with your family. We look forward to a New Year full of opportunities!

Take care,

Meredith

Meredith Nadeau, Superintendent of Schools
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