



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

October 16, 2007

Dear Small School families,

It seems like eons ago since the Small School community was taking its summer break; however, many teachers utilize that precious time to build on their own professional growth. For example, I took a workshop entitled Mentor/Coaches for Novice Principals in order to build on my skills and abilities as an educational leader in hopes to one day support the work of newly hired administrators within the region. I am also in the process of becoming a surrogate parent for students needing support in the Individual Educational Planning process (formally known as Pupil Evaluation Team, PET). If you have experience with educational planning (like with your own child) and/or the desire to assist some individual who does not have advocacy in the special educational process, I encourage you to contact www.state.me.us/education/surr/ for more information.

Many teachers, such as Nancy Olson and Anita Wood, grade 2 teachers, and Lynne Johnston took advantage of the Summer Information Technology Institute offered by the district. In this course they have learned to utilize technology to fit their individual teaching needs. Teachers are utilizing web sites more proficiently, generating documents to organize and analyze data, and creating some very funky newsletters to inform parents of classroom curriculum and practices. As our school social worker, Mrs. Johnston also took a graduate course entitled Depression and Suicide in Adolescents and she read the OASIS Guide to Asperger Syndrome and a book on Tourette's. Phew, heavy stuff! Anne Tewhey, third grade teacher, took two graduate courses as well. They were Developing Numeracy in the Elementary Classroom and Using Technology to Support Assessment in the K-12 classroom. Laura Stevens, second grade teacher, continues her advanced studies (she already has a PhD!) through course work at USM. She took Aspects of Reading for Multilingual Learners. Given the district's desire to have English Second Language learners to be able to access their neighborhood schools, Ms. Stevens will be a valuable resource for us all. It truly takes a lot of resources of energetic, talented, and knowledgeable individuals to support the diversity of students here at Small School.

You should all be well acquainted with the new staff members through their introduction via the PTA newsletters. We are proud to have such fine quality individuals who add greatly to the team approach we strive to emulate here at Small. They come knowledgeable about their practice, excited to be part of a team, and share in the fun that does occur each and every day. Most importantly, they enjoy children more than anything else whether they are serving food, keeping the facility clean, or directly instructing students.

Students have enjoyed many experiential opportunities through field trips; thank you PTA! They include grade four taking advantage of our beautiful community by working on curriculum at SMCC and a local cemetery. Fifth grade did the same by using their senses to write about Fort Preble. It would not be fall without the annual grade three trip to the Cumberland Fair and grade one visiting Wolfe Neck Farm. Our second annual harvest is under way through the guidance of the greening committee. I was able to donate a hubbard squash, but no takers for the beets and parsnip yet. Mr. Thurlow presented fourth and fifth graders with the most special treat of inviting Donn Fendler, the actual boy, *Lost on a Mountain in Maine* in 1939.

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I am tickled to see students purchasing their own books and borrowing the book from the library. Students were enraptured with the retelling of the actual events and took away valuable lessons and a new friendship. Interestingly, Mrs. Wentworth's father, a physician, was involved in Mr. Fendler's rescue, so the connections go deep.

And of course formalized assessments continue. Last spring's MEA have arrived and have been shared with families of last year's students in grade 3, 4 and 5. Small students performed phenomenally well. Collectively, Small School students exceeded district and state meets or exceeds scores in all subcategories, excluding fourth grade math. While score differences were not statistically significant, we will continue to look more closely at our mathematical instruction in grades K-5 to ensure learning mirrors best practice as well as addresses learning expectations. Last year, school level staff development spent time investigating, sharing, and analyzing what good mathematical instruction sounds and looks like. As you have noticed through grades K-5, mathematics is no longer only about fluent mathematical computation, but more importantly, being able to problem solve and strategize in a variety of ways.

Small School fifth graders scored the same as district and state students for writing at 58% meeting or exceeding the standard. This month all students will be given the district- wide writing prompt, which provides us with a wealth of information on the district, grade, school, and individual student levels. Students in K-2 have been given many literacy assessments to inform reading and writing practice. Also, grades 3-5 have been involved in NWEA testing which looks closely at reading and mathematical skills. Teachers will use this data as one source of information to develop academic goals for individual students and to inform individual, small group, and whole class instruction.

At all of the schools in South Portland, we have implemented a system called Response to Intervention to assist students who are not succeeding at an adequate level. We use all of these assessments and more to help establish specific types of interventions that are needed to boost student achievement. We are very pleased at Small School to have Sandra Jones, a literacy teacher who supplements classroom literacy instruction for some first and second graders. Stephanie McLaughlin is new to our district and assists all teachers grades 3-5 as a literacy specialist who provides support to build on teacher practices and professional relationships so good practices are being shared as well as problem solving for individual and groups of students needing additional support. At Small we also boast the opportunity to utilize a literacy tutor during the school grade. Last year Amy Bromwell worked with small groups of students in grades 3-5; however, the evaluative data we have on all students helps us as a school decide where needs reside to enhance student achievement. All of this to say, we are cooking on all burners at high heat. We can only do this by continued learning, collegiality, and shared ownership of the students at hand. Together, we are planning to make a positive difference in your child's educational life!

Sincerely,

Bonnie Hicks

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