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SUPERINTENDENT'S MEMO

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## **South Portland School Department Fall Newsletter**

We've had a busy beginning to the school year. I'd like to take this opportunity to highlight some of the successes and challenges we're facing in the South Portland School Department.

**H1N1** – The threat of seasonal flu virus, coupled with the potential for a large-scale outbreak of H1N1, prompted the district to provide vaccination clinics for our students. At this time we have vaccinated approximately 50% of South Portland's school aged children with the seasonal and/or H1N1 flu vaccine. In South Portland, we have delivered approximately 3000 seasonal and H1N1 vaccines. Currently we are working with our partner organization VNA to secure additional vaccine and schedule a make up clinic for students still wishing to be vaccinated.

To date, we have not experienced the student or staff absentee rate that other districts have reported. This is certainly a credit to the strong nursing and teaching staff and their work on preventing the spread of disease. Our nurses and teachers have been actively teaching hand washing, cough and sneeze etiquette, and educating our families and staff on the need to stay home with a fever over 100 accompanied by a cough or sore throat. Please check our district and school websites and the CDC website regularly for H1N1 updates.

**Laptops** – This fall all 900+ students and 150+ teachers at South Portland High School received laptops as part of the one-to-one state technology initiative. We are thrilled to see the interesting and engaging learning that is being developed using this new technology. An example of the opportunities available with the laptops is the new Graphic Design course approved for next year. This hybrid online course will be structured for students to participate in weekly meetings with the teacher, as well as online learning of advanced Photoshop techniques, the use and skill of In Design, and will incorporate the elements of design and graphic arts. This exciting course will help prepare students for the world of online learning they will encounter in post-secondary courses.

**Three Cups of Tea** – Throughout the district, students at the elementary schools, middle schools and high school are all reading a version of Three Cups of Tea, by Greg Mortensen and David Oliver Relin. Three versions; adult, young adult and a picture book chronicle Greg's climb of Pakistan's K2 in honor of his sister as well as his subsequent time in a village called Korphe. While in Korphe, Mortenson made a promise to help build a school for the village. Mortenson has since dedicated his life to promoting education, especially for girls, in remote regions of Pakistan and Afghanistan by establishing or supporting 131 schools. By collectively participating in book discussion groups, interdisciplinary activities and online exploration of the Pakistan and Afghanistan regions, we are hopeful our students and staff will all gain a better appreciation of the struggles and challenges of another culture.

**New England Comprehensive Assessment Program** – October 1-22, 2009 our students in Grades 3-8 joined students throughout Maine, New Hampshire, Rhode Island and Vermont by participating in the NECAP as a replacement for the Maine Educational Assessment. This assessment is used by participating states to meet *No Child Left Behind Act* requirements for testing reading and mathematics and writing. Later this year NECAP student results will be reported in one of four achievement levels; Proficient with Distinction, Proficient, Partially Proficient, and Substantially Below Proficient. We look forward to sharing our results with parents and the community when they become available.

**State of the Schools** – One way that we share assessment results is through our annual State of the Schools report which was presented to the Board of Education at the November 9, 2009 meeting. This report highlights the academic achievement of our students as well as the goals and strategies we are embracing at

the elementary level, middle level and high school level. Please visit the district website [www.spsd.org](http://www.spsd.org) to access this report under the Board of Education section.

**Camp Kieve** – In the second full week of school, 107 of the 6<sup>th</sup> grade students at Memorial Middle School went to The Leadership School at Camp Kieve in Nobleboro, Maine. They spent five days and four nights at the Leadership School learning how to work together and how to communicate clearly and effectively. All of the members of the sixth grade team also attended Kieve and additional staff members joined the team throughout the week. The staff that attended the program reported being impressed with all that the students were learning but also with all of the different ways that the staff at Kieve engaged all of the students in the learning. It is our hope that we will be able to continue this program for our 6<sup>th</sup> grade students at both middle schools in the coming years.

**Congratulations** – The following items have been newsworthy this fall:

Staff Honors - South Portland High School educators Linda Sturm and Andrew Lupien have been awarded 2009 Yale University Educator Awards. Nominated by Yale freshman and SPHS 2009 graduate Jacob Viola, Sturm, Guidance Counselor, and Lupien, Teacher of Mathematics, were recognized as outstanding educators who have inspired their students to achieve at high levels. The Yale Admissions Office credits the excellent quality of the Yale student body to educators like Sturm and Lupien who shape their students long before they attend Yale.

Congratulations to the members of the South Portland High School marching band for their championship performances. On Saturday, November 1<sup>st</sup> at Marshwood HS, the band scored 97.25 in winning their 4th consecutive gold medal. On Sunday November 2nd, they traveled to Massachusetts to compete in the New England championships, placing third. South Portland was also recognized as having the top percussion section in its class.

Congratulations to SPHS for being chosen as one of Maine's "Schools That Shine." Schools That Shine is a grant program in partnership between WCSH 6 and Dunkin Donuts to recognize schools for innovation and creativity. SPHS has been recognized for their Testwise and Honor Code programs. Please check out the videospot at [www.wcsh6.com](http://www.wcsh6.com).

Also in the news was Skillin School which was featured in the WGME Kids Correspondent segment on November 6, 2009. The segment can be viewed at [www.wgme.com/newsroom/features/correspondent/videos/](http://www.wgme.com/newsroom/features/correspondent/videos/).

**Budget Reduction** – As many of you have probably heard, we are facing a projected \$1,225,000 reduction in General Purpose Aid from the State of Maine for this school year. To put these figures in context, \$1,225,000 represents the following:

- more than the entire athletic and co-curricular budgets for all schools combined
- 16+ teaching positions
- 95% of the district's transportation budget
- The funding for all classroom teaching activities at either Dyer or Small School
- All library, guidance and technology education programs at the five elementary schools plus one of the middle schools
- 8+ furlough days for the entire district

Needless to say, we can not sustain this level of reduction.

In response to these challenges, we have instituted a freeze on all non-essential spending. This includes Professional Development, Travel, General Supplies/Instructional Supplies, Books/Periodicals, A/V Supplies, Technology Supplies, Equipment, Instructional Field Trips, Dues and Fees, Miscellaneous Expenditures and non-essential overtime.

In reflecting on the anticipated savings from a freeze, it is clear that freezing the budget alone will not result in the desired savings. Therefore, we have convened a Task Force to discuss possible strategies for addressing the anticipated reduction in the current year's GPA. The Task Force, composed of three building administrators, three association presidents, a Board member, the Business Manager, a representative for the Special Education Department and the Superintendent has been charged with identifying areas for the Administrative Team to explore in preparing a recommendation for Board of Education. More information will be forthcoming as the Board deliberates publically on the proposed recommendations for reducing this year's budget.

Thank you to all staff for continuing to provide a high quality education for the students of South Portland during these challenging economic times. We appreciate your help and understanding with this serious issue. If you have any ideas for additional revenues or ways to save funds, please feel free to contact me.