



School Administrative Unit 21

May 13, 2022

Dear SAU 21 parents and guardians,

Spring has sprung here on the Seacoast, and we are definitely feeling that in our schools. As the end of the school year approaches, our classrooms and schools are busy with activities, long-awaited field trips, and "transition" activities--particularly for our students moving from grade 8 to 9. Winnacunnet High School is planning a spring "mixer" for incoming 9th graders for tonight (Friday the 13th), and our incoming 9th graders will also be able to spend the morning at the high school on the 17th to see classes and learn about electives and extracurricular offerings.

I've had the opportunity over the last couple of weeks to meet with groups of 8th graders in our schools. These students have a lot to share regarding the impact of the pandemic on their middle school education, things they are looking forward to in high school, and their perspectives on their K-8 school experiences. To a student, they were polite and thoughtful in their conversation with me, and, overall, appreciative of their teachers and educational opportunities. Many feel like they missed out on some experiences and learning as a result of COVID, but they are enthusiastic about the move to high school and the chance to meet new people, and to have more choices and responsibility for their learning. Several spoke about the options available at SST and many spoke about participating in the "Sea to Summit" and "Fresh Start" programs which are designed to help students become acclimated to the Winnacunnet environment and to get to know new peers.

Last week was teacher/staff appreciation week, and I can not express enough my own gratitude to staff for their work this year. The work year for our staff began with the very real challenges of COVID, very limited substitutes, and many students needing increased levels of support. While we have seen some improvement in a couple of these areas, I know that for many of our staff it is the most challenging work year they have experienced in their careers. I am grateful for their resilience, their determination to make things better for students, and their passion and enthusiasm for education. This job is difficult, and our staff stay with us because it is also incredibly rewarding. I thank them, and I thank you for supporting our staff in their work for your children.

We are currently in the midst of state testing in our schools. These assessments are given annually in grades 3-8 and in grade 11 where students take the SAT. Up until a few years ago, you might have had the impression that NH's schools were doing fairly well and that we were consistently ranked in the top 5 in the nation. You might have heard largely good news about the innovative approaches NH had taken for learning--competency-based education, extended learning opportunities, etc.--areas my colleagues across the country used to ask me about at conferences. Unfortunately, over the last few years, we have heard an increasingly consistent message about how NH public schools are failing students. **The truth is that New Hampshire is still ranked in the top 5 in the nation for its K-12 public education system.** It is also true that while on the whole students in NH lost some ground during the pandemic, we are faring far better than students in other states and communities. We expect to. It's why those of us who grew up in NH public schools are sending our children to them, and it's why many people move here to send

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their children to our schools. We do a pretty good job for most students. It is true that there is room for improvement in our schools and districts, and particularly for some populations of students who have historically fared less well in public school. The solutions to those issues are also local and best achieved through collaboration, conversation, and communication between students, parents, teachers, administrators and school boards. We are by no means perfect, but we will get better together.

Enjoy the warming temperatures and New England sunshine!

Best,

Meredith

Meredith Nadeau, Superintendent of Schools
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