July 29, 2013

Dear Rivendell Families,

I hope that everyone has had an enjoyable summer. I would like to welcome all the family members of our new 7th grade class, especially the families from Warren who will be joining us this fall. For all our families, but especially for new Academy families, please know that our goal is to provide the best education possible for your son or daughter. If you have a concern please contact us immediately. The sooner we know about your concerns, the sooner we can work together on a solution.

The Summer Academy and SummerScapes have just concluded. The Summer Academy was a new program for 7th and 8th grade students. I would like to thank Chris White, Tracy Nathan, Tim Alvarenga, Willie Johnson, Amber Brooks and Autumn Brooks for all their hard work making this new program a success. Check out the website to see the students’ work – click on the link for “Rivendell Academy Survival Summer.” I would also like to thank Tammy McQueen and her amazing staff for putting together another excellent SummerScapes program for our students of every age throughout the district.

The first day of school, August 26th, will be here before we know it. Our traditional potluck barbeque to kick off the school year has been moved to the first week of school – Thursday, August 29th from 5:30 – 6:45 p.m. You will receive more information about that shortly. I hope everyone has time to squeeze in a few more fun weekends. We have been planning for the start for the 2013-2014 school year since last spring and have a number of exciting new ideas planned for this year.

New staff:
Cindy McLaren is replacing Kris Widmann as our 7th and 8th grade counselor. Cindy has an MA in Social Work from UNH and has 12 years of experience as a counselor in elementary, middle and high schools. She has directed the Student Assistance Program for a high school for nine years, coordinated homeless student programs, provided drug and alcohol counseling and family counseling, written grants, and advised a Students Against Destructive Behavior group. For three years she was the case manager in an adult mental health center. She comes to us highly recommended, and we are thrilled to welcome her to Rivendell Academy.

We are currently involved in a search for an English/Humanities teacher to replace Mr. St. James and an attendance secretary to replace Mrs. Murphy. We were sorry to lose Mr. Dubois in the special education department. Because of the low number of special education students, he will not be replaced next year. Mrs. St. Pierre will continue working with some 9th grade students.

Focus on student learning:
Teaching has historically been an individual effort. The general trend has been for about 50% of all teachers entering the classroom to leave within five years. Our society rarely acknowledges the intellectual and emotional demands of teaching. Given the demands of teaching we cannot afford to keep it an individual effort. Our integrated social studies and English courses and math and science courses have started to get people planning together and teaching together.

Our number one purpose is to develop students’ intellectual abilities. We want students to think critically and express themselves clearly and effectively about the important concepts within each of the courses we teach. Starting in the third trimester last year, I spent a great deal of time in classrooms working with teachers on curriculum and instruction directed at expanding students’ capacity to think for themselves, enjoy the process,
and develop confidence in what they know and can do. As a result of that work, I wrote two documents to provide a starting point for deeper discussions and innovation concerning curriculum and instruction.

This deeper work on instruction will build on successes indicated by our NECAP scores last year. If the science tests come in as strong as the 11th grade math, reading and writing scores, we will have had strong scores in every area; something that hasn’t been accomplished in at least four years. We’ll know in August. Our next goal is to try to do a better job supporting our struggling students. We still have too many students failing classes each trimester and far too many students with multiple F’s.

**Summer reading and a change in attitude:**
For this year’s summer reading, student government selected books that reflected the theme of survival. The main characters in many of the books not only endure difficult circumstances but regain their place in the world as whole human beings.

When I came to Rivendell three years ago many students complained about the summer reading. At our awards assembly this year, I asked if any students had finished their summer reading books. At least six hands went up. I believe the negativity has changed because of the brilliant idea of student government members two years ago to organize the reading around a theme and offer student choice. The summer reading is now a community activity used to start the school year together.

**Advisory and electronic portfolios:**
We have made minor adjustments in the schedule to allow for a short morning advisory every day. Our classes will remain 65 minutes. We will have a full 25-minute advisory meeting every Tuesday.

As part of advisory, students will be required to develop electronic portfolios for major projects in all classes. These portfolios will be a vehicle to support each student’s growth and development while at RA, and it will be a place for students to present their work to peers, other teachers, parents and community members. Especially for juniors and seniors, the portfolios will be useful as students look for jobs, apply for scholarships and apply to college and technical schools.

**Other new developments:**
- Doc Browne is offering a robotics elective based on the same hardware used in the regional and national robotics classes.
- The fencing club is ready to be launched this fall.
- Work in the West Wing (gym, hallways, offices and classrooms) is progressing smoothly thanks to Gary Collins and the contractors.
- The Athletic Leadership Council will start their first full year of work. The ALC was formed last year to involve athletes in service and leadership activities in the school and district.
- Mademoiselle Keefer is making plans for the arrival of the French students.
- At present, seven students from Warren will join our 7th and 8th grade classes, one exchange student is coming from Germany, one homeschooled student is entering high school classes and one freshman has transferred into the district.

Get ready for a great school year.

Best,

Keri J. Gelenian
Head of Schools