

MAINE SCHOOL ADMINISTRATIVE DISTRICT NO. 35

Serving the communities of ELIOT & SOUTH BERWICK

Mary C. Nash, Ph.D.
Superintendent of Schools

Ryan Cormier
Financial Manager

John Caverly
Chief of Operations

Heidi Early-Hersey
Director of Teaching & Learning

Carole A. Smith, Ed.D.
Director of Special Services

The Superintendent's Opening Day Address

Wednesday, August 29, 2018

Welcome back! I am so very glad to see you all! I hope you have enjoyed this spectacular Maine summer with your family and friends!

It's hard to believe that school got out on Friday, June 15th isn't it? Hasn't the summer been just wonderful? I am so pleased to report that many of you attended professional development sessions throughout this spectacular summer and we are grateful for your efforts in this regard! Just last week the district hosted a professional development institute together with York and SAD 60 at York High School and what a success! Thank you, Heidi, for working so hard to make this opportunity so rich for so many practitioners!

I would also like to thank Devan Weber and Pam Starkey who attended a workshop at Colby College this summer and brought us the Teachers 2 Teachers initiative: *Why I Teach*. What a terrific idea! Thank you!

In thinking through where we are and where we are going as a district, I thought it would be helpful to reflect where we have been as a community of teachers and learners in terms of strengthening the instructional core of our work.

In October 2014, the district submitted its application to the Department of Education regarding its proficiency based diploma implementation plan. Our plan was thoughtfully prepared and based on the assumption that the district needed to move slowly and deliberately in this area and learn from other districts' plans before crafting one of our own for our students and for our community.

Proficiency based standards work is incredibly important and incredibly complex work! The idea is to ensure that all Marshwood students have the opportunity to demonstrate proficiency or advanced skills and knowledge in each of the eight Maine Learning areas. Proficiency based diploma work essentially aligns our content and performance standards with those across the nation and the world affording Marshwood students the opportunity to compete fairly in the local, national and world economies.

However, in preparing to do this incredible work, I reminded our community that although Marshwood always likes to be in the lead, in this particular effort, I recommended that the district stay safely nestled in the upper half of the lower third of districts in Maine in terms

of our final implementation phase so that we could carefully craft a plan that was good for Marshwood students. And that is the solid foundation upon which our work has been based i.e. to ask ourselves over and over again: *“What is good for Marshwood students?”*

We did our proficiency based diploma work over the past four years not because the state told us to but because we believed it was the right thing to do for Marshwood students and for the Marshwood community.

As a result of this approach, in 2014 we applied for and were approved for “Option 5” status from the DOE which meant that by the year 2021, all Marshwood students would receive a proficiency based diploma. In line with this time frame, in 2017 the Board approved a graduation policy for the district that outlined graduation requirements for the Class of 2021 and beyond and maintained traditional graduation requirements for the Classes of 2018, 2019, and 2020.

It is a result of this thoughtful, methodical work that together over the past four years we have: unpacked the standards at each grade level and content area; worked to organize the standards into scopes and sequences, and crafted units of study together. We have built strong common assessments across our grade levels and content areas and we have learned how to validate all of our curriculum work so that every Marshwood student has the opportunity to learn at high levels.

And yet, perhaps to no one’s surprise in this auditorium, earlier this summer, the Legislature essentially hit the UNDO button regarding proficiency based diplomas and passed the decision-making back to local districts!

What shall we do now?

I believe we need to move through this unsettling time slowly and methodically. We have done great work over the past four years precisely because we framed it around what was good for Marshwood students (and not what was good for the DOE)! It would be a huge mistake in my opinion to just hit the UNDO button and throw all of our work out the window. What we need to do is carefully examine our proficiency based diploma work, ask ourselves what is important to keep, what is important to still work on and are there better ways of providing our students with opportunities to learn at high standards.

I ask you to join me and engage in this continuing professional conversation around what is good for Marshwood students in the area of proficiency based diplomas. Therefore, I will convene an advisory group to look at the work we have done in this area already and to advise me on how best to shape the work in the future. I envision the advisory committee meeting once per month from October through March and then in the spring of 2019 I will summarize the committee’s thinking and advise the Board of any changes that may need to be considered by the Board’s Policy Committee regarding the district’s graduation requirements. In late September, I will send out an invitation to you to consider serving on the proficiency based diploma advisory committee. This advisory committee structure is similar to the successful structure of “The Group” we used to craft our PE/PG plan and

it is my hope that we will be able to have several of our best teachers from each school serve on this important proficiency based diploma advisory committee.

Finally, as we think through our proficiency based diploma work we need to simultaneously continue to build Pathways to Proficiencies for all of our students. This could include designing after-school, weekend, school vacation, or even summer extended teaching and learning time where our very best teachers and Ed Techs are paid extra to offer students who are not yet proficient the opportunity to learn at high levels such that they too can demonstrate their proficiency in their learning. The Summer Reading Program at the Great Works School this summer is a great example of creating opportunities for struggling readers to accelerate their literacy progress during non-school hours. 60 elementary aged students from grades 2-5 who needed an extra boost in reading attended this Summer Reading Program half days from July 30th to August 16th. We learned that some operational supports really improved our students' attendance. For example, students were bussed to and from school and had both a breakfast and lunch served a school. The classrooms were air conditioned and there was an atmosphere of: "Yes, I can read and have fun too!" permeating throughout the classes. Gifted teachers and Ed Techs embraced the new program with a flexible mindset and the result of all of these efforts was a great success! This is the type of innovative programming we will need to design in constructing our Pathways to Proficiency at all grade levels as we move forward! Well done everyone and thank you!

This is our journey and it is a result of our listening to each other and figuring out how best to support this most important work on behalf of our students that we are the most successful!

On another important operational front, last spring the Board approved \$7,500 for the district to purchase an online emergency management plan service called: *Crisis Go*. As many of you know, the district has relied on huge paper filled notebooks for the past 20+ years to detail each facility's emergency management plans. Despite their innovation years ago to compile all useful emergency information in one place, these plans are simply not good enough today to help us navigate through an emergency as easily as we may need to respond.

Therefore, over the past several months, I am happy to report that we have worked with both the South Berwick and Eliot Police Departments to think through new emergency protocols which we are in the process of uploading to our new *CrisisGo* platform (thanks to Chris Russo and his Tech Team!) Over the next few weeks, each school's Safety Team will be invited by their principal to test these new protocols and to gather important feedback from our schools' staff regarding how we can further refine our communication systems and safety protocols.

In closing, I would like to underscore that the Leadership Team and I always ask ourselves: *“What can we do to best support teachers in serving our students who are at the center of the instructional core of our work?”* I wish to assure you that every decision, every investment, every opportunity is dedicated to assisting you in this most important work!

Colleagues, it’s going to be a fantastic year for teaching and learning and remember ~ people who learn well, teach well! Thank you for all your hard work, imagination and creativity! We are going to have a great year!