

# Auburn Public Schools District Newsletter

"EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION BY PUTTING STUDENTS FIRST"

December 2021



## From the Desk of Dr. Casey Handfield, Superintendent

"Tough times never last, but tough people do."  
- Robert H. Shuller

Hello, everyone. I am pleased to offer you the first edition of the 2021-2022 Auburn Public Schools District Newsletter. As has been past practice, we assemble some thoughts at the conclusion of each trimester regarding a theme we believe is worth addressing with the school community. The theme for this edition is "Grit, Grace, and Generosity" in our schools. This is particularly fitting right now as it is during the toughest times grit, grace, and generosity are needed most, yet, can be incredibly difficult to see, hear, and feel from each other.

I do not believe it is a stretch to offer that I think all of us believed we were through the worst of the pandemic last June. Suffice it to say, when things took a turn for the worse in July, it was incredibly deflating for everyone in the schools. While we have done our best to resume a normal school experience for our staff and students, the truth is that it just is not the same, and I do not have a time table as to when it will be. COVID continues to impart its will in the schools. Masking, testing, reimagining how to operate schools (again), although necessary, continues to be a distraction to teaching and learning in our classrooms on a daily basis.

However, despite COVID's attempts to disrupt the teaching and learning process, the resilience displayed by our staff, students, and parents continues to be inspiring to me as the proud superintendent of the Auburn Public Schools. Robert H. Shuller is credited with saying, "Tough times never last, but tough people do." I agree with him. I would also offer that "grit, grace, and generosity" are hallmark characteristics of tough people.

Enjoy the following submissions from our district administrators. On behalf of all of us in the Auburn Public Schools, we wish you a blessed holiday season.



**From the Desk of Dr. Beth Chamberland, Assistant Superintendent**

*"Grit determines that life challenges will neither defeat nor define us."*

*"Grace gives kindness to ourselves and others even when it's hard."*

Author Unknown

As I reflect on the 2021-2022 school year thus far, the quote above encapsulates much of what has held us up and held us together this school year. It has become increasingly clear that we all benefit from appreciating the value of both *Grit* and *Grace* in our work each day.

We all know the challenges that COVID 19 has placed on us as parents, guardians, students, teachers, and school staff. Seemingly, we all had hoped that we would be 'back to normal' this school year and when COVID remained as a daily challenge, it was difficult to understand and adapt. But as the Auburn Public Schools community always seems to do, we have rallied, we have supported each other and we have marched on-we have *Grit*! *This challenge will neither defeat nor define us!*

Teaching and learning is alive and well in the Auburn Public Schools thanks to our dedicated teachers and school staff. Students are again, working together with one another to explore topics in science, math, English Language Arts, history, social studies, languages, technology, music, art and physical education along with many others. Students are collaborating with each other. Students are participating in a wide range of after school activities and while in some cases, things look a little different, students are fully engaged in school.

Staff at each of our schools recognize that some of our students may need additional support to be successful this year. Teachers are using data to ensure students receive the instruction they need to fill gaps in their learning while still receiving appropriate grade level instruction. Each of our schools are giving special attention to the social and emotional needs of our students. They are focused on helping students acclimate to being back in school and to help them to adapt to the challenges of being a student in 2021.



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We also know that the challenge of COVID 19 has placed stress on families and schools and the prevalence of anxiety has been elevated for everyone. When that happens, patience with one another can run thin and even minor inconveniences can often seem to be major problems. This is when the need for *Grace-giving kindness to ourselves and others even when it's hard*, becomes imperative. Everyone in our district, families and school staff alike, has experienced some level of difficulty that has come along with the pandemic. Everyone has had family members or friends impacted by the pandemic. Everyone has 'stuff' that they are trying to solve, correct, improve, or resolve. Let's commit to giving each other *Grace* in those moments.

Together, working with and trusting one another, and with a generous sprinkling of both Grit and Grace, we can ensure that each of our students is safe, well cared for and receives everything needed to be successful both in school and out. Please reach out to your child's teacher(s) if you have any questions or concerns. We are all here to help! I look forward to our continued work together.

Our mission is Strengthening Connections through Rigor, Relevance and Relationships.



**From the Desk of Mr. Daniel Delongchamp, Auburn High School Principal**

There is no mistaking the fact that our community has had more than its fair share of adversity over the last several months. While these challenges have taken their toll on all of us, what has propelled us through these moments has been the unrelenting kindness from the many members of our community. Both random and planned, a smile, a simple hello, an offering of support, or a pleasant acknowledgement, can go a long way in lifting us up.

I recently read that poet and philosopher, Azrat Inayat Khan said, "Some people look for a beautiful place, others make a beautiful place". This has never been more important than in today's world. At Auburn High School we look to each and every community member to make our school a "Beautiful place". As soon as we awaken in the morning, we have the ability to begin our day, whether it is "half full or half empty" I choose to look at things as if they were half full. Even on our most challenging days, there is so much to celebrate. As I travel in and out of classrooms it is readily apparent that students are beginning to thrive again. Whether it is in the

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conversations with one another or with their teachers. You may also hear it in the laughter in the hallways or in the cafeteria. It is clear that our school has become a place where people take care of one another.

At Auburn High School we do our best to give back to the community as well as teach our students the importance of kindness and generosity. Over the last 14 weeks some of the activities that our students have participated in are as follows:

**Athletics Leadership Group**-Coat Drive to support Auburn Youth and Family Services

**National Honor Society**-Created care packages for 5 soldiers with direct ties to our community. At this time, the NHS is partnering with Auburn Youth and Family Services in order to provide gifts for 5 students to ensure that they have a nice Christmas.

**Student Council**-They have participated in a food drive for Auburn Youth and Family Services. In addition, students have made and delivered cards to the The Lifecare Center in Auburn. Lastly, as we have entered the holiday season, they have focused on a theme of gratitude through the leaves on the "Tree of Gratitude" found on the wall of our grand stairwell.

**Class of 2023**-The class spent the weekend before Thanksgiving raking leaves for homes in our community


While these are all wonderful contributions to our community, you don't have to have affiliation with any particular group in order to be kind or grateful. We all have the ability to take care of one another even if it is within the gestures below.

**Ways you can express your gratitude:**

- Learn to compromise
- Reach out to someone with an email or letter
- Offer to help someone
- Listen more
- Just be there for someone

As we make our way through the holiday season and winter months, I encourage you to practice some of these strategies. There is no question that we can all play a part in making a positive difference for one or many people in our community. From a personal perspective, I know the power of helping someone who might be struggling or the impact of being a support for someone who may not have anyone. Sometimes it is the simple gesture of allowing someone to feel heard. Regardless of the gesture, I find that as long as you are trying, you are making a difference.

I wish you all a healthy and joyful holiday season.





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### Upcoming Events in the APS.....

Dec. 23rd	Early Release Day for Students
Dec. 24th - Dec. 31st	Winter Break
Jan. 3rd	All schools return
Jan. 17th	Martin Luther King Day Observed (No School)
Feb. 21st - 25th	February Break



### From the Desk of Mr. Gregg Desto, Auburn Middle School Principal

There are approximately 7.3 billion people in the world as of today. Those 7.3 billion people occupy 197 million square miles on earth. The world is a vast and populated place. And yet, somehow, 720 people – 650 students and 70 adults – all ended up at Auburn Middle School at the same time. Whether you believe that is a coincidence or some kind of fate, you have to admit that it's pretty amazing. And, as I remind our students often, when you consider all the space and people in the world, our ending up here together must mean something. It just makes sense that we try to make this place special for one another.

That's just one of the reasons that even as we teach English, Math, Science, History and all the other academic subjects, we strongly emphasize learning to be respectful and kind to one another. In fact, the core values of our school center on treating everyone with civility and respect, actively helping others when necessary and learning to help ourselves when we need it. When students fail to live up to that standard, we take the opportunity to review the situation with them and teach them how to do better next time. Middle school is, after all, very much about learning to be more responsible and sometimes those lessons come via mistakes.

The other major way we emphasize kindness is by putting our students in positions to serve the community. There are very few days in the 180 day school year during which there is no community service project going on at AMS. Among the service activities our students have engaged in this year are:

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- A Thanksgiving Food drive that fed multiple local families
  - A Holiday Toy drive which, as of today, has collected nearly 100 toys for local children
  - Participation in Cradles to Crayons, which annually gathers quality clothing for hundreds of children across the state
  - A school program called BRYT in which students receive numerous supports to increase their likelihood of succeeding in school and in life
  - Rockets to Rockets, a program in which AMS students engage in fun activities with their classmates who have special needs
  - And many more

Truly, AMS is a place where kindness and respect are valued, modeled and practiced. With 650 people between the ages of 11-14, it is rarely perfect, but we really try because if ever there were a time when just teaching academic subjects was enough to prepare students for life, now is not that time. Our kids have been deprived of nearly two years of social skills practice. More than ever, we have to try to make up for lost time. Emphasizing civility, respect, gratitude and generosity is one way we try to do that.

Our vision is to educate and prepare students for the opportunities and challenges of a changing world.



**From the Desk of Dr. Susan Lopez, Swanson Road Intermediate School Principal**

***"Be somebody who makes everybody feel like somebody." - Kid President***

Together, we continue to face a truly unprecedented time in our lives as educators, friends, mothers, fathers, and caregivers. We have all had to adapt to this new reality. The global coronavirus pandemic has no doubt affected our families, our communities, our organizations – indeed, it has impacted our perspective and way of life. As you certainly have had too, at Swanson our team of teachers and staff have focused our energies and adapted together to build a community in which everyone feels safe to



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grow and develop both as individuals, and collectively as a school learning community. We have made it a priority to spend time each day, through all of our interactions, to strengthen our resolve to instill the importance of kindness, empathy, and the understanding that all of our interactions have impact, both good and bad, on all those around us.

It is heartwarming to see the impact so many creative team activities and school-wide initiatives have made on students, despite some of the challenges. We have had grade level activities, our morning and afternoon program up and running, along with band and strings, as well as other clubs such as Girls on the Run. Indeed, we all have daily struggles, but must remember there is so much good continuously occurring not only inside the walls of SWIS but throughout our community. All we need to do is pay attention.

In the midst of these difficult times, we have also seen the amazing power of positivity and kindness. I am very touched and proud of how our students, staff, and families are stepping up even more than usual to engage in acts of generosity and community support. A few examples include:

- Back to School Socials and donations from families
- Kindness Challenges embraced by students and staff alike
- Cards for the elderly
- Grade four field trips to Natick Farm supported by our generous PTO
- Spooky Spectacular volunteers who tirelessly worked to make this event come to fruition.
- Candy drives for our Veterans that conveyed our love and respect for those who have served our country
- Staff fundraisers for families in need
- Staff donations for students
- Students writing letters to the administration and displaying posters to promote kindness and community activism throughout SWIS
- Auburn Fire Department education series
- The generous donations of supply boxes that every one of our 569 students received during Literacy Month that were donated anonymously and delivered by the Pappas family
- Mask donations made by staff as well as anonymous donors
- The many letters and emails of support from our wonderful families to show their understanding and appreciation for our work.
- Most recently the incredible amount of money raised for *Pride and Purpose* to support our 'sister school' in South Africa.

These are just a few of the many examples. There have been hundreds of such acts of kindness – likely many more that I'm not even aware of. Knowing the passion of our staff and families, I know that there are new activities being organized and happening at this exact moment.



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In this same spirit, it is very important to me – as well as the entire SWIS team – that we do the right thing for every one of our children during these difficult times. As such, we know that not every child's needs are the same nor are they the same each day, week, month or year. This changes. We are fortunate to have such a wonderful school community and district committed to our children. Though nothing is perfect, I believe that when we approach everything and everyone with the idea that we all have the best intentions, we can make a difference together.

These are trying times and while we are celebrating acts of kindness, and emphasizing the importance of generosity, giving of ourselves, and empathy, many of our friends and families are struggling with health issues and other concerns. There is so much good around us, let us remind each other to see this in every aspect of our lives and embrace that positivity. I thank you from the bottom of my heart and truly appreciate your continued support.

*"I can do things you cannot, you can do things I cannot; together we can do great things." - Mother Teresa*

# GO ROCKETS!



From the Desk of Mrs. Jennifer Stanick, Pakachoag Elementary School Principal

***"PAK - Prepared, Aware, and Kind"***

Pakachoag Elementary School is often referred to as PAK. Our school motto utilizes PAK as an acronym for being, Prepared, Aware, and Kind. We proudly recite our school motto each morning and hope to model and instill these attributes in our students. We strive to model kindness in our daily interactions with



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students and staff alike. A kindness quote is announced each morning to inspire friendliness, consideration, and generosity.



Through our community service learning projects, we hope to spread kindness to our community on a local, national and global level. We encourage kindness through our acts of service while preparing our students to make a difference in their world.

PAK partners with AYFS, Auburn Youth and Family Services, to spread kindness and support to families in need. We collected donations for the food pantry during the month of November and PAK staff will be adopting a family for the holidays. We collected excess Halloween candy to donate to veterans through Project New Hope. Project New Hope strives to support current and past military service members. Each grade level team chooses a project annually to make a difference in the lives of others in our community. We look forward to the grade-level projects to continue paying it forward throughout our world during the remainder of the school year.



We are excited to announce PAK's New Years' resolution. Our "PAK pride" will make the commitment to kindness and utilize the 365Z Foundation materials that have been generously funded by The Officer Ronald Tarentino, Jr. Charitable Fund. The Tarentino Charitable Fund strives to promote, "Acts of Kindness, Acts of Generosity, and Service to Community" all of which we strive to promote throughout our school community. "The 365Z Foundation provides ideas, guidance, and resources designed to encourage, inspire and challenge individuals to perform conscious acts of kindness to make the decision to help someone in some way, every day; and in doing so help perpetuate a community-wide kindness movement, raising awareness and personal commitment to helping others."

Finally, we will be celebrating The Great Kindness Challenge the week of January 24th through January 28th with lessons, events, and kindness-themed days throughout the week. During our Kindness Week, we will be asking all students to perform acts of kindness at home as their "homework". Your child will pledge to perform an act of kindness for someone else every single day to help perpetuate a community-wide kindness movement.

Pakachoag Elementary School is a fabulous place to learn, filled with kindness!







**From the Desk of Mrs. Marie Mahan, Bryn Mawr Elementary School Principal**

A 2019 study published in the *Journal of Happiness Studies* found that gratitude is linked to happiness in children by age 5. Teaching gratitude to our students at Bryn Mawr will help them grow up to be happy adults. For children especially, learning how to be thankful can help in the development of interpersonal skills, including the 'big' one – empathy. Gratitude lends itself to expanding our worldview. When we are thankful for even the small things, we are thinking of more than just ourselves; we are thinking about how all of us have the ability to positively impact another person's life. Gratitude is powerful!

There is lots of kindness happening in Mrs. Sylvesters classroom. Several students have been struggling with zipping their own jackets so in addition to practicing at home, she has encouraged students to help one another with this task. It warms my heart to now see students helping one another.

In first grade, Mrs. Johnson's class is starting a Kindness Calendar on December 1st. Each day students will have a new activity to complete which will spread kindness throughout the building. As you walk through the halls in the morning, Mrs. Connor's class is singing about kindness and how they have the ability to make the world a better place each and every morning.

I would also like to personally thank the Bryn Mawr families that have donated clothing over the last few months. We have had someone donate underwear and socks to the nursing office as well as families donating brand new coats, hats and gloves to be given to families in need.

Holy Candy Drive! Bryn Mawr families shock me with their generosity when donating Halloween candy to our homeless Veteran Shelter on Grove Street in Worcester. You can't imagine the smiles on the faces of these students that donate their candy. When they go trick or treating and then choose candy to donate, they feel directly related to this endeavor. They get it! They also make cards in class to accompany the candy and thank the Veterans for their service.

Cans, Glorious, Cans! We held the most successful can drive yet this Thanksgiving. All donations help stock the shelves of our own Auburn Youth and Family Services. For every donation, it acted as a token for the student to vote for their favorite staff member to dress as a goofy snowman. They loved every minute of it.

Get your shovels ready! Bryn Mawr is waiting for a blizzard, a "Blizzard of Kindness". Teachers will be looking to catch students being kind, they will write their name on a snowflake and add it to the blizzard bulletin board.

As a school community, we will again be making a New Year's resolution to commit acts of kindness every day! Our guidance counselor Mrs. Bouzan has successfully revamped PBIS and continues to educate all our students with weekly guidance classes. I want to sincerely thank all staff, students, and families for continuing to work together to make this school year so successful.



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