

October 10, 2008

Dear Small School families,

My hopeful prediction of an Indian summer has been dashed by the more than 10 inches of rain last month. Given that it has already snowed on Mount Washington and that it is only 52 degrees as I write this, I am less optimistic that October will send us more gloriously warm days. Well, I am not sure if it was the wet and cold weather, fast pace of being back to work, or just being in close proximity to over 350 or so individuals carrying all sorts of what not, but I am writing this at home while recovery from Bronchitis (Sorry Mrs. Niles; she insisted that I rest!) Yet, communicating with home is one of my favorite monthly responsibilities and want to take advantage of this opportunity to write in peace and quiet which is a luxury rarely afforded. So, let us catch up.

Academic Open House had a marvelous K-2 turn out and a moderate 3-5 turn out. I would like to hear from parents regarding their thoughts about the information shared and what they took away from the evening. Specifically, what did it leave you thinking about in regards to your child as a learner as well as Small School as her/his learning environment? If you were unable to attend, I would also like to know if there is anything the school could do differently to have you here.

Please indulge me with a quick synopsis of the evening. In addressing the “State of the School”, I shared that “We are currently preparing students for jobs and technologies that do not yet exist to solve problems we can not yet even conceive.” (Shifthappens ...) This is simply no small task and one we address at Small School as individual educators as well as a K-5 collective collegial team. I shared the abundant resources the district, school board, and you, as taxpayers, support in order to best meet the needs of the 21 st century learners.

Through various data points, it is apparent that Small School does a tremendous job of creating very high percentages of achieving readers. This means that students are decoding, comprehending, and interpreting text quite well through all the grades. We also know that mathematical problem solving is strong in all grades with computational skills dropping in proficiency in grades 4 and 5. We know just by walking down the halls and looking at student work that we are producing strong voices in our young writers. As a school and district we are anxious to analyze the district writing prompt data in grades K-5, looking for trends of instructional strength and areas needing improvement. Last year’s MEA reveals that either very few students in the state of Maine can write well in response to a persuasive essay or that the test prompt / scoring was flawed. Regardless, the district and Small School are very much invested in improved writing instructional practices across all grades.

Further, we looked at attendance data. Overall, Small School’s attendance is the poorest in the district. Strangely, it is strongly contrasts the outstanding parent volunteerism we have at Small which is roughly over 3,000 hours logged in yearly! How is it we have parents consistently in attendance for all manner of support and giving of themselves, yet too many students arrive late or have excessive absences? Am I selfish to want both? Let me share a remarkable statistic in here for parents of late or absent student to consider.

“Data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress indicate that three factors over which families can exercise authority are school attendance, variety of reading materials at home, and television watching- account for nearly 90 percent of the difference in the average state-by-state performance of eighth-graders’ mathematics test scores (U.S. Department of Education, 1994). (And I thrown in here that the average 21 year old has watched over 20,000 hours of television) A national study o f eighth-graders shows that parental involvement in students’ academic lives is a powerful influence on students’

achievement across all academic areas (Keith & Keith, 1993). Higher achievement occurs, in part, because students whose families are more involved in their education do more homework, are closely monitored for attendance and use of leisure time (Raising the Educational Achievement of Secondary School Students- Volume 1 Summary of Promising Practices- 1995)”.

At the Academic Open House, I asked parents four requests: 1) Continue to read to and be read to by your child on a nightly basis, 2) practice automaticity /recall of applicable math facts, 3) make school attendance (8:45 am – 3:00 pm) a family priority, and 4) keep open lines of communication between home and school to ensure we are working together to make sure that every student is achieving to his /her fullest potential.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Hicks

P.S. In the next newsletter I will update everyone on our community dancing! If you go anywhere different/special go ahead and do a dance and send us a copy to incorporate into our video. I will also be able to introduce you to our newest education technician in third grade as well as a lead custodian. Congratulations to Roy Kierstead for moving to a custodial foreman position at Memorial Middle School. We wish him and his football team much success!