

Dear Merrimack Families~

Over the years, the Merrimack School District has distinguished itself in a number of ways. Over the last ten years, two of our elementary schools have been named elementary school of the year by the New Hampshire Excellence in Education Committee and one of our principals has been named elementary principal of the year by that same committee. Other Merrimack personnel have been recognized in their area of work by this committee as well, from assistant principals to special educators, school counselors and gifted and talented teachers. More recently, Merrimack has led the way in recognizing the emerging issue of student mental health as a significant factor contributing to the rise in serious behavioral and academic challenges faced by our students and those who serve them in our schools. From that early recognition of the problem the district mental health committee formed and was tasked with examining that phenomenon and recommending, after serious review, research and data analysis, possible systemic responses to it. Since those early days of this effort, the Merrimack School District has been in the forefront of this issue, partnering with other school districts throughout the state all of whom are facing similar challenges and most of whom have been inspired by Merrimack's work and leadership on this issue. Their work has been recognized by the governor the Bureau of Student Wellness at the Department of Education, and other agents and agencies, all of whom recognize both Merrimack's leadership and partnership on this very important matter.

Once again, the work of Merrimack staff has been recognized, this time for its leadership in the area of planning for our eventual return to school in the post-COVID-19 era. Our school district nurses have been providing guidance and leadership to all of us since the first days of this health emergency, and have been doing so ever since. Most recently, these excellent health care professionals we are proud to call our own have been hard at work regarding the current health crisis and the effect it will have on health services when school resumes. Most recently, they have worked to identify a number of scenarios to consider when school resumes in the fall, in whatever form that may take, with a goal of proactively developing a plan for how to monitor and manage the health status and safety of our students and staff.

Once again, leading the way, our nurses reached out to neighbor districts to share their work and to seek feedback, recognizing the value in working together to plan for and develop a thoughtful and comprehensive plan for the safe return of our students and staff. In recognition of this work, both in form and substance, the NH School Nurses Association asked our nurses to be part of the state wide COVID-19 task force. The task force is a state wide committee working to create protocols and guidelines for the new school year with guidance from the Center for Disease Control (CDC), NH Department of Health and Human Services (NH DHHS), and the National Association of School Nurses (NASN).

Merrimack represented 4 out of the 12 attendees at the recent task force meeting, and when they shared what they had been working on on behalf of our district, the task force asked if they could use and share our nurse's developing framework state wide. They were impressed with the work they had already done, and with how Merrimack was leading the

way in getting the conversation started around what school health care services will look like in the future.

As I have said on so many occasions, there is much to do in the short term to conclude this school year as successfully as we can. But there are many long term considerations as well, and as we work on the now, many of our staff, and particularly our school nurses, are working on the new future. I am grateful for their commitment and dedication to the health and safety of our students. We are lucky indeed to have these health care professionals on our team.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin
Superintendent