



WINCHENDON COURIER

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VIEWS

Opinion and commentary from Winchendon and beyond

The year to date: great expectation

The arrival of February vacation week is a good time to take a look at some of what we've done this year, things of which we are proud and are a tribute to our entire team at every school. They are making things happen on a daily basis despite the economic restraints we face. I'm exceedingly proud of them and they should be exceedingly proud of themselves for accomplishing those little miracles every day.

Every Friday afternoon at Toy Town Elementary, we hand out around 60 backpacks full of treasures for the weekend including breakfast and lunch foods as well as healthy snacks, things like oatmeal, fresh fruit, juice, soup and tuna. You should see the looks of excitement and appreciation on those young faces. In fact, the program, one which illustrates the extent of our commitment beyond the classroom walls has been so successful we're anticipating expanding it to Memorial school next year. This program is done in partnership with the Kiwanis of Winchendon, who have done the fundraising and support for the project.

Our extended day after-school program which includes a homework component enables students to participate in activities ranging from cooking to engineering to science to combining sports with math. That means they're partnering academics with fun and who knows, maybe this will help encourage



FROM THE
SUPERINTENDENT'S
OFFICE
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STEVE HADDAD

some of them to pursue careers in science or math, fields which are of particular importance given the technological complexities of the 21st century.

You may have noticed all these programs are run below the high school level. Our high school can't be successful unless our elementary and middle schools are, so while we are working to align our system-wide curriculum to assure a smooth flow from year-to-year, pre-K right through graduation, we are mindful our responsibility doesn't end when the final bell rings every afternoon.

One of the important benefits of curriculum alignment is we've been able to create schedules whereby teachers in each subject are able to sit down together and discuss strategies for their discipline. Being able to communicate face-to-face to exchange ideas and brainstorm together can enhance and have a significantly positive impact on the overall classroom experience. We've seen this year what a difference that can make. It's not by accident our faculty's "highly qualified" assessment runs about three points higher than the overall state average.

It's been a successful year in athletics too. Our field hockey team qualified for Districts for the first time in about a decade. I can't say enough about the job Amanda Lawlor has done in just two seasons as head coach. It wasn't

Turn To **YEAR** page **A5**

YEAR

continued from page A4

long ago when a couple wins was pretty much all that could be realistically expected. Not anymore. Amanda's philosophy of commitment, teamwork, and sacrifice has paid off because the girls on that team bought into it and made that mantra their own. Best of all she and they have applied it off the field as well as on. You see a lot of athletes on honor roles. The boys' basketball team has reached Districts for the first time since 2011. Like Amanda, Coach Matt O'Malley has instilled a new spirit in his program and the results speak for themselves. We've had some very impressive performances turned in as well by the track team, including the establishment of multiple new school records in various categories. Coach Anthony Findley keeps delivering successful seasons, year after year, a tribute to the program's stability. As a former varsity baseball coach, I can attest to how hard it is to make Districts. The athletes and coaches on these teams deserve a lot of credit, both for their accomplishments and how well they've

represented their school and community. We're proud of them all.

In sum, it's been a good year so far. Rather than be intimidated by challenges our system embraces them as opportunities to build on towards our goal of reaching Level 1 status. I'm proud of what we've done this year. I hope you are as well. Happy vacation week.

