I looked up the origin of the word *spontaneous*. It comes from the Latin *spont*, which means willing. Not what I expected, but a perfectly appropriate connection to my thought that RA’s distinctiveness stems from valuing spontaneity. We are *willing*:

A group of seniors led by Jennifer DeBois were willing to draft a letter to change the rules regarding senior privilege during study time.

Eric Reichert was willing to take over as the cross-country coach, a new experience for him.

Caleb Parker and Emma Hayes were willing to take me up on my offer to come in on a day off from school to work on a math activity with a stranger in front of some 35 Rivendell teachers. I thought it would take me hours to cajole two students to come in. It took minutes.

Rachel Sanders was willing to experiment with her biology curriculum by adding an aquaculture project in the greenhouse based on a spontaneous field trip to the Dartmouth organic farm last year.

Nurse Creigh Moffatt would be willing to do just about *anything* to improve our health and wellness.

Laszlo Bardos was willing to teach three different courses in the same room at the same time to accommodate the needs and interests of different students. He was also willing to start an electronics club after school.

Students in journalism were willing to include advertisements in the school newspaper to help pay for a trip to DC.

Gail Keefer was willing to teach French to 5th and 6th graders from Samuel Morey and teach a new course on Africa to expand our global studies offerings.

Everyone was concerned about taking a dog named Digger on a field trip to the Orford cemetery, but Jamie Nunn was willing to make sure that Digger didn’t disturb any bones.

Michael Galli, Cindy McLaren and Nancy Hall were willing to plan a complicated assembly, change the schedule and hold the assembly less than 16 hours later. The entire process was triggered by a short conversation earlier that day. It would be safe to say that it was an amazing assembly.

I could go on and on with examples of people being willing to help make RA a better place for everyone. People at RA don’t pontificate they *spontificate*.

**After School Help (Soon to be renamed by students)**

Our after school program is finally up and running. The program is designed to support students in math and literacy based on test scores and grades or teacher recommendations. We have sent letters home inviting students into the program based on our selection criteria.

The program runs Monday through Wednesday from 3:00 pm to 5:30 pm. Students are organized into literacy and math groups depending on their needs. Students have an additional block of time to complete homework. On some days we will have a math and reading specialist working with teachers.

We will have a snack and a fun activity to end the day. Students exit the program when their level of performance improves.

Special education teacher, Brynne MacMurtry, is running the program. If you have questions or would like to have more information, please contact Brynne at bmacmurtry@rivendellschool.org.
Smarter Balance [SBAC] Scores

Recall that newspapers used to print NECAP results and school rankings. The Vermont DOE has also downplayed SBAC results -- surprising, given all the media attention, time and money that went into the launching of the Common Core Standards and associated SBAC testing.

We received a memo from the Secretary of Education that reported that SBAC scores across the state were lower than NECAP scores. She attributed the drop to the nature of the Smarter Balance questions. This was expected based on the results of the pilot testing that occurred two years ago in Vermont and across the country. In the same memo, the secretary went on to write:

“So how do we use these tests? Remember first of all that this is the first year of these tests. We really have no idea what level of performance on the Smarter Balanced assessment predicts a student will be well prepared for college and careers. We need to look at this data over time before we can come to any defensible conclusions about school quality based on these tests.”

I believe that there probably is a strong relationship between students’ scores on the SBAC and their ability to do college level work. But I also believe there are other important factors besides standardized test scores that influence a student’s ability to complete an undergraduate degree, technical degree, job training program or simply meet the expectations of an employer. These might include financial support, ability to deal with stress, confidence, the ability to find adequate support, or uncertainty about what they want to do in life.

The issue of school quality mentioned in the memo rests primarily on educator’s ability to improve students’ intellectual skills to the greatest degree possible. At RA the Smarter Balance test results provide very little information that we don’t already know about students’ academic performance. The DOE should investigate whether or not this is true in the majority of schools in the state.

SBAC Results Compared to GPA

“Was there a relationship to 11\textsuperscript{th} grade students’ GPAs at the end of last year and their SBAC scores?” We asked this question to test if Smarter Balance assessment actually did give us information about students that we didn’t already know.

| 11\textsuperscript{th} ELA | 11\textsuperscript{th} Math |
|----------------|----------------|----------------|
| SBAC Ranking | Current GPA Ranking | SBAC Ranking | Current GPA Ranking |
| 4 | 4: (9) | 3: (4) | 2: (1) | 1: (1) | 4 | 4: (6) | 3: (1) | 2: (0) | 1: (0) |
| 3 | 4: (0) | 3: (2) | 2: (5) | 1: (1) | 3 | 4: (2) | 3: (6) | 2: (3) | 1: (1) |
| 2 | 4: (0) | 3: (3) | 2: (0) | 1: (1) | 2 | 4: (1) | 3: (1) | 2: (4) | 1: (1) |
| 1 | 4: (0) | 3: (0) | 2: (2) | 1: (4) | 1 | 4: (0) | 3: (1) | 2: (1) | 1: (6) |

By dividing students into four equal groups based on GPA (four quartiles) and comparing GPA quartiles to SBAC scores, we found that there was a strong correlation between test scores and GPAs. For example, of our students who scored a 4 on SBAC language, 9 were in the top GPA quartile, 4 were in the third highest GPA quartile, 1 was in the highest quartile, and 1 in the lowest quartile. We then looked closely at the surprising individuals. For example, why did someone in the lowest GPA quartile score a 4 in the language test? When we identified that student, there was a readily apparent reason. When we looked at three students with a high GPA but low test scores, we also found sensible reasons; we had recorded that these three students spent very little time on the test.
In her memo, the Secretary of Education went on to say that we need to give these tests, “Because they DO give us useful information that we can use to evaluate the size and direction of our achievement gaps, as well as the mastery of individual students on specific content.” Our RA analysis leads us to conclude that we already have this information.

What We Could Do

Given our stance and our experience, I believe the state and federal governments need to back away from failed policies of accountability/punishment and constant meddling with standards. There are many common sense ways to better spend taxpayer’s money. Here are a few examples:

1) Create greater incentives for qualified people to become math, science or reading teachers.
2) Increase the training and placement of clinical counselors to work in elementary schools.
3) Assure that schools have strong music, art, and drama programs.
4) Increase support of post-secondary programs like Upward Bound.

Sincerely,

Keri Gelerian

Superintendent Brenda Needham announced her retirement to the Board effective January 15. The board greatly appreciates her five years of service to the Rivendell Interstate School district. We wish her good luck in her future endeavors. Surely she will enjoy more time with family, especially her new grandson.

The board is working with the administrative team to begin the hiring process for a new permanent or interim superintendent.

What’s New in the Health Office?

Please let the school office know of any reason for absence due to health: head cold, or just bouts of severe coughing, stomach bug, either or both of those accompanied by aches and pains, sore throats, headaches, etc., or any information that might alert us to a trend for contagious illness. Also, please contact the school nurse about any illness or injury that your student may have so that we can provide the best environment possible at school while they recuperate.

A reminder: hand washing (20 seconds of good, sudsy hand washing followed by a thorough rinse; and coughing and/or sneezing into one's own inner elbow) is the best protection against catching or spreading illnesses, including flu.

Please contact the health office any time for any questions at cmoffatt@rivendellschool.org or 603-353-4321 X2142 during school hours.
Dear Parents,

Regarding café accounts at Rivendell Academy: All balances, positive or negative, from the previous school year carry over if your child attended Samuel Morey Elementary.

We offer à la carte items. If your child has money in their account, they can make purchases. If they owe a balance, they will not be able to make à la carte purchases. Some à la carte items such as tossed salad, fruit, breakfast sandwiches, and yogurt can be a part of a reimbursable meal. If your child receives free/reduced lunches, they must choose a fruit or a vegetable, meat, milk, and a whole grain.

Please remember to fill out the free/reduced application ASAP and have your child bring it to the school office. I will begin sending weekly bills via email for accounts that are negative.

If you have questions about your child’s account, please contact me.

Sincerely,
Celise Johnson
cjohnson@rivendellschool.org

We are looking for volunteers to organize a small parent committee to take the lead in planning a fundraiser to support the visual arts programs in the district. The committee members would organize a silent art auction of works donated by local artists. We would encourage artists to attend and set up displays of their work. The committee would also organize food, advertise the event, and find a venue that would attract a large crowd.

If you are interested, contact Brenda Gray at (603) 353-4321 or bgray@rivendellschool.org
The Rivendell Academy Players are busy preparing the thriller performance by Agatha Christie *And Then There Were None*. The performances are November 5th, 6th and 7th starting at 7:00 pm in the Academy Gym.

Tickets:
- $5 for students
- $10 for adults

*And Then There Were None* involves ten guilty strangers who are trapped on an island. One by one they are accused of murder; one by one they start to die. In this superlative mystery comedy statuettes of little soldier boys on the mantel of a house on an island off the coast of Devon fall to the floor and break one by one as those in the house succumb to a diabolical avenger. A nursery rhyme tells how each of the ten “soldiers” met his death until there were none. Eight guests who have never met each other or their apparently absent host and hostess are lured to the island and, along with the two house servants, marooned. A mysterious voice accuses each of having gotten away with murder and then one drops dead - poisoned. One down and nine to go! The excitement never lets up in this mysterious play.

Come see students Dakota Menard as Rogers, Katana Labadie as Mrs. Rogers, Delaney Vogelein as Freida Narracott, Gabbi Miles as Vera Claythorne, Caleb Day as Philip Lombard, Lauren Holt as Andrea Marston, Cam Day as William Blore, Teddy Wilkin as General Mackenzie, Sarah Parenti as Emily Brent, Abby Hinsley as Madam Laura Wargrave, and Tali Gelenian as Dr. Armstrong.

If you have any questions please call 603-353-4321 x 1101

Hope to see you there!
High School Guidance News

TESTING

Wed., Oct. 14th AM
Juniors took the PSAT.
Sophomores took the Practice ACT.

SENIORS

Deadlines to register for the SAT or ACT:
SAT - Nov 5 deadline for Dec 5th test
ACT - Nov 6 deadline for Dec 12th test

Financial Aid Nights
Kim Prestridge from Dartmouth College Financial Aid office will be sponsored by NHASFAA on Thurs, Jan 7th at 6PM in the RA Library.

ACTIVITIES FAIR

During an all-school assembly, students were introduced to various clubs/activities at RA:

College Fair News

Grades 9-12 participated in a Mini College Fair on Sept 11th when representatives from eleven New Hampshire colleges & Universities visited Rivendell.

All juniors and interested seniors traveled to Southern New Hampshire University for a college fair hosting over 100 colleges/Universities on Sept 22nd followed by a tour of campus.

River Bend Career & Technical Center hosted a college fair on September 16th that was open to all interested students

FAFSA Forms Night
January 20th—RA library
Drop in between 4-8 PM for help completing the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid).
Bring tax information from last year & this year.

Representatives from The Mountain School met with sophomores for a presentation about their semester study program offerings. Interested students should submit an application by February 18th.

Juniors interested in the St. Paul’s School Advanced Studies Program this summer should submit the student & parent questionnaire by December 15th.

For more information visit Guidance on the RA Web site at
http://www.rivendellschool.org/schools/rivendell-academy/guidance
Middle School News

This fall Middle School Guidance will focus on Career exploration. Seventh grade will participate in the money smart program presented by Dartmouth students, 8th grade will start their preparation for Job Shadow Day and both 7th and 8th will get to visit River Bend to participate in a student led activity called “What type of jobs could you do in this outfit?” These are just a few fun things that your child will get to do this fall.

Helpful Tips

For Students:
- Use your daily planner
- Take a picture of your weekly assignments that are written on the board
- Make sure your binder is organized
- Create a homework folder for each class
- File your paper work in your binder
- Ask for HELP when needed.
- Make sure you get 8 hours of sleep, eat healthy, exercise and drink plenty of water.

For Parents:
Highlights from Life Skills Parent Guide by Gilbert J. Botvin

Talking and listening to your kids:
As your child reaches middle school age you may find that it becomes more difficult to talk to them. Between daily misunderstandings, disagreements and crazy schedules, some parents may feel like giving up on talking all together. But this is the time when open and honest talks are more important than ever.

Middle school students have lots of questions about all sorts of things as they grow from childhood to adolescence, and most of the time they want to discuss these thoughts and feelings with adults, especially parents. They just don’t know how...

Your child may not always be sure how they should behave in new situations with which they are faced, and they need help with what to do from someone they can trust. They are learning how to understand new emotions and learning how to link thoughts, feelings and actions.

Helpful tips in building communication and trust with your middle school age child:
- Show an interest in what your child is saying and learn what is important to them
- Think about your own thoughts and feelings when your child speaks to you
- Listen carefully and wait until your child finishes what she/he is saying before you speak
- Do not react quickly, instead think and take a minute to respond. Saying things like “I’m happy that you are telling me this” or “I am concerned about what you said”.
- Plan your day so conversations happen regularly, such as eating family meals together or planning a family activity together.

When parents and kids share feeling it helps build trust and communication.

Students may see the counselor for small group and individual counseling to assist with a variety of concerns and problems, including: friendship, problem solving, academic improvement, divorce, grief and loss and crisis intervention.

Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns. You can reach me at 603-353-4321 ext 1204 or cmclaren@rivendellschool.org

Cindy McLaren, MSW
Dear Parents and Guardians,

Our after-school Title I program started two weeks ago for students in grades 7-9 who need extra literacy and math support. The program will run **Monday through Wednesday from 3:00 to 5:30**. Students will receive concentrated support in math and/or literacy depending on their needs. Students will receive a nutritious snack and can catch the late bus home. Families who are not served by the late bus should call the school to see if transportation can be worked out.

Our funding source (Federal Title I) requires a process for identifying students who are in need of this additional support. We have gathered four types of information: placement test scores in literacy and math, SBAC test scores from last year, grades in math or language arts, and teacher recommendations. If the students are scoring in the bottom 25% of their class on the tests and these low scores correspond to low grades and teacher recommendations, than students will qualify for support. We will periodically evaluate students’ progress to monitor any gains or make any changes to instruction and when students’ grades, teacher recommendations and scores on the placement tests improve, they will be no longer be eligible for support and exited from the program.

In addition to the after-school Title program, there will be 20 open slots for students in grades 7-12 to receive homework assistance. Slots are filled on a first come first served basis, based on the following criteria:

- the homework group is open to 7th, 8th and 9th graders
- student must be failing 2 or more classes
- student must have parental permission to stay
- students choose the times and days to attend
- 10th-12th graders may attend only if they give back by volunteering to buddy up with a student in 7-9 and assist them for 45 minutes per day of attendance

We also would like to put together a parent group to work with us in developing a strong after school program. We will be holding periodic meetings with families of students who qualify to help shape improvements. Please call or email Brynne MacMurtry, the Title I Coordinator at the Academy if you have any questions or would like to be a part of the parent group.

Sincerely,
Brynne MacMurtry
Title I Coordinator
(603) 353-4321 X1110
bmacmurtry@rivendellschool.org