



Where Each Child's Life-long Learning Adventure Takes Flight

December 11, 2007

Dear Parents,

With winter weather upon us and the holiday season here, we are hustling and bustling to meet our many obligations and commitments. At school, the first trimester has ended; therefore, teachers are working to evaluate your child's progress to date based on individualized learning goals in the fall and grade level benchmarks. On December 18, you will be receiving your child's progress report with evidence which supports the growth that has occurred to date. This is a good time to reflect on progress, develop new goals, and make plans with teachers to move your child forward academically.

As a school principal, one very important role is to be a facilitator of the professional growth of a variety of educational practitioners. That's a more apt descriptor and more fancy way of saying that I am responsible for formally evaluating and supervising nearly twenty professionals this school year. For example, I am either the primary or secondary evaluator of many educators who are new to the system. They include one literacy specialist, one kindergarten teacher, two second grade teachers, one fifth grade teacher, and a nurse. This entails pre-conferencing, observing at least twice, post-conferencing, writing up formal observations, and following up on specific recommendations, needs, and learning interests of the new staff members. There are six practitioners whom I am solely responsible for who are new to the formalized professional growth plan, but not new to education. They are a guidance counselor, speech/language clinician, special education teacher, a second and third grade teacher, and a literacy teacher/specialist. I am also following up on five continuing contract teachers who are in their second year of their professional growth plan which include an art teacher, and a kindergarten, first, second, and third grade teacher. While the process of supervision can be time consuming and sometimes tedious to meet the numerous deadlines and needs of the adults, it is a wonderful and stimulating opportunity to observe, hopefully facilitate, and be part of the professional development of others in the district. I certainly do not profess to be knowledgeable in all aspects of the varied roles and responsibilities that each of these people play in the learning of the elementary student; however, I am excited by new learning and in awe of what they bring to the process. By seeing different educators outside of the Small School setting, I am able to pilfer; I mean borrow, wonderful educational strategies being implemented in individual classrooms and in other schools within the district. I would like to take this opportunity to share some of the great work happening within this district at the elementary level. These are but a few examples that skim the surface of the thoughtful practices being played out around South Portland elementary schools that I have been privy to in the last few months.

At **Brown School**, the students were lining up for recess and Mrs. Briggs, second grade teacher, was reminding students that it was "Mix It Up Day", initiated by the school counselor, Mrs. Schwellenbach. Students were to sit with classmates who shared the same birth month. What a simple, but easily structured way for students to get to know each other better through a not so obvious commonality. At **Kaler School**, Miss Fowler, fifth grade teacher, had students create their own inventions based on the Motion and Design science unit. Work products included computer images of the labeled design, advertisements, and explanations giving the purpose and function of their inventions. At **Dyer School**, I delighted in a simple reflective code a second grade teacher, Ms. Dobosz, used to help students process what they were reading. Students use the following codes while making meaning and connections with their reading: ? – I am confused; ! - Wow; that's awesome; W – This is a new word; X – That makes me think differently ; and + - This is new information. At **Skillin School**, Ms. George, third grade teacher, instructs Windows to Poetry where students are asked to recall a memorable image. In one block they describe the image. In another they recall any lights and in another any sounds connected to the memory. The students also generate questions evoked by the image. Next, they repeat one powerful word three times. Lastly, they recall how they felt in the memory. Students cut the six pieces up and place them in any window pane creating a poetry collage.

It is heartening to know that varied and talented practices are happening through out the district. In my next newsletter I will highlight practices that have evoked curiosity, excitement, and interest in me here at Small School. I encourage parents to take time to walk up and down the halls (after school please) to catch a glimpse of some of the students' work products. In the meantime, relish your own child's accomplishments, talk about school positively, connect with your child's teachers and become knowledgeable about learning benchmarks and goals, and develop ways to build on your child's school skills and abilities.

Don't forget to stay warm, play, **read together**, and take time to just hang out and be a family. Peace and affection this holiday season.

Sincerely,

Bonnie Hicks, Principal

