



Mill River Unified Union School District

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Thriving Students. Premier Schools. Engaged Community

September 12, 2017

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We have had a splendid start to the year at our Mill River Schools. Before discussing school business, I wanted to take a moment and share a little about myself, since many of you may not know much about me. My name is Andrew Jones, and I am the Director of Curriculum for the Mill River Unified Union School District. I am assuming many of the responsibilities that Brooke Farrell oversaw the last couple of years, particularly matters that pertain to curriculum, instruction, and assessment. I live in the mountain town of Lincoln, with my wife Krista and two children, Eammon and Lena. Prior to working at MRUUSD, I spent seven years as a high school science teacher at Mt. Abraham UHS in Bristol, VT. I'm originally from Washington State and enjoy being outdoors hiking, fly fishing, and climbing. I am incredibly grateful and excited to be a member of the MRUUSD community.

Last May we sent you a letter with updates on the district wide shift towards the implementation of proficiency-based learning. As we transition into the 2017-2018 academic year, we wanted to provide an overview of the work ahead as we leverage our momentum from last year.

The 2017-2018 school year marks the initial roll out of proficiency-based and personalized learning for grades 7-12. After working toward proficiency-based learning over the last several years, elementary schools in the district fully implemented a proficiency-based system with personalized learning practices last year, so many of the changes discussed in this letter will not be new for parents of children in the elementary grades.

For those of you new to the concept of proficiency-based learning, it can initially be a little overwhelming to make sense of this educational reform. In essence, proficiency-based learning and personalized learning practices aim to provide more engaging and equitable experiences for all students. Report card and transcript grades in a proficiency-based system are more accurate, meaningful and reliable. This in turn provides teachers with better information about the strengths and weaknesses of students so that instruction can be more personalized. Through personalized learning, students are provided voice and choice that enables them to be the drivers in their own educational journey. In all, this provides a more rigorous and authentic learning experience for students that will ensure they are college and career ready.

All schools across Vermont are in the process of making this shift. The Vermont Educational Quality Standards requires that all high school students, beginning with the graduating class of 2020, graduate based on demonstration of proficiency and not solely by the number of credits that they accumulate. Furthermore, Act 77 institutes the implementation of personalized learning practices and

Clarendon
Elementary School

Shrewsbury
Mountain School

Tinmouth
Elementary School

Wallingford
Elementary School

Mill River
Union High School

personal learning plans for students in grades 7-12. I am happy to note that MRUUSD schools are making significant progress with the implementation of these initiatives.

How is all of this going to impact your child? Some of the changes you will notice this year for grades 7-10 include:

All grades entered will be on a 0-4 scale → no more letter grades or percentages

Academic and transferable skill scores will be separated

Classroom assignments and assessments will be aligned with performance indicators

Students will be provided opportunities to reassess on assessments

To ease with the transition away from traditional grades to a proficiency-based system, current juniors and seniors will not have any changes to their transcript and will continue to earn letter grades on their report card. Though some classroom practices may shift, it is not until the graduating class of 2020 that all students will be fully embedded in the new system.

This is an exciting shift in education. The move away from the traditional model of school is not something that will happen quickly. We will work tirelessly over the next several years to effectively transition into a fully personalized, proficiency-based system of teaching and learning.

Several resources are available that provide further details regarding the implementation of proficiency-based learning. If you visit the Mill River Schools website, there is a parent guide to proficiency-based learning, a brochure on the topic, and the list of proficiency-based graduation requirements. Furthermore, school principals will be sharing information during open house nights and during parent conferences.

If you have questions or would like more information please feel free to contact your building administrators or myself.

Sincerely,

Andrew Jones
Director of Curriculum

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