August 7, 2019

Dear Rivendell Families,

As the summer begins its journey into fall, I have been reflecting on some of the district’s successes that we will carry forward into the coming school year. But first I would like to thank the staff and families for all their hard work at the end of last year, which was busy with graduation, step-up day, the 8th grade trip, Spring Fling, the end of year exhibitions, and a bike trip around Lake Champlain.

I usually write a more in-depth piece on deeper issues in education and our work at the Academy, but for now will stick to general news and updates. I am working on a piece that I hope to send out soon after school starts, so stay tuned!

Changes and News about the 2020 School Year

The number and complexity of projects and exhibitions increased dramatically last year, and teacher collaboration made a big difference. Our thinking, structure, and funding will continue to support a high degree of teacher collaboration and therefore, high quality project work.

Another new program, created by a very dedicated committee, was Academic Mentoring, serving 9th and 10th grade students who we believe need support in achieving their full potential. Select students, along with parent consultation, will meet with teachers beginning this school year, and work on skills and dispositions that will allow them to eventually fly strongly on their own. Story Graves is moving from her special education position to head the program, with Learning Coach, Deb Churchill, as her assistant. We believe Academic Mentoring will be a useful tool in supporting student success.

This year students also took the lead in selecting culture as our summer reading theme and planning the full-day introduction of our theme to the school. As part of our summer reading work this fall, World Story Exchange https://www.worldstoryexchange.org/ will be working with students and staff, offering documentary storytelling workshops inviting students to explore their lives, dreams, and concerns, while finding their creative voice using a variety of media tools and artistic approaches (digital media being one example). The students’ finished stories are then shared with their local community before being shared with a group of students in another part of the world. We will hold an Advisory Open House (“back to school night”) in mid to late September, where each advisory will host an exhibition of students’ digital stories.

Last year we formed small grade-level teams that met twice a week to discuss students’ successes and needs. The teams designed interventions to help students and communicate with other teachers, and families, about students’ concerns and successes. Our grade-level teams perform the function of what other schools call “Educational Support Teams”. Over the years, we have experimented with many models, but have found the teams worked really well. Teacher collaboration, communication, and time made all the difference.

Fairlee, Vershire, West Fairlee, VT and Orford, NH
After her recovery from a broken ankle, Stephanie Chesnut made a smooth transition into a demanding role of Dean of Students. She was instrumental in bringing Dartmouth’s Summer Enrichment at Dartmouth (SEAD) program to RA, which encourages academic preparedness and personal growth in high school scholars through immersive opportunities, specifically designed academic enrichment courses, and year-round mentoring with successful college students at Dartmouth (check it out on our Facebook page). Our seven SEAD students had an exceptional experience. (The support from the program continues in 11th and 12th grade and the first year of post-secondary education.)

Once again, the Relentless Riders of Rivendell ended the year with a student and staff bike trip. This year it was a short round-trip circuit from the Academy, around Lake Champlain and back. (Last year’s trip to Quebec City.) While unfortunately there will be no bike trip next year, the good news is the Eco/Outdoor club is sponsoring a kayak trip in the Caribbean!

Ms. Chesnut secured two years of funding to start a new peer leadership program sponsored by the Anti-Defamation League, which she and Brynne MacMurtry will get rolling next year. (see the enclosed material). Ms. Chesnut has also made revisions to the School Handbook and created a new documentation process related to reports of bullying. We will send the handbook home with students the first day of school.

In other news, Ms. Hall secured an $8,000 grant from VSAC to help fund the growth of our Maker’s Space. We have had donations of new tools and equipment as well as new benches and storage. Doc Browne is taking charge of the Maker’s Space. And finally, last year Ms. Cousens was our new 7th and 8th grade counselor. She returns a veteran and will continue with 7th and 8th grade. (She worked all last year with the 6th grade as SME.)

New Faculty and Changes in Staffing
There are several terrific new hires to make special note of!

**Jeff Decker/High School Physical Science**
Jeff Decker is originally from the Upper Valley before leaving to attend the University of Oregon where he earned a BS in Geology. Jeff comes to us with over 25 years of science teaching experience. He taught for 15 years at Richmond Middle School in Hanover before teaching Science at an independent secondary school in Tucson, Arizona. Jeff will be working closely with Rachel Sanders and Doc Browne. Jeff is a big fan of soccer and hockey and I have heard that he has a mean 3-point shot.

**Paul DeSantis/High School Math**
Paul DeSantis comes to the Academy with 11 years of math teaching experience in two large high schools in Massachusetts. Paul earned a BS in Civil Engineering from Northeastern where he was also a rower. After college Paul joined the Marine Corps, earning the rank of Lieutenant Colonel before retirement. Paul was a tactical helicopter pilot and flight instructor. He is a rower, rock climber and performs magic with kids who say they aren’t good in math. Paul will be working closely with Rachel McConnell.
Christian Durgin/High School Special Education
Christian has a BS in Biochemistry from University of New Hampshire. He is currently working on a graduate degree in Clinical Mental Health Counseling/School Counseling from Plymouth State. Christian taught algebra part-time at the Lyme School, and taught 7th and 8th grade science and math for 11 years at The Sharon Academy. He also coached soccer for 8 years at Sharon. He will be working with Brynne MacMurray.

Kerry Browne has become our Digital Culture Leader, and he will also continue to teach the upper-house physics course. He will work with all staff and work with Matt and Nick to help with technology.

Story Graves has become our Academic Mentor, and she will also keep a small special education caseload.

Deb Churchill has moved to be the Learning Coach in the Academic Mentoring program.

At this time, we still have not hired anyone for our 7-12 PE/Health position.

Advisors

7th and 8th grade advisors stay with students for 2 years. High school advisors stay with students for 4 years. By grade level, our advisors for next year are:

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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Jen Ellis</td>
<td>Jen Bottom</td>
<td>Kirsten Surprenant</td>
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<tr>
<td>Allison Lary</td>
<td>Laura Taylor</td>
<td>Carol Sobetzer</td>
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<td>(TBD New PE teacher)</td>
<td>Chris White</td>
<td>Paul DeSantis</td>
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<td>Rachel McConnel</td>
<td>Paul Ronci</td>
<td>Paige Radney</td>
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<td>Rachel Sanders</td>
<td>Brynne MacMurray</td>
<td>Gail Keefer</td>
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<td>Christian Durgin</td>
<td>Jeff Decker</td>
<td>Eric Reichert</td>
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Stay tuned...
Because of the time and attention needed for developing projects and the Maker’s Space, we took a two-year hiatus from our accreditation work from NEASC. We might be continuing this work this year. As we progress, we will need community input and collaboration.

Please follow us on Facebook. Our page will give you the quickest updates on happenings at RA. https://www.facebook.com/Rivendell-Academy-329492943770265/?ref=bookmarks

Before school starts, Vermont voters should contact the Agency of Education to encourage them to either stop testing students or hire enough staff to produce useful reports of the results. https://www.vnews.com/test-results-overdue-by-nine-months-27325844
New Hampshire voters should contact their representatives to ask the state to abide by their Constitution and provide adequate funding to schools. https://www.concordmonitor.com/Public-School-Funding-26086385

I am anxious for staff to return so we can get started! Enjoy the remaining days of summer and we’ll see everyone soon.

Best,

Keri Gelenian
Principal/ Head of Schools