

From the Superintendent...

Writing the June newsletter always causes me to face the end of another school year. Each one is special in some way, each one has memories, and each one is an opportunity to take a moment to reflect on accomplishments and defer thinking about all that remains to be done. I'd like to share some thoughts and points of pride about 2006-07.

- We welcomed Joni Jay to Sudbury as Nixon principal.
- The ECMS Science Olympiad team finished 2nd in the state competition. What a team of young scientists and coaches.
- Noyes, Loring, Nixon, Haynes and Curtis students exemplified themselves in a variety of outreach and service learning efforts. The Sudbury Food Pantry, the Heifer Project, donations to the homeless, Relay for Life, PanMass and PanLoring Challenge, Avon Walk for Breast Cancer, Hoops for the Heart just to name a few.
- We created a new ECMS Math Team that competed admirably in the Intermediate Math League of Eastern Massachusetts.
- The ECMS Theatre Troupe brought the house down with *Anything Goes*.
- Haynes school received a \$5,000 grant to allow teachers to work with math consultants to strengthen their teaching of math concepts in grades one to five.
- The Haynes 5th graders performed a musical with an original script and lyrics written by staff members Shannon Bair and Jane Badman focusing on the Jamestown colony.
- We implemented after-school math clubs for 4th and 5th graders at Loring, Nixon, Noyes and Haynes. By all accounts, these were very successful.
- Two of our Destination Imagination teams finished in 1st place in regional competition which qualified them for the State event where they also distinguished themselves.
- ECMS art students won awards and recognition in the Boston Globe Scholastic Art Contest and the Worcester Art Museum.
- Technology continues to be an area of focus and excitement across the district. Teachers using the ActiveBoard have changed the way they teach and students learn; middle school students participated in a live webcast with teacher Mat Lafond from a rain forest in Puerto Rico; teachers are using web pages and creating blogs (e.g. Mary Mahoney's from her travels to Japan); the middle school robotic class is impressive in what they are learning and creating; and our creative 8th graders are developing multi-media presentations that are professional in nature.
- The ECMS orchestra, band, and chorus traveled to New York City and brought back awards and kudos for their performances.
- Our collaboration with the leaders and staff of Sudbury Extended Day strengthens, and our appreciation for their work grows.
- The Sudbury Special Education Advisory Council (SSEAC) continues to provide a valued service to the school district, certainly to parents of students with disabilities but to all parents as well. The programming SSEAC brings to the community is first rate and valuable to all parents and staff.

- We finalized the restructuring of the school schedule for next year with the adoption of the Improved Learning for All Plan. This regular, substantive, on-going time for teacher training and collaboration will pay dividends for all students. An outline of the 2007-08 plan will be available to parents in late summer.
- The school committee studied, then adopted in concept, the goal to establish full-day kindergarten. Space is a deterrent at this time, but the committee is working to develop a facilities plan that recognizes this goal.
- SERF again stepped up and provided valuable resources for our staff to be creative and to extend learning opportunities that go beyond what the district is able to provide. An editorial comment: Support SERF, it is money that directly impacts students.
- The Sudbury Foundation has quietly supported SPS and our mission. Funding for equipment, professional development and participation in the Primary Source program are just some of their important contributions.
- My participation in the Chinese-US Educator Exchange Program has been exciting. We hosted an administrator from Nanchang, China in October; I traveled to China in April. We are making plans to continue this relationship with hopes of extending the global sharing to staff and students in the future.
- Maybe the most inspiring event this year was the passage of the override in April. Again this community stepped up to make a statement of their commitment to children, schools and the town. This clearly is one of the reasons Sudbury is a great place to work and learn.
- One bittersweet aspect of the end of a school year is the acceptance that some of our best, most talented, experienced staff members will be retiring. This year, Sandy Bell, Debby Hartline, Jan Durgin, Phil Irving, Judy Newell and Jan Seftor have decided to move into a different phase of their lives. We are losing 133 years of contribution to Sudbury students. We will fill their positions, but we will not be able to replace them. Not only will our students not have their influence, but our staff loses a bit of history, tradition, and the conveyance of culture that is so important.

I would be remiss in ignoring two important events that unfortunately also define this school year.

- The district's need to review the 4th Grade Odyssey experience to ensure that it remains a viable, valuable experience for students escalated to a point of unfortunate contention within the community. On a positive note, a number of parents and students took the opportunity to share with us how meaningful the experience was for them and the aspects that made it so. This certainly will be factored into our decisions. On a more troubling note, the contention escalated to a point of "*us vs. them*", a characteristic I have never observed in Sudbury. Moreover, it is a point that I am unclear about why this was necessary given there was never an intent to cancel Odyssey and it occurred prior to any decision being made. It is the partnership between schools and parents that make Sudbury what it is. Vilification and vitriol can not exist in a partnership.

- Finally, January 19, 2007 is one of those days that we all remember what we were doing and where we were when we first heard the news about the tragedy at L-S. Disbelief, fear, anger, grief, helplessness.....the list of emotions may be endless. Five months will have passed when this school year ends, but the ramifications and reactions continue to manifest themselves. We have seen this in SPS since January in many unexpected and yet, understandable, ways. However, as in most tragedies, there are positive aspects that must be recognized. My respect and admiration for my colleague John Ritchie grew as his leadership shown through the dark hours. The staff and students of L-S distinguished themselves as they reached out to others while they cared for themselves. The summer will put some time and distance between all of us and January 19; our thoughts and prayers remain with the Alenson and Odegren families and for a peaceful perspective of our future.

Enjoy your summer and I hope to see you in 77 days.

John Brackett