



An Update from the Superintendent

By Sara E. Ahern, Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

It's hard to believe that over two months have passed since school started! The first quarter has ended for the high school students. The leaves have dropped from most of our trees. Athletic teams are in post-season play, and I can hear our musical groups preparing for winter concerts as I walk through the corridors of our schools. The sudden cold weather reminds us that winter will soon be upon us -- be sure to read the article about what to expect for notices on school cancellations or delays that appears elsewhere in this newsletter!

It has been a fantastic two months and I have explicitly sought to know and learn more about the Franklin Public Schools. I have focused in recent weeks on holding Parent Forums, by level, providing an opportunity for elementary, middle, and high school parents to share their perceptions on the strengths of the district and opportunities for growth. I am combining this feedback with input from administrators, School Committee, our teachers, students, and community members to identify patterns across the district and will present my findings in January. I will be holding faculty forums and student focus groups in December and I will be holding a Community-wide forum during the evening of November 30 at 6:30 PM in Town Council Chambers in the Town Municipal Building. In case you missed it, you can read my [Entry Plan](#).

I have been very impressed with the Franklin Public Schools so far. One theme that has resonated strongly since my arrival is an *appreciation* for the schools and numerous people have told me how "lucky" they feel that they are a part (as a parent, as a community member, or as an educator) of this organization. People have also remarked about the *dedication* of the faculty, a few of whom you can see in the pictures we are sharing about our 37 educators who earned Professional Teaching Status this year.

I have visited 120 classrooms across all 11 schools and have seen a lot of teaching and learning. I have been very impressed with the *quality* of instructional strategies, especially how students are so often working in small groups, focused on targeted skills based on their level of mastery of the content. This small group work also fosters collaboration and academic dialogue among the students. Choice also plays a big role in instruction, with students writing or creating independently.

While my report of findings will include a few opportunities for growth, one area emerged early in my entry process. I sense a keen interest among all stakeholders with whom I have spoken in answering the following question: *Are our classrooms providing what students will need for their futures -- in post-secondary education and the workplace?* While the answer does not solely rely on technology, it seems to me that people are very interested, in particular,

in deepening the use of instructional technology so that students develop important new literacy skills, exercise their creative muscles, and not only use but also master these powerful tools.

As I continue my entry activities, I will be testing this finding, as well as uncovering others, and sharing them with the community for your thoughts.

Although much of this year is focused on getting to know the district, we are actively working towards some important [District Improvement Goals](#). Our goals this year stress the importance of a safe and inclusive school environment, where each child and family feels welcome and respected. These goals fall into four categories:

- Bolstering students social-emotional learning skills (e.g. self-awareness, self-management, social awareness, problem solving, and decision-making)
- Investing in curriculum and instruction -- notably examining homework practices, implementing new science and digital literacy standards, and an examination of high school grading practices.
- Focusing on a collaborative culture rooted in core values and beliefs as a framework for decision-making and behavior
- Strengthening communication with stakeholders through existing, revised, and new channels.

This November Newsletter includes some updates from the first two goal areas. Mr. Peter Light, Assistant Superintendent of Schools, writes about our efforts to bolster SEL and Dr. Joyce Edwards, Assistant Superintendent for Teaching and Learning, writes about the committee that is studying the district's homework practices. We look forward to continuing to update you through periodic newsletters from the Central Office team.