

Newsletter 08-01 September

Welcome back and happy new year. I am writing this with only two weeks before 3,377 children return to our schools. This is always a special time of year even though I realize our lives change gears and the RPMs ramp up significantly—to borrow an old Detroit cliché. I also know that many of you are doing what I am—beginning to adjust my internal clock to ready myself for early mornings, some late nights, and a hectic pace. These were all missing from my summer and I hope from yours as well.

Earlier this summer, Ann and I spent two weeks in Denmark and Norway. For the prior two summers, we went on holiday (oh, how European) in Italy. So this summer's trip was into uncharted territory. Each country was charming in its own way and the fjords of Norway were spectacular. However, again I was confronted with the realization that I am monolingual and that so many people in the world are conversant in multiple languages. The wonderful friends we visited in Denmark each speak three languages, as do their children Lea and Ida. In my recent travels, I became starkly aware that my language limitation puts the burden on others to use English if we are to communicate. I am working on this, but you know what they say about old dogs.

I do believe as our world grows smaller and as, Thomas L. Friedman says, flatter, I hope we can take steps here at home to prepare our children to communicate, appreciate and understand the diversity in the world in which they will live. One-step we are taking this year here in SPS, is to offer a pilot language program in Mandarin. This will be open to middle school students after school and will likely begin in October. More information will be forthcoming. If the response is strong, we will review our programming in world languages and global cultures in the future.

Each school year brings new and exciting programs and services for students and families. I will highlight several here; you will hear more about these, and others, as the year progresses.

New staff joining our district is always exciting and invigorating; I make it point to meet and talk with each new teacher. Despite the fact that I am feeling quite old around them, I can attest the 29 new teachers are coming well prepared and ready to work hard. Many have previous teaching experience and all are anxious to be in Sudbury. The number may sound large but really is quite typical.

The Sudbury Foundation has generously funded, for the next two years, the new position of School and Family Social Worker. Our district is experiencing, like every other district, a growth in the number of students with significant emotional, behavioral, familial needs that get in the way of their school success. This new position will serve and support such students/families in each of our five schools.

Speaking of generosity, we have collaborated with our PTOs to provide 16 new ActivBoards, projectors and laptops for deployment in classrooms around the district. This dynamic instructional and learning tool helps teachers bring learning to life. Teachers who are currently using them are very excited and indicate that the boards have changed the way they teach. This supports our core belief that deep learning occurs in active classrooms where students have a context for the content they are trying to learn. I hope you will get an opportunity to see a demonstration of these new teaching tools in action.

Did I mention generosity? Last year we were contacted by Mr. Herb Stoller of the Rosenberg Charitable Trust offering a significant contribution to our efforts to provide quality services and support for the children, and their families, with autism spectrum disorders. As a result, we are happy to provide the services of an Autism Specialist as a resource for teachers, students and families. We will be able to employ an applied behavioral analysis (ABA) tutor for a new district program designed for children with autism spectrum disorders. In addition, we will provide a special music program for the students in the Partners program at Loring and continued professional development for all staff in the area of autism.

The ILAP (Improved Learning for All Plan) gets under way this fall with an early release schedule for staff professional development on the 2nd and 4th Wednesday's of each month. Please note the new start and dismissal times for each school this year. These time modifications are designed to address previous bussing issues. In addition to the time adjustments, we have redesigned the bus routing system and modified stop locations to bring further efficiencies to the system and ensure all students are safe and arriving at school and home within a reasonable length of time. We recognize these changes cause some disruptions to family routines and schedules and we appreciate your understanding and cooperation.

If you have not already accessed it, I encourage you to check out the new web-based transportation program and information section contained on our website. We are working hard to utilize available technology to make information more available that works best for you.

Our technology staff has been very busy over the summer in installing new equipment, operating systems and educational enhancements. From the generosity (there's that word again) of the taxpayers in last year's override vote, we have been able to replace the dated workstations in three labs (Nixon, Noyes and ECMS #151) with new, more powerful equipment. We will move the computers currently in these labs into classrooms as computers there fail or are found to be inadequate.

We are also rolling out a point-of-service management system in our food services program. This will allow parents to make on-line payments for lunches,

provide better accounting and reporting of sales, and ultimately make the service to students faster.

Odyssey? We are very close to finalizing the new structure for Odyssey 2008. A team of staff worked throughout the summer and we believe this year's program will be accessible to all students, will be an active, discovery science based learning experience and will be located at a camp that is within an hour of Sudbury. Watch for more on this on our website soon.

The heart of our mission lies in teaching and learning that happens in our classrooms. Curriculum and instruction enhancements have certainly not been ignored. Samples of the forthcoming enhancements include:

- Our 3rd graders will be pioneers in their study of Colonial Sudbury. They will tour historical sites and meet the characters of that period of our town's history.
- Our students will participate in the town-wide Longfellow Big Read celebration. As a community, we will come together around the writings and life of Longfellow and the importance of the Wayside Inn to our town.
- Student writing will be a focus of our professional development efforts. We are intent on improving the writing skills of all students and will pilot new materials and strategies to that end.
- We will incorporate the newest release of the Investigations Elementary Math program in K, 1st and 3rd grades (2nd, 4th and 5th next year.)
- The Impact Math program will be extended into the 8th grade this year, completing the implementation of this new program at Curtis.
- Science has been a content area of concern and in need of our attention for some time. We began the improvement efforts last year and will sustain that throughout this year.

I started this by saying that each year brings several new initiatives that are part of our Improving on Excellence efforts. The list above reflects some of those initiatives. It is important to remember that regardless of the program, service, initiative, or pilot opportunities, our focus remains clearly on each student. The safety, learning, health, and happiness of each of our 3,377 students is our number one job.

I hope 2007-08 is the best year you and your child(ren) have experienced in Sudbury Public Schools. We thank you for your trust, generosity, support and the opportunity to work with your child(ren.)