



School Administrative Unit 21

August 25, 2022

Dear SAU 21 Parents and Guardians,

I hope your family has been able to enjoy our beautiful New England summer. It's hard to believe that school will be starting next week. It has been another busy summer at SAU 21. We have been working hard to fill vacancies and onboard new staff members, and we still have some Educational Associate and other support staff and substitute positions open across our districts. (Click [here](#) if you are interested in applying for any vacancies.) Staff were involved in a number of professional development opportunities, and our summer programs for students were well-attended. A number of capital projects were completed in our buildings involving such things as paving, HVAC, and roofing, and our facilities have been cleaned and polished for the new year. Among many other projects at the SAU office we conducted our annual audits, prepared schedules, calendars, and activities for the year ahead, worked with our schools to apply for safety grants as well as our annual entitlement grants, and worked with our School Boards on policy review.

Though I hate to have to say it, we do still have COVID guidelines in place. A full copy of our COVID plans can be found [here](#). It is important to note that students are still required to stay home/test if they are demonstrating any [COVID-19 symptoms](#) and abide by the [quarantine/isolation guidelines](#) from NH DHHS. Testing is not required for COVID-positive individuals to exit isolation on day 6 as long as individuals have improving symptoms and have been fever-free for at least 24 hours. Please reach out to your child's school nurse if you have any questions about COVID guidelines.

The schools across the SAU have also remained focused on emergency management planning and school safety and security. Each district has submitted requests for funding through the NH SAFE grant, and each of our districts has also worked to update its emergency management plans based on the latest information and guidance from local emergency responders as well as the NH Homeland Security and Emergency Management (HSEM). NH HSEM will be conducting its triennial school safety and security audits of our schools early this fall, and NH HSEM officials will be conducting a tabletop exercise of our plans in October. In addition, our staff are also completing their annual [ALICE training](#).

Yesterday was the first official day back at school for our teachers and educational associates, and we had a great kick-off to the new school year. We are excited to continue our professional learning related to a host of SAU priorities. In addition to the ALICE training, our employees engage in multiple hours of required training as well as some elective professional development inside and outside of the district including suicide prevention, bullying and cyber-bullying awareness training, and training on preventing harassment. More than 80% of our teacher's professional development time is focused on curriculum and instruction related topics including vertical alignment of curriculum, developing quality performance assessments, and reviewing competencies. Over the last couple of years, 20-25% of the time of our professional development time has been focused around the social emotional needs of our students, as meeting those needs is a precursor for students' ability to engage in instruction.

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One training scheduled for the upcoming year has been a subject of concern for some individuals. That training is a 90-minute session for educators focused on creating a welcoming and inclusive environment for all children--in this case, providing a better understanding of how to support LGBTQ+ youth. The goals of the training are to build staff understanding of the concepts of sexual orientation, gender, gender identity, and gender expression, to share information and data regarding the experiences of LGBTQ+ youth, and to discuss strategies for creating a safe classroom/school space for all. There is no curricular component, and no aspect of this training is intended to be provided to children. As educators, our job is to create an environment free from discrimination for all, including on the basis of *age, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, race, color, marital status, familial status, disability, religion or national origin, creed or economic status*. Students who identify as LGBTQ+ are twice as likely to report being bullied or harassed as their peers, and 45% of students identifying as LGBTQ+ report having seriously considered suicide in the last year. A recent WHS graduate perhaps best articulated the need for this training for our staff:

I went through Winnacunnet as one of the few LGBTQ+ students... It was incredibly isolating and when I needed help, I hesitated in fear of not being understood...My favorite staff members did not share any of my experiences, but they had open hearts and open minds that I am forever grateful for. I recognize that not everyone is privileged enough to be in my position. That is why I strongly encourage...training so that students like me are able to freely rely on faculty without fear of discrimination or judgement on who they are. It will show them that our school is always striving to be better to all individuals.

The last year has been a very challenging year in our communities, and fear and anxiety have contributed to those challenges and our perceptions of them. All of us have felt that loss of control and normalcy that we had grown accustomed to prior to the pandemic, and we feel that most acutely when it comes to our children. We are inundated with information and misinformation and it can be hard to discern what to believe and who to trust. Instead of the coming together and dialogue that usually occurs, we were forced by distance to resort to announcements rather than discussions. Frustrations with closed schools, restrictions on our daily lives and social interactions, and anxiety about the physical health and safety of ourselves and our families compounded. We have turned to social media conversations *about* rather than in-person conversations *with*, where we can look people in the eye and draw our own conclusions. I encourage all of us to rise above that--make contact, ask questions, seek out opportunities for discussion, approach others with a sense of goodwill and a willingness to listen to their point of view. In the end, we don't have to agree, but I hope that we are able to see beyond headlines to hear one another's perspectives.

I look forward to a positive school year and to our collaboration with and support of one another. Our children need the support of all of us--school staff, parents, and community members--to grow strong, healthy, and to reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Meredith

Meredith Nadeau, Superintendent of Schools
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