

Dear Merrimack Families and District Staff~

As this school year comes to a close I have been reflecting on all the many employees throughout our school district whose contributions to our goal of providing the best education it can under any conditions must be properly acknowledged. Now, more than ever, it is necessary to recognize those whose services on behalf of the youth of our community and, by extension, the community itself, are inseparable from the common good. It goes without saying, then, that our educators, ALL our educators no matter their title, keep the engine of public schooling running, and running well under conditions both favorable and unfavorable to education itself.

In any normal given year, our teachers work very hard. And if merely the typical responsibilities of a teacher were all they were accountable for, those alone would be daunting enough—taking 15, 20, 25 or more students, all with diverse needs, diverse backgrounds, wholly different, variable and highly impactful personal stories, a huge variety of learning styles and cognitive abilities, a huge variety of behavioral and emotional challenges, and turn that vast and changeable melting pot into a learning community guided by local, state and federal requirements and subject to a variety of mandated, and frequently changing, accountability requirements, and do so successfully on more days than not, and you come close to recognizing the daily life of a teacher. And this is just Monday--one day out of 180.

But this was not a normal year. This year, as if literally out of the blue, a pandemic swept the world, and New Hampshire was not spared. We left for February vacation confident that we knew the trajectory of the rest of this school year and returned to unseen and completely unprecedented forces. Within two weeks of our return from February vacation, schools closed. And within four days of that date, schools reopened to remote instruction. Teachers, under the expert guidance of their principals and assistant principals, completely rewrote the script for the rest of the school year, agile enough to plan without a clear sense, at the time, of an end date to this unprecedented interruption of operations. Within days Zoom

classes began. Analog packets were developed and distributed by smiling, supportive teachers whose main goal was to show their students that they were still there for them, had their back, and would get them through this crisis. Educators, ALL educators, recognized that their support, their confidence in students' success in the midst of this sudden and dramatic turn of events, meant everything to their students. And our educators never looked back. They learned. They adapted. They produced. They performed. And, most importantly, they were there for their students, through it all.

Some might say that is their job. And it is. But let's be clear. Not all jobs have as their core mission the academic, emotional and physical well being of young people. Some might say teachers chose this work. That is true. But that does not diminish for one minute the importance of their work or the gratitude we should all feel for those who choose this complicated profession and stay with it, despite occasionally daunting obstacles and changeable conditions over which teachers have very little, if any, control. The fact, frequently and rightly acknowledged, that this enterprise fails, on occasion, cannot be overlooked. But in this school district, at this time, our teachers have fully committed to do their best. And on those occasions, when that best is not good enough, our teachers acknowledge and commit to do better, learn more, adapt, grow, change and evolve. That is the reality of the Merrimack School District educator, ALL of them, and as we wind down this extraordinary school year, when we have depended on these professionals for so much, and when so much has been given, I offer my deepest thanks. It is all I can do. I invite you all to join me, in whatever ways you think appropriate, to do the same.

Stay well.

Mark McLaughlin
Superintendent