

BELLOWS FALLS MIDDLE SCHOOL

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From the Office: December News at BFMS

December 11, 2009

Dear Bellows Falls Middle School Families:

It is hard to believe the first trimester has come to an end and that we are officially one third of the way through the school year.

Some fall highlights have included:

- A successful fall sports season that culminated with a recognition ceremony
- Student assessments and progress monitoring through NECAP, Aims Web, and district testing
- Band performances at the Eastern States Fair, the Firemen's parade, and the Central School parade
- An amazing community art show at Chittenden Bank
- District Music Festival -BFMS hosted roughly 90 students from area schools for a full day of rehearsals in preparation for the Festival at on Nov. 21st
- Select chorus performance for the Bellows Falls Women's Club
- A tremendously successful school garden project
- Wonderful enrichment activities and projects -including photography, yoga, homework café, and mural painting-through the 21st Century afterschool program
- Grade level field studies and activities
- A well attended all school dance and a series of PTO events

Please, please, please....check for student's notices and visit our website <http://bfmiddleschool.org>, for upcoming events!!!

The winter sports season has begun and for BFMS this means boys and girls basketball. Our music and band programs have been in high gear as we have our winter concert coming up on Wed. December 16th at 7:00 pm. It is great to have family and friends attend events at the school and to show their support for our student participants and our school. Thank you. It is so exciting to see students engaged and performing for their families.

School Climate & Vision

We are actively working with students to develop their unique sense of individuality as contributing members of a caring and compassionate school community. To this end we are strongly promoting our school wide behavioral expectations of respect for oneself, respect for others, and respect for property as well as our school vision statement.

Our Vision

We envision the Bellows Falls Middle School to be a place where all members of the learning community strive to:

1. Engage in and promote lifelong learning
2. Have high expectations
3. Celebrate the achievement of high standards
4. Contribute to and promote positive school climate
5. Respect and recognize one another's passions, strengths, challenges, and needs
6. Lead healthy lives

Report Cards & Student Achievement

As this mailing includes your child's report card it seems important to discuss academic progress and grade level expectations. We have students coming to BFMS with variable base line skills and varying levels of academic preparation. To this end, we are actively working to insure that each individual student has sufficient mastery of baseline skills and is appropriately challenged within the general grade expectations for the State of Vermont. For some students this may mean remediation while for others this will mean extension activities and supplementing the grade expectations.

We have many students who are excelling and are earning very good grades! We are proud of them and expect to see these students continue to achieve.

We also have students who are struggling and are not performing at an acceptable level. Middle school is a time of great change-physically, socially, cognitively, and emotionally-to say the least!! It is also a time when the academic and social demands of the school environment dramatically increase and when parent participation tends to decrease. If your child is not doing well---please--make contact with your child's teachers and get involved. We strongly encourage parents to monitor homework completion and to support consistent daily attendance. Children need to be prepared for school by being well rested, have a good breakfast, and have their school materials (binders/backpacks / notebooks/ homework) organized and available each day.

Children are more successful when parents and teachers are working cooperatively together.

Student Discipline

Dianne Ellis, as Assistant Principal, has initiated restorative discipline practices at BFMS which works well in reinforcing our school wide expectations and vision. Restorative practices develop student reflection, problem solving, and a personal sense of accountability for decisions and actions. Students bear responsibility for fixing or making amends in a given situation. We work with students to look at discipline through natural and logical consequences. For example, if you violate trust that trust needs to be regained and how do you (the student) think that might happen? To this end, we involve students in proposing and fulfilling a number of "apologies of action," whereby the student makes amends for an infraction. This may take a variety of forms depending on the student and circumstances. Some students have performed community service for the school or for a teacher, while others have completed academic tasks and apology letters, or others have faced temporary loss of student privileges or participation in student activities. Attention needs to be paid to our athletic and co-curricular policy as it relates to academic and conduct expectations. Detentions continue to be utilized as disciplinary consequences along side of restorative practices as well as school suspensions (in or out of school) for significant offenses. Effective communication, consistency, and constructive partnership between the home and school are essential in supporting student accountability and success.

Cell Phones

We want to thank our student families for supporting our new cell phone procedure. Having students turn their cell phones in during advisory and to pick them up at check out has been very helpful in minimizing the added distractions and conduct concerns that cell phones bring to the learning environment. We expect students to be honest and to abide by this requirement. You know if your student has a phone at school so please check with him or her and the student's advisor to see if this plan is being followed. As the new procedure has been in place for some time we will be moving beyond warnings for students who are found to be in violation of this plan.

Seasonal Clothing and School Dress Code

As the weather is getting colder and the temperature can vary within our building we encourage children to dress in layers and to wear appropriately warm jackets and seasonal clothing. If your child is prone to losing his or her clothing, labeling items is highly recommended. We maintain a lost and found each trimester and try hard to reunite students with lost items where possible.

We also want to call families attention to our student dress code. This is a middle school and the expectation is that clothing is safe, comfortable, and meets a basic standard of modesty. Ultra low rise jeans, belly shirts, low cut shirts that show cleavage, short shorts or skirts, or clothing that exposes undergarments (sagging pants, spaghetti straps, tiny tank tops) are not appropriate to the school environment. Your child needs to be able to comfortably bend, sit, and move about without clothing exposing them or being unnecessarily burdensome or distracting. Footwear should be comfortable and secure, allowing your child to move freely through the building, and safely go up and down stairs. Additionally, we do not permit clothing that promotes or depicts violence, alcohol and/ or substance use.

We want families to be aware that we will begin enforcing our dress code more consistently.

The first offense for dress code violations will be contacting the parent and obtaining a change of clothes. Sometimes our school nurse has extra clothes that students have borrowed as cover. Any subsequent offenses will likely involve loss of student privileges.

For the safety and comfort of students and for the benefit of our school environment we thank families in advance for your support in this matter.

Snow & Snowballs

Speaking of seasonal weather we have the issue of snow and snowballs. Please remind your child that snowballs are absolutely not allowed on school property including on the sidewalks in front of the school. Children will need to resist the temptation of picking up and throwing snow while at school. This will not be considered horseplay or children being children. Middle school children are becoming quite aware that different environments have different expectations and that there is a clear line between conduct acceptable at school versus playing out in the backyard.

As this is a real safety issue--an icy snowball to the face could cause serious injury-- any violations of this will be dealt with direct consequences up to, and including suspension, from school.

Student Leadership and Engagement

Under the leadership of Sean Gould our Student Leadership Council has been meeting and planning out projects and actions. The students are planning a spirit week and are working out the many logistics of running our school store. Council members also want to form a restorative justice student board to help determine amends for

infractions of school rules and expectations by their peers. The student leadership council is open to students in grades 5-8 who are in good standing. Applications are available with Mr. Gould in room 203. Meetings are presently held in room 205 on Wednesday mornings between 7:30 -8:00 am.

U-Act

BFMS has registered with the Red Robin Foundation as a U-ACT participating school. U-ACT, which stands for Unbridled Acts or random acts of kindness, is Red Robin's national character-building initiative specifically designed for middle and junior high schools. The program challenges students to be kind to each other through in-school programs and volunteer activities that create caring communities. Participating schools are eligible for grant awards ranging from \$1,200 to \$15,000. The foundation reports to, "inspires kids to celebrate the power of kindness, ultimately helping to eliminate negative, bullying behavior among young people and establishing lasting positive and productive social behaviors that impact kids at school, at home and in the community at large."

For more information about the Red Robin Foundation please visit their website at <http://www.redrobin.com/>.

We expect to be kicking off a series of U-ACT activities within the school that may include:

- Benefit drives - canned food drive, toy drive, clothing or bottles- to address area needs
- Community partnerships and mentoring-sending cards or letters to elementary school classrooms, area elders, and daycare centers, etc.
- Various service learning projects within the school building

Recycling

BFMS has a strong interest in restoring our school wide recycling program. Recycling is a natural extension of our school vision, promoting awareness of natural resources, conservation, and sustainability. We have begun dialogue with the Recycling Coordinator for the Southern Windsor/Windham Counties Solid Waste Management District and will be looking to develop our capacity for collecting and transferring our recyclable materials. More information will follow.

Special Thanks

It takes a dedicated team to run a successful school. Everyone's efforts each day - teachers, support staff, office personnel, administration and especially families- make a difference in the lives of our students and for that we are thankful. Special thanks are due to our PTO parents whose support of the school is greatly appreciated.

Cheri McDaniel-Thomas
Principal

Dianne M. Ellis
Assistant Principal