



Union #28 Updates from the Superintendent

Union #28 Mission Statement:

Union #28 strives to ensure equitable access to deep and meaningful educational experiences for every student.

This has been a busy summer, start of school and fall with many things going on at all of our schools and in our district!

On August 16th, I joined our CNC Coordinator, Gillian Budine, other CNC coordinators from around Massachusetts, along with the Commissioner and Associate Commissioner of Early Education and Care and EEC staff at a press conference and family event to announce the FY24 Coordinated, Family and Community Engagement (CFCE) grant that funds programs like ours across the state. Union #28 families also joined to share their experiences with EEC. I want to give a heartfelt thank you to the Community Network for Children and the Department of Early Education and Care. "Free the child's potential and you will transform them into the world," (Maria Montessori). Their support in freeing our children's potential will help our children transform our world!

Opening Day for staff was on August 28, 2023 and was held at Swift River School. We had a breakfast for all staff, a brief welcome from the superintendent, an all-staff group activity led by Principal Mendonsa from Shutesbury Elementary, and an overview of our district focus this year: Universal Design for Learning, Equity, Content (Literacy) and Co-teaching/Inclusion.

We had a district presentation from the Collaborative for Educational Services on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Culturally responsive teaching means using students' customs, characteristics, experience, and perspectives as tools for better classroom instruction. The term was coined by researcher Geneva Gay in 2000, who wrote that "when academic knowledge and skills are situated within the lived experiences and frames of reference for students, they are more personally meaningful, have higher interest appeal, and are learned more easily and thoroughly."

We welcome a new administrator, Erving Elementary interim principal David Krane. David brings a wealth of experience to us and we are happy to have him as part of Union #28.

Union #28 now has a curriculum team! There are two new curriculum team members.

Jim Hanson, the math coach/interventionist at Erving Elementary is taking on some time this year as a curriculum assistant. Our Director of Curriculum and Instruction and Mr. Hanson will have the focus of math support as all schools roll out our Universal Screener of Number Sense. Paige Smith, 3rd grade teacher at Swift River School, will be taking on curriculum projects with our Curriculum Director as well. One of the major projects this past summer was creating a shared google drive with literacy resources for staff.

For reading this year all schools are using the Amplify mclass platform to assess students with DIBELS 8 and as stated above, for math all schools will be using the Universal Screener for Number

Sense and using the Forefront database to keep this data. This is exciting as we are able to look at assessments as a district.

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) released 2023 Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) results on September 19, showing continued academic recovery from the pandemic. While overall results are still lower than they were in 2019, results in English Language Arts (ELA) scores and Math were level or improved in all grades compared to 2022 across the state. In Mathematics, the percentage of students scoring Meeting or Exceeding Expectations in math increased by 2 percentage points in grades 3-8 and in English Language Arts scores increased in 2023 as compared to 2022. Science scores decreased slightly in 2023. Each school will be looking at and sharing school-based data.

Finally, I will be retiring as Superintendent of Union #28 as of June 30th. To Union #28, thank you for the past 8-plus years. As Elphaba and Glinda sang in the musical *Wicked*, "I've heard it said that people come into our lives for a reason, bringing something we must learn, and we are led to those who help us most to grow if we let them and we help them in return." For those of you who helped me to grow as a district leader, thank you. I hope I have helped you in return.

"Who can say if I've been changed for the better? I do believe I have been changed for the better. Because I knew you, I have been changed for good."

All my best,
Jennifer Culkeen, Superintendent