

Super News

Superintendent Newsletter

SAU 56, Somersworth School District, November 2023

FEATURING

Hilltopper Cats

Lights on for Learning

Title Funds for Somersworth

WELCOME TO the inaugural edition of Super News! This digital newsletter from the Office of the Superintendent



will highlight many of the wonderful people, events, and educational programs across Somersworth Schools. It will be shared via School Messenger, the SAU 56 website, and on our newly established school department Facebook page,

www.facebook.com/somersworthschools.

Since arriving as superintendent a few months ago, I have been spending much of my time in the community and in our schools, and have many positive impressions.

First and foremost, I am amazed by our extraordinary students. They are polite, respectful, courteous, responsible, and caring human beings. The school spirit and peer support are the best I have witnessed in my educational career. I have seen this at various sporting events, in school hallways, district family nights, and in classrooms. Most recently, I was moved by the abundant support shown at the student National Honor Society induction ceremony.

I am impressed by our dedicated and motivated faculty and staff. They are student-centered and go above and

beyond for our students. They come out for many student events and cheer them on with big smiles and encouraging words. I know our students appreciate them; many students have told me so. We are blessed to have such incredible employees working in our schools.

I have found the school board to be fabulous to work with. Each of its members cares deeply about Somersworth students and employees. They work tirelessly on numerous committees to ensure our students are provided with the best educational programs and services that can be offered.

The support that Somersworth families and the community show for our school system has been outstanding. Scores of supporters recently attended a city council meeting to advocate for the acceptance of 1.9 million dollars in Adequacy Aid needed for our students. I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for the invaluable support and assistance we've received from the city council, city manager, and dedicated city department employees (e.g. the police, fire, and public works teams) for our students, faculty, and staff.

I have tremendous hope for good things to come as we move through the semester and into the new year.

— **Superintendent Lou Goscinski**

HISTORY OF THE HILLTOPPER CATS

WHEN I WONDERED what a Hilltopper cat is and why Somersworth schools display a variety of cats across their schools, Superintendent Lou Goscinski recommended that I speak with Eric Mommsen. Though Lou had only been at Somersworth School District for a couple of months, it didn't take him long to learn about Eric's reputation as the historian of all things Somersworth.

A long-time teacher at Maple Wood School, Eric, or Mr. Mommsen as he's known to his third-graders, graciously met with me outside the high school to share what he knows. He pointed out the hills across the athletic fields, a view that clearly showed the origin of the "Hilltopper" moniker. Hilltopper is not only used to claim a student as one of Somersworth's own, but it is also a nickname for anyone who lives in Somersworth. Mr. Mommsen says that the first official school use of Hilltopper came in 1936 when Hilltopper appeared in the name of the school newspaper. The high school yearbook Hilltop Echo, debuted in 1947 and is still the name of the school's yearbook today.

In 2002, the school district decided it needed a mascot to promote sports and other school programs. Why? Because mascots are fun and have an innate ability to

lift spirits. It was then that the Hilltopper nickname was revived and paired with a blue cat, which seemed as respectable a mascot as any. (Mr. Mommsen noted that a top hat named "Toppie" briefly appeared on the scene in 1965, though it didn't make a comeback along with Hilltopper.) Mr. Mommsen likes that Hilltopper cats can vary by school, making them age-appropriate.

Friendly cartoonish cats are used at Somersworth's elementary schools, while the more dastardly, foreboding cats are found at the middle and high schools.

In addition to being the district's historian, Eric Mommsen is also an artist. He ran with the idea of the Hilltopper cats and got to work designing them, combining bits and pieces of cats he admired with his own

ideas. He painted the two Hilltopper cats that adorn the gymnasium walls at the high school. One seems on the prowl, the other appears ready to attack.

While he isn't sure whether or not cats once roamed the Somersworth hills, Mr. Mommsen is pretty sure they weren't blue. Though now blue cats do appear on shirts, hats, and bags of students and fans of Somersworth School District. Thank you, Eric, for setting the record straight.

—Elizabeth Belle Isle



Eric Mommsen is dwarfed by one of his more menacing Hilltopper cats.

Visit Somersworth School District's Facebook Page

Would you like to see more good news from the Somersworth School District throughout the week? Join us on our official Facebook page at www.facebook.com/somersworthschools and "Like" the page to receive alerts. As always, continue to enjoy the Idlehurst, Maple Wood, Somersworth Middle School, and the Somersworth High School Facebook pages.



TITLE FUNDS AT SOMERSWORTH SCHOOLS

SOMERSWORTH IS KNOWN for its relatively soft landing for new U.S. immigrants. The city's acceptance of diversity makes Somersworth special and unique in New Hampshire and the region. Over the past decade or two, its population of immigrants has grown steadily, along with its need for services. This year, 110 students from immigrant families enrolled in the Somersworth School District.

As a Title 1 school that receives federal funds to raise children's academic achievement, SAU 56 provides supportive services to students and their parents, many of whom are immigrants. SAU 56 also supports students with ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) as one of these services.

The ESOL administrative team—Title 1 Curriculum Director Susan Blair and the district's three remarkable ESOL teachers, Jolene Francoeur, Emma Haskell, and Katie Somers—began the school year with a deep dive into their practices for welcoming ESOL families and providing supportive services.

In late September, the team kicked off the year with an ESOL Family Dinner, believing that breaking bread with immigrant children and parents would effectively help them to build relationships with the immigrant community. They served food, passed out business cards, T-shirts (designed by Career Technology Center students), and children's books written in English. The team introduced themselves to parents, asking how they could help.

Two-thirds of the ESOL children were receiving Title services at the time of the ESOL Family event. The team is also arranging field trips and other hands-on learning opportunities for these students. Susan Blair says, "We will be holding these dinner events with families every trimester. They are essential components for developing relationships and building bridges for these families. Our hope

is that the work we do to support the students and their families will make a difference, no matter how big or small!"



Somersworth families and the district's ESOL team came together to share a meal to kick off the school year.



Title grant discussions included school principals to pinpoint needs within each school. As a result, each school has at least two grant-funded positions to help bridge academic gaps within their buildings. Idlehurst and Maple Wood are working with a consultant to evaluate math instructional strategies and are investing in tools to identify learning gaps in reading more quickly.

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LIGHTS ON FOR LEARNING

ON OCTOBER 19, MORE THAN 140 Somersworth students and family members came together to play "Minute-to-Win-It" games and enjoy an evening meal with other district families. This year's **Lights on for Learning** was the 17th time Somersworth School District celebrated its Somersworth Youth Connection programs with the event.

According to Afterschool Alliance, 7.6 million children across America are alone and unsupervised after school. Because of

Somersworth Youth Connection—the district's before and after school and summer enrichment program for elementary and middle school families—we know that 88 Somersworth children are safe and supervised after school, and 48 are safe and sound before their school days begin.

The Family Engagement Committee, a group representing each Somersworth school and

describing its purpose as "engaging families in meaningful activities and two-way communication

to increase student achievement," organized Lights on for Learning. Remarkably, 23 high school students volunteered to look after and play with the children during the event.

Invited speaker Matt Fana spoke with parents while children focused on playing games like cup stacking and chopstick races for a chance to win

prizes. Fana's message inspires students to make better decisions in and out of school. The following day he presented his ideas to Somersworth middle and high school students.

The Family Engagement Committee promises additional happenings over the school year and hopes that even more families will join in.



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The district has also prioritized remedial academic and social-emotional services for the high school's first-year class to minimize the COVID pandemic's impact on the class. They are committed to acting now to mitigate the potential for failure.

Somersworth School District has the opportunity to support student learning through a variety of Title grants. Title I supplements state and local education

funding for low-income students. Title II supplements professional development for staff which includes mentoring new teachers and supports the training of all staff including paraeducators. Title III supports the ESOL and Immigrant population and Title IV is designed to provide supplemental support for students, grade levels, or schools that need supplemental support to succeed.