

MONSON PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Monson Public Schools Annual Report 2008

The 2008 school year was a challenging one for the Monson Public Schools, as the district coped with numerous changes in key leadership positions, namely the Superintendent, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, the Director of Business and Facilities, the Principal of the Granite Valley Middle School, and the assistant principals at both Granite Valley and the Quarry Hill Community School. To close out the 2007-2008 school year, Maryanne Malinowski and Dr. Denise Messina served as Acting Superintendent until the appointment of an Interim Superintendent. Other new members of the Administrative Leadership Team for the 2008 school year include Dr. Nancy Spitulnik, replacing Maryanne Malinowski; Don Smith, replacing Dan Tassinari, who had served the district well for over thirty years; and Cheryl Clarke, replacing Patricia Clem. In addition, two new assistant principals were hired. Nicole Heroux assumed that responsibility at Quarry Hill, and William Lataille has recently joined the Granite Valley staff in that role. Currently, the search for a full-time, permanent Superintendent of Schools is underway.

In spite of these significant changes in leadership coupled with the losses in staffing, programs and materials due to budgetary constraints, the district has revitalized its strategic plan, remaining focused on its commitment to strengthening student achievement and to meeting the goals set for the district under No Child Left Behind. The reports that follow, submitted by each principal, highlight the numerous and varied accomplishments and activities of each school and department.

Quarry Hill Community School – Grades K-4

(Mr. Neil Gile, Principal)

Child Study Team- We are in our second year of the child study team, which is proving to be most beneficial for the students. The purpose is to give support to the teachers and, ultimately, the student(s) through a collaborative process. The students should have every opportunity to be successful within the classroom. This team consists of the classroom teacher, the school psychologist, an administrator, the behavioral specialist (if needed), and the parent(s). The team meets when there is a concern for a student. A plan is implemented based on the area of concern and the decision made as a team; then we closely monitor the student's progress for a set timeline.

MCAS- This year we continue to focus on improving our Mathematics MCAS scores. The teachers spent the September professional development day working on instructional change objectives. These objectives are meant to be implemented immediately with the hopes of

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creating immediate change. They can be found in our School Improvement Plan (SIP), which is on our website. Additionally, in grades one through four, we have implemented math journals. These journals are focused on problem solving strategies and writing.

Literature Series- We hope this is the year we get a new literature series. For the last couple of years, we have spent much time researching and assessing various literature series. This year alone, we have welcomed representatives from both Scott Foresman and Harcourt to give presentations about their current literature series. We hope to make a decision regarding which series best meets our needs by the end of March.

Three Bs- Being Respectful, Responsible, and Courteous- This year we introduced our school wide positive discipline plan. Throughout the building students and teachers have been spreading the three Bs. Our primary focus is to send the message that learning is important, and the reason you come to school is to learn. The students are responsible for learning, they are to be respectful of everyone's right to learn, and they are to be courteous to others. The students know what is expected and are raising the bar. A nice addition to this has been our Three Bs Positive Referral certificate. When a child is being respectful, responsible, and/or courteous, he or she is eligible for a positive referral. The referral is then read over the intercom, so all the students know who these individuals are. We are looking to promote the positive behaviors and what is expected.

Olweus- Going hand in hand with the Three Bs, we kicked off our Olweus Bullying Prevention program. This is a national initiative that we adopted this year focused on eliminated bullying. Considering the program took flight only a month ago, I would say we are already seeing a heightened awareness of the issue from the students and staff. In preparation for this program, we spent many hours and days working on training staff and discussing the issues. The committee members were trained by one of the guidance counselors from the high school, Ms. Amy Scully. This training was very intense and took two-days to cover the necessary information. The teachers were then trained by us, the Olweus committee members during our November professional development.

Report Card- After many years of diligent work and commitment, we successfully introduced a new report card for grades kindergarten through fourth grade. The new report cards are a reflection of the Massachusetts Frameworks and the standards we are expecting the students to learn. This process was driven by the Report Card Committee. Many meetings with the committee and the whole faculty occurred throughout last year. Additionally, we have looked for parent feedback throughout the process.

When the new report cards went home for the first quarter, we had a parent feedback form attached. Much feedback was positive and praised the new document; however, there was information that pointed out areas that needed to be addressed. The committee has met and will meet again to continue to improve the document. It is a work in progress, and we accept that. All in all, it was a tremendous hit!

I would like to thank everyone's dedication and hard work in making this document. Also, I appreciate Roberts and Sons Printing, Inc. for their assistance.

Granite Valley Middle School continues to provide successful, appropriate middle level programs and practices to the young adolescents of Monson. Despite challenges to our budget which caused us to close our library and increase class size, our students receive a quality education from teachers who are dedicated, dynamic educators, committed to all students. Our interdisciplinary teaching teams offer a variety of opportunities for students to extend their learning outside of our classroom walls with curriculum-related field trips. Fifth grade students visit Boston and the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, our sixth-graders take a trip to Howe Caverns, the seventh grade visits a Salmon Hatchery, and finally, the eighth grade students visit Washington, D.C. for three days.

Many enrichment activities occur within the school day as well. One of which we are especially proud is our Peer Mentoring program. This program pairs grade 8 students with grade 5 students each morning during a special homeroom block. The fifth-graders receive help in areas such as organization, math fluency, reading or writing. Additionally, wonderful friendships are formed. During October, the Month of the Young Adolescent, students participated in a variety of exciting learning experiences. Students discovered what it was like to be a teenager during various decades and in various parts of the world. There were many writing activities, including a “50 Great Things About Being an Adolescent” display. Friday Fun Days allowed students to dress in different themes, with prizes awarded during lunch for the most creative.

At Granite Valley, our students excel in many areas. The monthly Principal’s Luncheon and Student of the Month ceremony take time to honor not just academics, but the whole student. Events such as the National Geographic Bee and the American Mathematics Competition challenge our students to compete on the national level. Choral students have been accepted into the Western Districts Chorus, and our art students have received recognition from the Boston Globe for their work. Our Kindness Counts program continues to acknowledge random acts of kindness on a daily basis.

Our school has been designated as in “Corrective Action” status by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education with respect to our MCAS scores. The goals of our School Improvement Plan address this status. As a school, we are working together to help students achieve greater success. Time on Task initiatives optimize every minute of the school day. The Granite Valley Middle School Rubrics Project is another initiative specifically designed to address our Corrective Action status. Students in grades 5 through 8 were first introduced to a Math rubric and Written Response rubric created by our teachers. Next, weekly lessons involve answering MCAS open response questions in a variety of content areas. Students then assess themselves, each other, and participate in whole-group discussions focusing on the rubrics.

Finally, a major change to the school this year was a new administrative team. I resigned my Assistant Principal position to become the Principal, and Mr. William R. Lataille is now our new Assistant Principal. I feel very fortunate to be the educational leader of Granite Valley, as we move forward in this challenging year.

Monson High School – Grades 9-12

(James Peters, Principal)

Positive indicators abound illustrating Monson High School's success in living their stated Mission to **“prepare its students for living, learning, and working in the 21st Century”**.

The 2007-2008 school year culminated with the MHS Class of 2008 experiencing a first ever Friday evening commencement ceremony, held on May 30th in the Michael J. Kane Gymnasium. Eighty-seven graduates participated, all of whom passed both the local graduation requirements, as well as the mandated testing requirements of the grade 10 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Other class highlights included twenty-two John and Abigail Adams Scholarship recipients, recognizing excellence on the grade 10 Mathematics and English/Language Arts MCAS tests, and a significantly high percentage of graduates (93%) matriculating into two and four year colleges. The rich tradition of MHS Senior Week activities also included The Senior Awards and Scholarships Program, where over \$63,000 in local scholarship monies were presented, inclusive of the \$12,000 from the Town of Monson Scholarship Fund.

The recognition and celebration of academic excellence also extended to the school's underclassmen in numerous ways. The Henry O. Holley Chapter of the National Honor Society inducted nineteen new members at their March induction ceremony. Approximately one-third of the student body was recognized as part of the sixteenth annual Grade 9-11 Awards Program held on June 13th. These awards included the showcase presentation of college book awards and the 2008 Faculty Award to eight members of the junior class. The Fall Academic Awards Program of September 22nd honored 79 returning MHS students for earning honor roll status during each of the four marking terms of the 2007-2008 school year.

Data from a variety of sources further punctuates the academic success of MHS students. A school all-time high of 41.4% of students earned honor roll on a quarterly basis in 2007-2008, with this figure combining with survey results from students verifying continued overall satisfaction with the MHS Extended Block Schedule. The school year also saw a school record high of 31 students participating in a total of 44 national Advanced Placement (AP) exams. These honor students completed AP exams in the areas of Calculus, Government, English Literature, English Language, Spanish, and Studio Art. Most notably, the Class of 2010 earned the highest average scores at MHS since the inception of the required grade 10 Mathematics and English Language Arts (ELA) MCAS exams. Substantially higher than the state average in both disciplines, these scores generated Composite Performance Index (CPI) scores in Math (MHS 91.3, State 86.7) and ELA (MHS 97.1, State 90.3) and resulted in the school meeting the established Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) standard. Other MCAS scores were also noteworthy, with the Class of 2011 (grade 9) scoring well above state average on the Introduction to Physics exam, where 96% of the MHS students met the newly established graduation requirement in science and technology on their first attempt, as compared to 85% at the state-wide level.

The ongoing process of curriculum review and revision saw five new courses added to the program of studies for the 2008-2009 school year, broadening the scope of offerings to students while also meeting the school's goal to increase academic rigor across all academic disciplines. Approved and implemented for the fall of 2008 were Multi Media Digital Design, Multi Media Video Design, Honors English 9, Honors Geometry, and Algebra IA/IB.

The tradition of MHS success in co-curricular competitions continued in 2008. In the athletic arena, Pioneer Valley Interscholastic Athletic Conference league championships were won in girls' basketball, softball, girls' track and field, girls' soccer, and boys' soccer. In one of the most memorable days in Mustang athletic history, both varsity soccer programs captured Western Massachusetts Division III titles in back-to-back games at Szot Park in Chicopee. Days later, the boys lost a heartbreaker to Bromfield in the state semi-finals, while the girls went on to their first ever state final before losing to Newburyport. A special note of recognition is also given to the girls' soccer team in being named for the fourth consecutive year as the recipient of the John Kurty/Bernie Santos Team Sportsmanship Award, selected by the Pioneer Valley Soccer Officials Association. In the domain of academic competitions, MHS again fielded strong contingents in numerous areas, with the Debate Society, Math Team, Schools-Match-Wits Team, and Envirothon Action Team all making strong showings at their respective contests.

In spite of the success stories highlighted above, the difficult economic times did have a significant impact on the school budget entering the 2008-2009 year. A school's continued accreditation with the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) requires that, "Principals of member schools must report to the Commission within sixty days of occurrence of any substantive change in the school which has a negative impact on the school's ability to meet any of the Commissions' Standards for Accreditation". In meeting this expectation, Principal James Peters forwarded an October, 2008 Substantive Report, outlining the impact of the following topics:

- Loss of one full time English/Social Studies teacher
- Reduction of Technology Education teacher to ½ time
- Reduction of Career Facilitator to ½ time
- Lack of funding for staff professional development
- Reduced funding for textbooks and instructional supplies
- Loss of one office secretary
- Loss of the one remaining building aide
- Increase in athletic users fees

A December, 2008 response from the NEASC Commission requested a detailed update on all related topics as part of the school's scheduled Two-Year Progress Report, due to the NEASC in September, 2009.

Pupil Services

(Dr. Denise Messina, Director)

As Director of Pupil Services, and with the support of our Pupil Services Administrative Assistant, I have continued to work closely with district leadership on numerous district and school pupil service initiatives. These have included:

- ✓ Prepared and manage special education grants and budget.
- ✓ Institutionalized district summer programming for Individual Education Plan (IEP) extended year services (ESY) and MCAS support for elementary and middle school students in the warning category.
- ✓ Continued development of inclusive concurrent enrollment partnership with a community college for our non-college bound students on IEPs.
- ✓ Decreased our contracted services by expanding salaried providers: bring on part time Speech/Language Pathologist Assistant (SLPA) FY08, projected addition of 2 SLPAs for FY09. Implementation of cost containment strategies, all fiscally responsible efforts which have supported students remaining in the least restrictive environment. Expanded district capacity in least restrictive environment: developing Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA)/ Instructional Support positions for our medically dependent and fragile students.
- ✓ Positioned and profiled autism program to be well recognized in the region; proposed expansion of autism program for FY09, allowing us to attract and tuition in students.
- ✓ Established periodic interdisciplinary consultation meetings for our intensive needs students.
- ✓ Monitored all special education out-of-district placements.
- ✓ Worked diligently to reduce Special Education legal fees with success. Continuing a pattern from 2007, special education legal fees are one third of the previous year.

As Director of Pupil Services, I typically attend initial and 3 year reevaluation meetings, as well as any of our complicated cases and out-of-district placements. Quarry Hill Community School (QHCS), as our largest and most complex school, houses our preschool, our PeAk autism program and our K - 4th grade classes. By the nature of the population, the school generates the most initial evaluation referrals and initial eligibility to special education.

Piloting of grade level Child Study Teams at Quarry Hill Community School (QHCS) began in 2008, an effort which the school has struggled to implement for years. Pupil Services has made a school psychologist available at every meeting. The vast majority of our IEP students are in inclusion settings for the major portion of their day. QHCS also services students who have multiple disabilities with complex health and education needs. In addition to the full complement of grade level and inclusion / resource room special education teachers, pupil service and related services staff are housed at QHCS. This includes Physical Therapy, Occupational Therapy, Speech and Language Services, a Behavioral Specialist and numerous Educational Support Professionals. In addition, at QHCS, there are several contracted service providers and consultants who collaborate and assist in the support and educational programming for our intensive needs students.

National Inclusive Schools Week, co-sponsored with Parent Advisory Council (PAC), and again in 2008, a District National Inclusive Schools Month was recognized in December. As Director of Pupil Services, I participated with PAC representatives in Special Needs' Advancing Parent-

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Professional Leadership in Education (APPLE) Conference in April. APPLE is a research project funded by the U.S. Department of Education in collaboration with the Federation of Children with Special Needs. Monson's Parent Advisory Council has continued to be an active force under the leadership of our PAC President. PAC has a link to a PAC website from the district website, a list serve group and a newsletter, and planned for several informative workshops for parents.

Pupil Services Office successfully complied with mandatory Pre-school Data Collection (Indicator 7) of State Performance Plan and Coordinated DESE Mid-Cycle Review of Federal Programs. Special commendation was given to our QHCS Autism Program (PeAk). Implementation of DESE (DOE) mandated Corrective Action Plan (CAP) required institutionalizing communication infrastructures to support uniformity in the management of records and reports, and in the monitoring and disseminating of information on state and federal laws and regulations. Quality assurance of pupil service delivery was managed through monthly district Special Education / Pupil Services meetings; Special Education Department DTLC and Special Education Coach monthly meetings. Coordinated professional development for teachers and para-professionals has been aligned with identified district special education instructional and support needs. Working collaboratively with Administrative Leadership Team, Special Education, District Teaching and Learning Council Leaders on Special Education issues and concerns, the Director of Pupil Services developed and clarified much needed school protocol and procedures related to pupil services and special education (Criteria and Protocol for Safety and Risk Assessment, and special education program descriptions drafts, 2008).

Highlights of additional 2008 district Pupil Service initiatives

- Continued development of a substantially separate low incidence classroom at the middle school: GVMS SOAR.
- Pilot DESE / DOE new Specific Learning Disability form and process (mandatory FY09, district school Psychologist)
- UMASS School Psychologist intern (FY08) supervised by District School Psychologist; pilot grade specific progress monitoring model at QHCS
- Adjustment Counselor and School Psychologist outreach to area colleges to secure social work and school psychologist interns for FY09
- Collaboration with QHCS administration to design and develop FY 09 Co-Teaching model (2 classrooms per grade level 1st - 4th grade, implement Response to Intervention/RTI, Tiered Intervention strategies, progress monitoring, data collection, supported by Special Education grade level teacher and two instructional aides).

Typically, as Director of Pupil Services, I participated in DESE/Department of Education Special Education Leadership Academy, Massachusetts Association of Special Education Administrators, Pathfinder Districts Special Education Directors, Special Education Legal Seminars on Case Law.

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Curriculum and Instruction

(Dr. Nancy Spitulnik, Director)

The Monson Public Schools have had a busy year in the areas of Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment. Our work has focused on providing a rigorous educational program in order to maximize achievement for all of our students.

Curriculum work at the High School has involved teachers in continuing their review of varied and authentic assessment, and examining data related to student evaluation. Teachers have been working together in learning cohorts to examine student work and provide peer recommendations for augmenting teacher instruction that enhances student learning. This multi-year effort has sparked deep discussions of best academic practices and educational pedagogy.

Our major efforts at Quarry Hill Elementary School and Granite Valley Middle School in 2008 have centered on improving the quality of inquiry-based instruction of students. Teachers have discussed ways to better engage students in authentic, hands-on learning that provides opportunities for students to think critically, apply their knowledge, and create solutions to real problems. This type of exciting learning pertains to all areas of the curriculum, from solving complex math and science problems, to researching and debating historical issues, to reading and interpreting works of great authors.

During professional development days and curriculum meetings in the Fall, teachers at Quarry Hill and Granite Valley developed Instructional Change Objective (ICO) charts, detailing how they could incorporate specific, easily accomplished changes to scheduling and instruction to raise the level of student engagement and understanding. We have continued to discuss and adjust these revisions as needed to move student learning forward.

Quarry Hill and Granite Valley have also engaged in specific activities related to the analysis of student MCAS data and Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) reports from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Quarry Hill has focused on increasing hands-on, authentic learning in math, improving student responses to open-ended questions, and researching the purchase of a literacy series to provide a consistent, sequential approach to reading, comprehension, grammar, spelling, and writing for grades K-4.

Efforts at Granite Valley have centered on the creation of rubrics for all curriculum areas to improve the quality of student writing and critical thinking. A special emphasis has been on exposing students to the type of open response questions they will encounter on the MCAS exam in order to better prepare them for this high-stakes test.

At the district level, the District Teaching and Learning Council has focused on rewriting and updating the Monson Three-Year Professional Development Plan. This plan provides a framework for the implementation of professional development activities that meet the continuing educational needs of staff, and move the district forward in improving student learning and achievement. This endeavor will include analysis of a staff professional development survey to guide our efforts and decisions.

The staff of the Monson Public Schools are working collaboratively and diligently to provide a rigorous, relevant, high-quality education for all of our students. We are excited about our initiatives, and appreciate the support of the town in accomplishing our educational goals.

Conclusion

In conclusion, I would like to thank the Monson Public Schools for this opportunity to serve you and to thank the school and wider community for the warm welcome and high level of cooperation I've received during my brief tenure with you. I commend the staff and students of the Monson Public Schools for their hard work and dedication to task. This community does have schools of which it can be justifiably proud. With renewed commitment to the Strategic Plan and all that it represents, I am certain that the future of the Monson Public Schools will be bright.

Respectfully submitted,

Linda E. Denault, Ed.D.
Interim Superintendent of Schools