



Washington
West
Supervisory
Union

1673 Main Street
Suite A
Waitsfield, VT 05673

Phone: (802) 496-2272
Fax: (802) 496-6515

Brigid S. Scheffert, Superintendent

Michelle Baker, Business Manager

Donarae Cook, Director of Student Support Services

Sheila Rivers, Director of Curriculum & Instruction

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Dear WWSU Staff,

I hope that all of you had a wonderful summer, full of fun, family and relaxation. Another school year is about to begin, and this year, due to the Tuesday start schedule, the principals felt all of Monday was needed for preparation, which means we will not be gathering as a full district team. Therefore, I wanted to use this correspondence to sincerely welcome each of you back and to say a few words about where I think we are headed.

First, I remain extremely proud of our schools. Healthy, caring environments, strong dedicated staff, and academically successful students make our seven schools some of the very best Vermont has to offer. Please take some time to review the WWSU Performance Data Workbook and WWSU Climate Survey Data on our website. Your collective hard work and dedication make these continuing excellent results possible.

I am delighted to have this opportunity to announce and congratulate two exceptional educators, both of whom have been nominated for the UVM Outstanding Teacher of the Year award. The first is Tom Young.

Tom Young has taught first and second grades at Waitsfield Elementary School for the past 11 years. Throughout his tenure, he has demonstrated a commitment to ongoing professional learning, pursuing a master's degree through the Vermont Math Initiative and engaging in any professional work relevant to the needs of his students. He is committed to the success of every child who walks through his classroom doors and understands that it requires a significant range of teaching strategies as well as supporting the children's social and emotional growth.

Our second nominee is Wendy Peterson, a 7th-12th grade art teacher at Harwood Union. Ms. Peterson challenges students and their creative abilities on a daily basis. She is the only art teacher for the 7th and 8th grade students. She offers a variety of artistic opportunities that engage students in middle school and throughout their high school career. She has the ability to make connections with students that could easily be disengaged from school. She offers students a place to work, to help or to talk, supporting their transition from elementary school to middle school or middle school to high school. Students find her easy to talk to and enjoy their art experience.

Ms. Peterson is also very involved with numerous activities that benefit the larger HU community. She is a positive individual that is willing to support many school-wide initiatives. Ms. Peterson is always looking for a positive solution and makes the needs of our students a top priority. The WWSU is very fortunate to have two such wonderful professionals working with our students each day. Congratulations and thank you, Tom and Wendy!

We will begin our work this year familiarizing ourselves with the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balanced Assessment. Change can be a difficult and occasionally painful process. Even in a perfect world, it moves forward in fits and starts. The journey towards change brings various levels of interest among those being encouraged to travel the path. I doubt if these initiatives will be any different. Each of us can think of many innovations that were touted as the answer in education.

Of course this begs the question, if we are doing so well, why change? The most compelling answer I can give is that we are not succeeding with many of our students. Regardless of what the state test scores say, are we satisfied with 20-30 percent of our students not achieving proficiency in any area? Even with our successes in the WWSU, we cannot be satisfied until all students are meeting with success. How can we achieve this? I believe that programs are never the solution, and they are never the problem. It is people, not programs that determine the quality of the school. Ted Sizer once said, "We are so good we know we can get better". I think we should adopt this statement as our mantra largely because it doesn't build from a position of deficit. Well, there's a new concept for public education!

Being a teacher is an amazing profession. It is challenging, dynamic, energizing, and draining - but most of all, it is rewarding. Your impact on the life of a student extends far beyond anything you will ever know. The very best teachers make every student feel valued. They know who may struggle or who may be reluctant to speak up. They set students up for success, reinforce their attempts, build on those attempts, and then provide future opportunities and experiences even more challenging and involving more risk taking. Great teachers want their students to be more excited about learning tomorrow than they were today.

School starts fresh every year, and we need to take advantage of this new beginning. I need every one of you to join us on the path of success for all students as we embrace the Common Core Standards, which focus more on career readiness and demonstrations of learning. There will be increased focus on teacher effectiveness and learning outcomes as we transform to a more global, 21st century model for learning and schooling. Transformation is a systems success or failure. We will be asked to deliver far more than an excellent, traditional, preparatory education. Every student will be prepared to take his/her place on the "world stage" by demonstrating academic competence, disposition for learning, civic responsibility, and personal development.

Transformation will require us to further provide multiple pathways, personalized learning, distance learning, state of the art technology, strong student voice, service learning, internships, dual credit, dual enrollment, and schooling far beyond the walls of our buildings. In order for our students to be well prepared for their future path, a quality education will ensure that they participate in Pre-K to 16 experiences that deliver civic literacy, environmental literacy, health

literacy, global awareness literacy, economic/business literacy, financial literacy, and information/media literacy.

Personalized learning will be center stage in 21st century schooling. While I will not be “performing” for you with my band this year, I do want to draw your attention to a song. Over the last two years, we have made many improvements in the WWSU, most of which are procedural or structural in nature. This year we will be more focused on our individual students than ever before. We need to celebrate and provide for each student’s uniqueness. Katy Perry sings a song called “Fireworks” with lyrics that portray the idea that just as no two fireworks are alike, neither are our students; each different, each original, each spectacular. Teachers ignite the “fireworks” making them shine bright, with the power to own the night. By helping each one shine through, the majestic beauty of them all becomes possible. No doubt our students are familiar with these lyrics. I find them very inspiring, encouraging perseverance and acceptance of differences. Maybe some of you might find a place in your classroom to use the song to send a very important message.

The schools in the WWSU will continue to set high expectations, embrace continuous improvement, practice data-driven decision making, provide a professional teaching culture, support strong leadership, maintain school climates where all adults and students feel valued and safe, and strive to regularly increase student supports and family engagement. Together we will develop a well-planned model for growth and determine how we are going to get there. I pledge to do what I can to keep our organization and its people moving forward on the path of growth to achieve success for each and every student who walks through our doors.

I am looking forward to getting together as a full district team at our October inservice. After a summer of rejuvenation and reflection, we can regroup and get on this very important path together. Have a great start to the school year!

Educationally yours,

Brigid