

From the Principal's Pen
January 2021!!!! (wooooooohooooo...21....we did it!)
Submitted by: Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School



"I love music. For me, music is morning coffee. It's mood medicine. It's pure magic. A good song is like a good meal – I just want to inhale it and then share a bite with someone else." -Hoda Kotb

It's funny how music plays with the mind. Recently Mr. E was playing some 70's AC/DC rock in the gym during his PE class. I couldn't stop myself from wandering directly from my office into the gym. I told Mr. E I was instantly transformed back to 1987 in my dorm room at UMF, blaring that song from my (wait for it...) record player! Music does that.

Next fall, my son is getting married. We didn't have to think too long before we chose the mother/son song we would dance to. We chose Your Song by Elton John (he used to call him Apple John when he was little...). My children's entire childhood was spent with Elton John playing from a cassette player, in the car, in the kitchen, as they were rocked to sleep. Choosing a favorite Elton John song for us to waltz to was a no-brainer.

One of the hardest things about 2020 has been the fact that we aren't able to allow children to sing. The teachers have been amazing. They have developed all different ways for the children to express themselves musically. The children chant, clap, snap, and dance and use instruments, but you can tell, as they listen to music, that song is all but bursting out of them!

Think about how often children sing in elementary school. They sing the alphabet, they sing the weather, they sing the days of the week, they sing the months of the year. The sound of children's singing voices often fill the hallways of our little Atwood Primary.

The absence of those tiny joyful voices has been symbolic to me. The presence of that absence has really represented the joy that has been taken from us by the onset of Covid19.

So now, enter the year we have been waiting for...2021. In 2020 we certainly discovered "we can do hard things", and, I believe, 2021 invites us to learn "we can recover from hard things." Both lessons are so important for our children, and frankly, for adults as well.

I enter 2021 feeling so proud of your children. These lessons they have learned, about keeping each other safe, have been really hard. When the numbers of Covid19 cases really began to spike again in December, the Maine Department of Education was forced to increase the criteria around safe practices in schools. I had to go into the cafeteria and explain to the children (ages 4 to 8) that they could no longer turn around in their seats and talk to the children behind them. All children needed to continue to be six feet apart as they ate, but they also had to all be facing in the same direction.

At first I felt really heavy hearted as I delivered this message to these beautiful, joyful children. But when I really had a chance to think about the message, "this is what we need to do, for now, to keep each other safe", I felt so proud of your children. Out of 217 children, not one child complained, not one child argued. They all held two thumbs up, they understood, and then they complied. Some children were trying so hard to do the right thing, they would only move their eyes side to side, not even daring to turn their little heads. The duty teachers went over and whispered, "It's okay to move your head. Just don't turn around." I mean, they are so precious and they all want to do the right thing.

And while I am on the subject of how wonderful your children are, I think it is incredibly important to thank all of you for being so amazing. Each morning, our day begins with a series of phone calls from all of you: “here are my child’s symptoms, can he come to school”, “we may have been exposed, we are keeping our children home,” “I tested positive, I am keeping my child home”, “our daycare had an exposure, we are keeping our children home”. These are the sorts of calls we begin each day with, and it is thanks to all of you that we have been able to stay in session five days a week. If not for your caution, there is no way we could accomplish this. You have been incredible, and we are so grateful. We know all of this is so inconvenient, expensive, and hard...but thank you. We could not do any of this without your communication and understanding.

So, I am entering 2021 with so much hope in my heart. This is not going to be immediate. Things will not change overnight. But we are going to recover, our households, our communities, our states, our country, and our world. Each of us have proven, just with little old Atwood as an example, when we work together and do all of the right things, we can do hard things. We already have done hard things.

So on we go. As I type this Principal’s Pen, I can hear basketballs bouncing in the gym and the whistle of Mr. Q, I can hear laughter in our hallways, I can hear beautiful classical music from Mrs. Peterson’s music class happening in first grade, I just heard the wheels of the Art Cart pass by, and a little naughty one just entered my office with her mask on and a guilty look in her eyes.

I’ll know when this is behind us when the faces entering my office aren’t wearing a mask, and when I hear the joyful trill of those beautiful tiny singing voices drifting out of the walls of every classroom.

We are so close. It will happen soon.

In the meantime, I enter this new year feeling so grateful that I work with your children, in this community.

“I hope you don’t mind, I hope you don’t mind, that I put down these words. How wonderful life is while you’re in the world.” -Elton John

Happy New Year,

Jennifer McGee, Principal of Atwood Primary School

Dates to Note:

Holiday Break: December 21 through January 1, 2021...return to school Monday, January 4, 2021

No School: Monday, January 18: Martin Luther King Day

No School: Tuesday, January 19: Teacher In-service Day



Remember: This year a snow day is a snow day... there will be no school for remote students and for in person students! Listen for your School Messenger Call during in-climate weather!

BBBBRRRR...oh the weather outside will be frightful! Please send extra mittens and extra socks in your backpacks. Consider refreshing your child’s indoor recess toys!

