

ADMINISTRATIVE REPORT

At the last Annual District Meeting, voters approved a bond of \$300,000 to carry out work required by the State Fire Marshal. And in fact, this past year saw significant improvements in student safety. We added a sprinkler system to the building, improved emergency exits in some areas, and painted our wooden walls with a fire retardant primer. While these required changes were costly, they also gave us an opportunity to improve the overall appearance of the building. We were able to paint most classrooms, which now look cleaner and brighter.

Another area of considerable concern has been student safety at drop off and pick-up times. A variety of changes were implemented to streamline the flow of traffic, prevent accidents, and ensure that the correct people pick up students. While not perfect, the situation is far improved from what was the case a year ago. Discussion on an improved parking lot continues. A newly designed parking lot could have a further improve student safety and traffic flow.

Several other measures were put in place to keep students safe during the school day. A joint presentation by Principal Langsner and the Plainfield Police Officer Paul Roberts explained the reasoning behind the changes for parents in September. The School Safety Committee, area first responders, and school administrators continue to have discussions about improving school safety while maintaining accessibility for parents and community members.

The proposed budget will allow us to continue to work on improving the health and safety of students and staff by addressing facility needs such as replacing rotting windows and siding, and adding insulation. We are also asking for the purchase of a tractor to more efficiently perform the needed grounds work, such as snow removal around the building and assisting with mowing in the summer.

Last year's report discussed the need for an Assistant Principal. The need for this position remains. The Principal's job is divided into five areas: personnel and instruction; supervision and evaluation; human relations; management; and professional growth. In short, everything that goes into the smooth running of the building, the staff, the students, and the educational program. This one person is responsible for the supervision, evaluation, and professional development of over 55 staff members; the education, monitoring, and necessary discipline of over 280 students; the revision, budgeting, and purchasing required for more than ten curriculum areas; as well as personnel issues, safety, school maintenance, fundraising, and all the details required to run the educational program. It is a large job. The School Board and administration are committed to the idea that the school's principal be primarily focused on curriculum, instruction, supervision, and evaluation of staff. A part-time assistant principal would allow the focus of the principal to shift away from managerial responsibilities towards more educational leadership. The possible benefits to students include increased attention to curriculum, teacher training and evaluation, and improved instructional outcomes for students. We hope the community will support this article.

There are also two warrant articles asking to appropriate funds from the expected surplus. The first is for adding money to the Building Reserve Fund. The second is for creating a Benefit Payable fund to address anticipated increases in the cost of benefits (especially the employer's increasing cost into the state retirement system) over the next few years.

Nancy Brogden, the Director of Special Services, reports that the New Hampshire special education data system is fully functioning and special educators are

sending data to the State on a regular basis. There are “bugs” to be ironed out but the system seems to be working.

A new part of the “No Child Left Behind” law (NCLB) states that general educators must try scientifically based classroom interventions that may meet the needs of children in their class before making a referral to special education. This approach is called a “Response to Intervention.” A new referral process needs to be implemented before children can be considered for individualized programs under the special education law, IDEA (Individual with Disabilities Education Act). General and special educators work collaboratively to provide modifications for a child before evaluation and identifying the child as one with a disability. If a child needs a specially designed instructional program, staff work together to provide that program. It is more cost-wise to provide a program at our school than to try to send a child to a costly out-of-district program. Currently, our need is to provide a program for students who may require a more individualized program, because of cognitive or behavioral needs. Special educators work diligently to develop programs that will meet the diverse needs of our Plainfield students.

This year’s budget includes a half time special educator who will work on a program for children who need a “Life Skill” approach to learning, more of a “hands on”, developmental approach. We are excited about this new program and know that it will meet the needs of our Plainfield students. This program will also help to prevent the high cost of outside placements for students requiring this specialized curriculum.

Looking at the numbers, the preschool through grade 8 special education team provides services to 41 students with Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and for 11 students with disabilities who don’t need individualized programs, but who need a modified program (504 students). Also, at the high school Nancy oversees the programs of 14 students who currently have IEPs and 10 students who are on 504 plans.

Last Spring, a Junior High Round table discussion was held for interested staff and community members. Several of the issues brought up at that meeting have been addressed. One was the physical organization of the 7th and 8th grade “pod.” Doors replaced the curtains that have long separated the four classrooms from each other. This change allows teachers to engage in more active group activities since they don’t have to be so concerned with disturbing other classes. Having four full-time teachers in the pod means that all junior high homerooms can be in one place; the students actually have a “home base.” This has also had the effect of increasing supervision, communication, and the number of educational offerings to junior high students.

The staff has been actively involved in improving curriculum and instruction. Curriculum committees are hard at work revising Plainfield instructional content in order to meet new State Standards. This is time-consuming work requiring lots of reflection on our current practice, examination of state expectations, and determining areas of strength and need for our school. Curriculum committees have taken the lead in providing professional development focused on improved student learning in areas of need.

The Language Arts Curriculum Committee is leading our work on improving writing skills by focusing on specific traits of writing. Staff learn strategies that enhance specific traits, examine student work, and share ideas with each other. There is a bulletin board in the front lobby that spotlights student writing. We have also focused on improving students’ reading fluency both by evaluating it explicitly and by providing students with opportunities to practice reading fluently. One of the ways reading fluency has been highlighted was organized by the Reading Curriculum Committee. Partner Up Day, where our older students paired up with younger students for an hour of reading and

reading related activities, was very successful. Students selected books with their partner in mind and practiced reading in preparation for the big day. It was a magical moment!

Technology use by students and teachers alike has increased significantly. Students are using technology tools as a way to communicate what they have learned to others as well as to teach classmates something new. Students have composed music and created lyrics, made movies, created graphic stories, presented Power Point presentations, and more. Teachers are successfully using technology to teach in addition to needing technology for organization, lesson planning, and recording keeping. The Internet has become a valuable support for student learning. Teachers use various mapping sites to give students an understanding of geography. Students examine digital images, use interactive sites, and go on web quests. Our technology needs have increased so significantly that we no longer have enough computer lab time to meet the demands. This is a very exciting development.

Community Service and Global Outreach continue to be a focus at the school. Classes have been involved in school, community, and global projects. Students have worked on our trails; scraped a fence at a local cemetery; worked at both the Plainfield and Meriden libraries; knitted afghans and teddy bears to send to orphans in other countries; sent books, money, and school supplies all over the world; and continued supporting Heifer International through Read to Feed and other projects. Students have come forward wanting to volunteer in other ways as well. We have students who act as mentors to younger students through a Big Brother/Big Sister elective. Other students volunteer to help students in PE or art classes.

A group of teachers and students has taken on the challenge of lowering our impact on the environment including saving energy and reducing waste. The entire school was given a lesson on recycling in an assembly lead by fourth graders. Our waste was weighed for ten days with a goal of reducing trash. A worm farm is growing in the junior high where some of our food waste is turned into rich soil. A group of students is working with a teacher in exploring ways of dealing with lunch waste in a more environmentally friendly way.

As you can see, many wonderful things are happening at the Plainfield School, with many people responsible. We wish to thank the members of the various committees, the volunteers, and the staff for working to continue to provide excellent educational opportunities and a safe facility for the Plainfield students, and the community members for supporting these efforts.

Respectfully submitted,

Russell Collins, Superintendent
Ellen Langsner, Principal
Nancy Brogden, Director of Special Services