

**Dear Students, Parents, Guardians, Staff and Community Members,**

Happy New Year. Winter has arrived in full force. A silver lining is that we have a greater amount of daylight each day.

As you might expect, the school year has been extremely busy, filled with challenges and hard work. On January 5, 2015, School Board members William Thompson, James Grant and Sarah Singer were sworn in at Town Hall. The School Board elected William Thompson as its chairman and Joy Prescott as its vice chairwoman.

At the School Board's first meeting in the new year on January 14, PDT Architects will update the Board on the cost to repair Coffin Elementary School and Brunswick Junior High School. The meeting starts at 7:00 p.m. at Town Hall.

There has been a great deal of discussion and some opposition to the School Board's decision to move the 5<sup>th</sup> grade to Brunswick Junior High School in September of 2015. While I recognize and support differences of opinion and philosophy, my hope is always that debates happen with accurate information and without the denigration of employees, students, programs or schools. It saddens me to read some of the comments made that are both inaccurate and unkind in order to support a particular cause or point of view.

We started this journey in September of 2013 after listening to two years of feedback about the number of students at Harriet Beecher Stowe. The administration began research leading to a meeting with the School Board on February 12, 2014. We had rationalized that it would be at least five years before any facility work was ready, and estimated that HBS would have 716 students. It currently has 700. At the February 12, 2014 meeting we brought forward four options: 1) Keep everything the same at HBS; 2) Move the second grade to Coffin School; 3) Move the fifth grade to BJHS; 4) Develop a school of choice K-5 in the Hawthorne School building.

The School Board gave us direction at that meeting, which was: 1) HBS should not stay a 2-5 school; 2) School choice was not palatable at that time as there were too many unknowns. They supported the development of a Superintendent's Advisory Committee; 3) Research on grade 2 should continue, especially around the cost of portables; 4) Research on grade 5 should continue.

On May 7, 2014, we met with the School Board and brought them further information on the two remaining options. Research on the 5<sup>th</sup> grade option included visits to Westbrook and Cape Elizabeth, and included teachers and administrators. The 2<sup>nd</sup> grade option centered on the cost of the portable section we thought we needed to have students and staff, and remove the four old classrooms at the front of the school. The company would not allow us to lease a ten classroom unit with a common area and bathrooms; we had to buy it.

On May 14, 2014 at a School Board meeting, a fifth option was requested by the School Board, making Coffin and HBS K-5 schools. That action I believe has given the impression that the decision was rushed because it was only two weeks later at a meeting, on May 28, 2014, when a decision was made. The School Board will hear from opponents of the 5<sup>th</sup> grade move on January 14, 2015, at its regularly-scheduled meeting.

A Superintendent's Advisory Committee on program options continues to conduct research and meet. It is our goal to develop and distribute a survey concerning our work in the second half of the school year.

We have been granted an extension to provide proficiency diplomas by the State of Maine. Option Six which is posted on our website provides a timeline for the district to develop the means for students to meet standards and for us to reorganize our grading and report card systems to meet the new criteria.

We have also had a committee working on a new teacher/principal evaluation document for the last three years. Currently many of our administrators and department heads are taking a course called "The Skillful Leader" to help prepare them for using a new evaluation tool.

On March 1, Brunswick High School will begin a four-day evaluation by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges. This event happens every ten years and includes a self assessment by the faculty and assessment by a team of educators who hold positions in education in Maine and other states. A final report will detail their observations and conclusions to be used by the department for school improvement.

We are proud of the accomplishments of our students and staff and look forward to a positive and prosperous second half of the year.

Sincerely,

Paul K. Perzanoski  
Superintendent