

Super News

Superintendent Newsletter

SAU 56, Somersworth School District, April 2024

FEATURING

Re-energizing Somersworth's Music Program

Progress at the Student Health Clinic

Connecting With Our ESOL Families

SOMERSWORTH'S MUSIC PROGRAM GETS A TUNE-UP

Devin DiBernardo came to Somersworth School District to lead its music program at about the same time COVID-19 was loosening its grip on schools nationwide. Like so many districts at this time, Somersworth's band suffered a drop in enrollment. Limited practice sessions and a shift toward core academics left enrichment programs wanting.

Originally a saxophone player who moved to French horn, Devin studied music education at UNH. He came to Somersworth after teaching at Merrimack Valley High School, up for working with kids close to where he grew up in Rochester, NH. With his move to Somersworth Schools, DiBernardo came with a growing list of priorities focused on breathing new life into the music program.

To rebuild music program enrollment across

Somersworth, DiBernardo was seeking to create a cohesive music program from grades K through



Sometimes happiness is receiving much-needed instruments through the federally funded Title IV-A program, focused enrichment programs. These students are becoming familiar with their new French horn, Glockenspiel, and marimba.

12. He focused on exposing kids to music at an early age. Working with music teachers and the band director from Marshwood High School, he brought middle and high school musicians to Idlehurst and Maple Wood elementary schools to play and demonstrate musical instruments.

He remembered how much these visits meant to him as a

child. "There's nothing cooler than having the *big kids* stop by to show you their instruments. This is when you start thinking about which you'd like to play someday."

DiBernardo says that having a football program with as much community enthusiasm as Somersworth High School's was an opportunity

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SOMERSWORTH'S MUSIC PROGRAM (Continued from page 1)

made for the high school marching band. Taking full advantage of half-time at home games, the marching band would put on a show. This would be the widest audience the band had performed in front of. It would also be the first time many spectators would experience the band.

DiBernardo has been working to expand a collection of instruments—another boon to the Somersworth's program. "I couldn't afford my instrument when I started playing, so now I

sense of humor, and are committed to practicing and improving. The festival's concerts will be held on April 6th. Senior Lukas Kelly will be performing in the All-State Band on French horn. He'll be playing first horn, a fantastic achievement. Raymond LaBelle IV and Reilly Quist, both sophomores, will be performing in the All-State Mixed Choir as a bass and tenor.

In another piece of encouraging news, the marching band is well on its way to replacing its uniforms. Incredibly, the last true Somersworth uniforms date back to the 1979, making them older than most of the band member's parents.

Much of the thanks go to the Somersworth Music Boosters (also known as Friends of Music), a parent-supported group that raises donations and assists with the band, chorus, and drama programs. The group alerted DiBernardo to additional funding for a large portion of the cost of uniform replacements. As a result, they earned enough to replace their biggest-ticket items, marching band jackets. Sashes, shakos, and gauntlets will be next and will complete the new look. Feeling good about their uniforms will help band members build confidence.

This is just the start of a reinvigorated Somersworth Music Program. DiBernardo reports that fourth-grade band enrollments have more than doubled at last count. He was recently able to hire Michael Marrone as the elementary music teacher for Maple Wood and Idlehurst. In time, these students will fill the chairs left open by graduating band members. Likewise, the number of good quality instruments available to students with limited funds will rise along with the Somersworth program.



Senior trumpet player Lukas Kelly performs during half-time, also the offensive center of Somersworth's football team.

collect used instruments and fix them up. We've got a decent collection of good-quality instruments. I don't want money to be part of the equation when students choose which instrument to play." Thankfully, people have donated instruments to the cause.

An indication of success, Somersworth is sending three high school students to the NH Music Educators Association (NHMEA) All-State Music Festival in early April. Like many band and chorus students, the chosen students are well-rounded kids—academically strong, participants in school athletics, have a good



SHS'S STUDENT HEALTH CENTER GATHERS SPEED

Behavioral Health Specialist Martin Bernstein and Nurse Practitioner Tara Kenney have worked regular hours at Somersworth High School's Student Health Center since its December opening. They serve as many as 20 students each week and are working to accommodate more.

Martin is providing scheduled counseling appointments three full days each week, while Tara is at the school two afternoons each week offering medical care—including preventive services, sports physicals, and "urgent care" style visits for acute injuries and illnesses. Both providers are able to see any student enrolled at the high school with a parent or guardian consent form in place.

Martin's counseling is often provided to students on a regular schedule to build skills over time. Though Martin's services are in high demand, they haven't had to turn students away due to the center's capacity.

Many of Tara's referrals are for students without primary care providers or regular access to health care. They anticipate that vaccinations will become available to students within the next few weeks. "We are slowly chipping away at these students' needs," says Sarah Carsman, the healthcare outreach manager of the Greater Seacoast Community Health and Goodwin Health, who is helping oversee health center operations. "We don't turn anyone away because of an inability to pay. Our sliding scale allows all students to access health care, and the center location makes it convenient."

Carsman and other administrators are reviewing the center's first few months in operation. They have adjusted their scheduling and other practices as needed to meet center demands while keeping an eye on the future.

Though the Student Health Center will temporarily close its high school location for the



Health Center staff remind parents to submit consent forms. More info is available online at [GetCommunityHealth.org/about/SSHC](https://www.getcommunityhealth.org/about/sshc).

summer, students will continue to have access to Tara and Martin by telehealth or at Goodwin Community Health in Somersworth.

Martin has been considering offering summer workshops to teachers interested in strengthening their abilities to support students in areas such as team building and communication skills. Carsman says they are beginning to think about expanding acute and primary care services to middle school students in the fall.

"We are happy with our progress and we will only go up from here," says Carsman.



CONNECTING WITH OUR ESOL FAMILIES

After kicking off the school year with a welcome dinner for Somersworth's ESOL (English to Speakers of Other Languages) families back in September, the district's ESOL team was anxious to find out how the school year was progressing for its families and children.

This time, the group came together in the high school's Mulligan's Grill. The ESOL staff and administrators prepared homemade dishes were a nice touch and added warmth to the event, especially welcomed on this cold and dark winter evening. Having already made it through the first four months of the school year, families seemed more relaxed and several of the children gravitated to their friends, clearly happy to see them outside of class.

The families in attendance heard from Keystone Dental Arts and the Dover Adult Learning Center, community partners who were on hand to introduce themselves and their services.



As a Title I recipient, Somersworth School District receives federal funds aimed at enhancing children's academic performance. This allows SAU 56 to offer supportive programs for both students and parents, a significant portion of whom are immigrants.



These are some of the joyful Somersworth children and family members that joined us at the Winter gathering.

BLACK HISTORY MONTH AT SAU 56

Each of SAU 56's schools celebrates Black History Month in ways that resonate with its students.



Beginning with Somersworth's youngest students at Idlehurst Elementary School, kindergartners through second graders learned about Black history with read-alouds, library displays, and various other activities. Pictures they colored now decorate the hallways with Black American themes.



Maple Wood Elementary School's nurse, Jenna Tousignant, ensured that the bulletin board outside her office would highlight lesser-known figures in Black history of interest to the school's

3rd-graders through fifth-graders. Those featured included the first black cowboy, the first black children's book author, the first-known black female magician, and a Sesame Street animator. Mrs. Tousignant has been updating her bulletin board every few days to keep the content fresh and to hold the attention of students.

Throughout February, the high school's morning announcements focusing on Black history. Students were reminded of Portsmouth's Black Heritage Trail, which follows black history along a path in the city. They learned about influential black figures such as Dr. Mae Jemison, the first black female astronaut in space, and the black female mathematicians depicted in the movie *Hidden Figures* (Katherine G. Johnson, Dorothy Vaughan, and Mary Johnson). High schoolers were introduced to innovators such as Garret Morgan, a black American who invented the traffic signal; George Washington Carver, who revolutionized agriculture; and Dr. Patricia Bath, a black female ophthalmologist who pioneered cataract surgery.

Exploring the accomplishments of these exceptional individuals not only enlightened us during Black History Month but also emphasized the pivotal role of diversity and inclusion in driving innovation. While these principles are ingrained in SAU56's curriculum year-round, Black History Month serves as a poignant reminder that American heroes reflect the rich diversity of our nation.