

SUPERINTENDENT'S NEWSLETTER

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RSU #1

Arrowsic, Bath, Phippsburg, West Bath, Woolwich

"Education of a Lifetime – for a Lifetime"

February 5, 2010

The sun is beginning to rise just a few minutes sooner and staying a few minutes longer each day, though as I write this on this very cold early Saturday morning, awakening to no heat, I am reminded that the Groundhog's appearance doesn't make much of a difference. Soon, you will see the first robin, hear the first crack of spring training and marvel at the brave crocus that dares to show his colors while snow still falls. Hope eternal in the abiding rhythms of life is a reminder that amidst some cloudy days of uncertainty and frost heaves that some of you feel right now, the sun will rise every day, coffee will perk and good people, with long history of deep caring will put the sun back in the sky.



Since I wrote last month, a lot has happened in this world. Haiti has been devastated, an ever present reminder that having a torn meniscus pales in comparison to the reality of a lost child in ruins. The best of humanity rises from these horrid moments, children in Wanda Brown's first grade class raising over \$500.00 to send to those who need it most. There was a 5K race on Saturday morning, a race announced by Morse Senior and RSU 1 board student representative Kean McDermott, in Bath to raise money and other efforts that come from the human spirit. We have seen the odd math that comes from the election of Scott Brown in Massachusetts, somehow the end of a Democrat rein in the Senate despite a 59-41 majority. We are not shocked by the revelation that John Edwards is the father, bored by the antics of late night NBC and even interested that the world is mourning Dennis Hopper's divorce. Why aren't the headlines heralding our girl's basketball team, again an upset winner of Edward Little on Friday night or Shawn Guest's wrestlers winning more matches than any Morse team ever or the kids chosen for All State Chorus, or George Schaab taking kids to the Ocean Bowl, confident that we will win, or the dozens of other real success stories that should and deserve to be showcased in this world. Children from Woolwich raised over \$1000 to send to a program called Kombat Sente, a Haitian relief effort. We have high performing students in every one of our schools and yes, I am an eternal optimist, also looking for those rays of hope and promise.

A confrontation with a citizen

I took a call last Sunday while at work and this man,

whom I never had met, started questioning me on why our staff salaries have risen by 400% since 1970 yet our SAT's continue to flounder, even drop. "Why the hell am I paying so much in taxes if I get such lousy results?" he railed at me. I tried to explain that more kids are taking the SAT's now than in 1970. It was obvious that he was not listening and he shifted to comparing our rather flaccid increase in MEA scores, and again, I found myself reeling from the uppercuts, trying to explain that the tests have changed so often, now the NECAPs and it was very difficult to compare results over a period of time. He shifted to dropout rates, using fairly irrefutable data, that show that our nation's drop out rates have also plateaued in the last 20 years and asked me what we were doing about that and why the hell is Morse so high in drop outs. I had an answer ready for that one. Yes, we did have a very high drop out rate; we don't now. In reality, we are losing very few kids every year that actually 'quit.' (I won't get into the actual computation for how the federal government computes drop outs, but it makes no sense at all). "We have made a huge dent in the drop out rate at Morse," I told him and highlighted some very direct interventions that we think have made a difference. But, he was on a toot and shifted back to data. "I want you to give every kid in your school the NWEA three times a year and I want those results published." He continued by saying, "that is a nationally normed test and you can't give me a bunch of mumble jumble like you have given me for the last half hour." It was clear that he was well informed, driven and relentless. "Do you believe that it is essential to look at the data?" he demanded. "Yes, it is my training as a psychologist to look at the data, even if it is the brutal truth." "Well," he continued, "I believe every parent in your new fancy RSU should be demanding to know how their kids are doing, what assessments you are using and what you are doing to help each child get stronger and smarter. Is that too much to ask?" he ended. No, it is not. He is right on and it was a reminder that it is my job to try to convince every teacher that data is the key to improving student achievement.

Technology: Does it improve student learning?

You decide, but look at some salient comments from some of the most conservative groups in America. Let's start with NSBA (National School Boards Association), {not exactly known as the skateboard generation}. "We know that successful technology-rich

schools generate impressive results for students, including improved achievement; higher test scores; improved student attitude, enthusiasm, and engagement; richer classroom content; and improved student retention and job placement rates.” Of the hundreds of studies that show positive benefits from the use of technology, two are worth noting for their comprehensiveness. The first, a U.S. Department of Education-funded study of nine technology-rich schools, concluded that the use of technology resulted in educational gains for all students regardless of age, race, parental income, or other characteristics. The second, a 10-year study supported by Apple Computer, Inc., concluded that student provided with technology-rich learning environments ‘continued to perform well on standardized tests, but were also developing a variety of competencies not usually measured. Students explored and represented information dynamically and in many forms; became socially aware and more confident; communicated effectively about complex processes; became independent learners and self-starters; knew their areas of expertise and shared that expertise spontaneously.’ The second, a 10-year study supported by Apple Computer, Inc., concluded that student provided with technology-rich learning environments ‘continued to perform well on standardized tests but were also developing a variety of competencies not usually measured. Students explored and represented information dynamically and in many forms; became socially aware and more confident; communicated effectively about complex processes; became independent learners and self-starters; knew their areas of expertise and shared that expertise spontaneously.’

Let’s look at another researcher. Stratham and Torell reviewed 10 meta-analyses on the effectiveness of technology. Their findings indicated that:

- When properly implemented, computer technology had a significant effect on student achievement, as measured by test scores across subject areas and with students at all levels.
- When used appropriately, computer technology stimulated increased teacher- student interaction and encouraged cooperative learning, collaboration, problem-solving, and student inquiry skills.
- Students from computer-rich classrooms demonstrated better behavior and had lower absentee and drop-out rates than students from classrooms lacking computers.
- Computer-based teaching was especially effective among populations of at-risk students.

Folks, if you honestly examine the data, it becomes overwhelming. Technology, even in the hands of the mildly technology proficient teacher, improves interest, collaboration, attention, higher ordered thinking and behavior. You would have to be in a coma for the last 20 years not to recognize that this is the digital generation and though most of us are not digital natives, look

around you and seek out David Ingmundson, Bob Jordan, Laura Phelps, Fran Lemont (you got to see her and her kids with her new SmartBoard), Pam Doe in her READ 180 lab, Kelli Rogers who made her own SmartBoard for 5 bucks and a host of others, pioneers, I call them, bravely, and intently seeking to connect with our students of the 21st century, knowing that the chalkboard, even the white board will soon be in the Smithsonian.

I want to thank all of the teachers that take this leap into the present. This is the era of technology. It is not about to go away and we can assail it all we want, yet, the kids, our kids, are connected and expect you to be also. One last comment. I know that some of you may be rankled by this perspective. You may say that technology has ‘dumbed’ down America, decreased the ability to write effectively and opened portals to debauchery, violence and endless ways to waste time. Yet, it is here. Please take 10 minutes and read Peter Kahl’s blog where he has posted dozens of very interesting comments from students regarding the value of laptops to their education. Technology is only going to move forward and yes, the Kindle 2 or the I-pads of the world will eventually replace texts; tomorrow’s adults will gather most of their knowledge through web based learning and books, pens, paper, markers, encyclopedias, dictionaries, thesauruses, will be the equivalent artifacts such as VCR’s, tape players, and SONY Walkman’s (oh, they are so 90’s) will be stored somewhere in the attic or nicely displayed in the Smithsonian. Note this famous quote: “The inventor of the system deserves to be ranked among the best contributors to learning and science, if not the greatest benefactors of mankind.” ~ Josiah F. Bumstead 1841 (On the benefits of the chalkboard.)



The Preliminary State Subsidy Reports Have Arrived

We had been told to expect a cut of \$1.2 to \$1.4 million in subsidy for the upcoming 2010-2011 budget year. The preliminary (and I underscore preliminary) report shows a cut of \$637,000, plus another \$41,500 in debt service and about \$135,000 in Medicaid moneys that we use to offset school based treatment services (OT, PT, speech, social work, etc.) {It appears that Medicaid is terminating all school based reimbursements}. It is not good news, it is just not as horrid as we expected. We start the budget cycle having endured a cut this year of \$594,000 wiping out any possible carry over funds that we had hoped to offset next year’s losses. Our administrators are working hard as a team to identify those areas that we may need to address. We are already an efficient organization and there is no ‘fat’ in our budget. The staff has been dutiful to limit spending on texts, supplies and consumables, even

though this amounts to very little in our total budget. Why did we get cut less than expected? I don't know. Other RSU's of the same size and budget were cut nearly twice what we have been cut. I am traveling to Augusta to get some more definitive answers. No subsidy figures are firm until the state enacts a budget and given the venom in Augusta, it could take quite a while. One of the contentious issues is that 'non-conforming' districts (those that did not consolidated) have been penalized in accordance with the state consolidation law and a percentage of those penalties have been passed on to us. There is legislation pending to overturn that as I write.

Let me answer one of the biggest parking lot questions (parking lot questions are defined as those non-collaborative, eye rolling discussions primarily designed to undermine morale, not to seek truth). Would we be better off if we had not consolidated? Now, this is a good and important question, one so important that it deserves a response, and not cloaked to undermine the forward progress we have made. The answer is very clear. Our goose would be cooked if we did not consolidate. We have saved over \$500,000 now in central office costs, and these are savings each year. We have been able to consolidate special education delivery, and benefited greatly from bidding out major services (auditing, fuel oil, paper products, custodial services, etc.). Our own RSU 1 funding formula protects our communities from incredible shifts in tax rates due to sudden increases in property valuations or enrollment decreases. We did get additional moneys that were distributed to us from non conforming school systems. Despite the continued resistance to school consolidation across the state, those districts that have formed after us are beginning to see the benefits of having done so. We are in a much better situation than ever and will continue to be able to be more and more efficient as we move forward.

So what does this budget mess do for us? It hurts. It will hurt us badly. Since 80% of our budget is people, the other 20% is hard to cut. This includes transportation (Bath Bus Service provides the second lowest per mile cost in the state). We have heating costs (we locked in low next year), electricity (we put back out to bid), building maintenance (thank you David and Russ for having so many skills) and materials you need to teach (less than \$175 a child, and that includes library materials). We are a tight system in this 20% area, for sure, which makes our work very difficult as we address the other 80%. As I have told everyone before, though there are a lot of discussions and ideas about how to address our subsidy shortfall, no decisions have been made and I assure you, every one of you, that if your situation is affected, you will hear directly from me. Promise. So, since no one has heard a word from me, you can be assured that your situation is not yet affected. I urge everyone to continue to do your best every day, work with kids, give 100% or more and know

that the process will work out in a respectful, well thought out manner.

Bath City Employees Begin Mentoring Program

Thanks to Mark Carignan and Ross Berkowitz, we have teamed up with some city employees to provide a mentoring program with students who can benefit from a positive adult role model. It will start with lunch and as relationships are built, you can be sure that our kids will benefit from the decency of the men and women who have volunteered to do this.

Pre-K at BRCTC

Folks, if you get a chance, please stop in and see Gretchen Parlin or Rosalie Perkins to watch this program in action. We have about 20 little ones in a certified pre-kindergarten program. They are using a curriculum called



Tools of the Mind, which focuses on teaching children self regulatory behavior and it is quite remarkable. Pre-K is not only a valued added service to our RSU, it also helped in reducing the subsidy cuts, since we were able to stabilize our enrollment figures for the first time in 7 years due to adding 4 year olds to our numbers. They would be so happy to have you stop in and visit them. While you are at the Career and Technical Center, take a look at our Electrical program, smell what EB and Emily are cooking up, drive down and see Toni Trippi's new house or stop in and watch David Minott's kids fixing cars. Lots of good work happens at the center.

April 1 Art Show

The 5th annual district art show will be on April 1 this year, from 5:30 to 7:30 hosted by Fisher Mitchell this year. This is an exciting event. Last year's art show was attended by over 700 people and our art teachers are working hard and passionate to make each year's event more fun and interesting than the previous year. The goal is to have every child have at least one piece of framed art on display. Now, that is quite a goal.

Finally, Can You Read This?

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What implications does this have for what we think we know about brain development and literacy?

