

# Derby News Brief

**FEBRUARY 2017**

- \* February 6, Grade 4-6 Winter Activity Day, 8:30-3:00.
- \* February 8, NAEP Math & Reading Assessments, 4<sup>th</sup> grade, 9:00-10:30, 1:00-2:45.
- \* February 10, School Level Prof. Dev., school closed.
- \* February 14, Valentine's Day classroom parties. Check with teacher for details.
- \* February 17, Farm 2 School taste test – cabbage, sponsored by kindergartners.
- \* February 27 – March 7, Winter break, no school.
- \* March 6, Town Meeting, 7:00 p.m. at Derby Elementary School.
- \* March 7, VOTE.
- \* March 8, School resumes.
- \* March 10, PreK and Kindergarten No School, professional learning for teachers.

## **Annual School Report Issue Information for Parents**

### **Standardized Testing This Spring**

SBAC: Vermont children in grades 3-8 are assessed using the Smarter Balanced Assessment, commonly referred to as the SBAC (*es-bak*). The SBAC includes the assessment of English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. It is aligned to the Common Core State Standards. Children will take the SBAC on a computer and the assessment adapts the questions to the child's ability as they are answered correctly or incorrectly. The SBAC will be given to children during the testing window of March 14 – May, 2017. Parents will be informed by the classroom teachers when testing will be taking place. More information about the SBAC including practice tests can be found here: <http://vt.portal.airast.org/>

NECAP: While the SBAC replaces the NECAP in English Language Arts and Mathematics, 4<sup>th</sup> graders will still take the Science NECAP in May. More information can be found here: <http://education.vermont.gov/student-learning/assessments/state-assessments/science>

### **Local Assessments**

While standardized testing may be important, it is only one measure on a certain day, and only provides one piece of the puzzle to student progress. At Derby, we assess students throughout the year in reading and math, which helps us get an accurate picture of what children know and can do. We are able to also measure growth and make sure our children are on target to meet year-end grade level expectations. These assessments prove to be more diagnostic than standardized testing, and if a child is not on target, we are able to intervene right away to help get them back on track. Teachers will have shared this information with you at conferences.

## Derby School Board Chair Report 2016 from Bryan Davis

Once again, it is time to present my annual report to the voters and taxpayers of the Town of Derby. The Derby Town School Board works diligently to provide a quality, safe, cost efficient, and high value educational program for all children in our community. We have always appreciated the support of the community.

Each year, there is always some unpredictability with student enrollment, special services for individual children, and of course, mandates from the state legislature. Despite those uncertainties, we are pleased to present a reasonable budget for your approval. Overall, we were able to reduce our expenses by 6.70%.

This budget does reflect other mandates beyond our control. As you may know, last year, the state legislature passed Act 46, part of which required us to consolidate special education services with all the other schools under the supervision of the North Country Supervisory Union (NCSU). For fiscal year 2017-18, the state has now changed the accounting process for special education services. Most state reimbursement for special education services will now go directly to NCSU. While this may be a more efficient way of accounting for the state, our local Derby Town School District budget is affected substantially. Frustratingly enough, we had no forewarning of this mandate. While this has resulted in a significant reduction in the assessment, our revenue is also significantly reduced, which has a detrimental effect on the tax rate. The significant decline in revenue also negatively impacts the spending per equalized pupil, and has caused the projected spending per pupil to rise. You will see this increase on the ballot. Additionally, we have to budget for salaries that are currently under negotiation regionally, with an unknown outcome. While factors such as these cannot be predicted nor controlled, we must nonetheless press forward with developing and presenting a reasonable budget.

Unlike many other schools around the state, our school grew last year and enrollment remained steady this year. This is great for our community! With our growth last year of over 30 children, we have found that we could not meet the past Derby standard and tradition of offering beginning band to our fourth graders with the current level of staffing. Therefore, earlier this school year, we hired a part time music teacher to meet this standard. We now must add the position to the budget.

In compliance with the *Vermont Educational Quality Standards* (EQS), we are required to schedule physical education class twice per week for children K-6. Due to our enrollment, we cannot meet this standard with our current level of staffing. Thus, we are budgeting for more PE staff so that every child can have physical education class twice per week. This impacts our budget, of course, but we feel it is in the best interest of our children and our town to provide this opportunity for increased physical activity.

Another change in our budget that benefits our children and town is the addition of transportation for our preK program. We would like as many children as possible to be involved in early education, and we have found lack of transportation to be a barrier for many working families. So, again, while this impacts our budget, we feel it is in the best interest of our children and town to provide the opportunity for more 3 and 4 year olds to be in a developmentally appropriate program.

We also are pleased to be funding an expanding, more robust Encore after school and summer program. This funding will provide more enrichment, exploration, and learning opportunities for Derby children. Our summer program will expand to include longer days with more of a camp-like, hands on learning environment. Extending these opportunities for children locally, and at an affordable cost to our families benefits our entire community.

As you can see, there are some budget items that are in the best interests of our town's children, and those that are beyond our control. Knowing this, our board did consider the impact of property taxes on our community. We are proud that we were able to minimize the increase in the homestead tax rate as much as possible, while continuing to improve the educational experience for the children of our town.

The fiscal year for the school system closed on June 30, 2016. As a result of smart fiscal responsibility, under budget spending, and greater than expected revenues from special education reimbursements, we do have a fund balance. To offset the loss in revenue, we put much of the fund balance back into the budget as revenue, which minimized the increase in the homestead tax rate.

In addition to using fund balance in our budget to avoid a large tax increase, we are asking voters to approve the reservation of \$100,000.00 of fund balance from the 2015-16 school year for two other purposes: the building maintenance fund, and the technology fund. Building and grounds reserve funds are helpful to have for unforeseen circumstances such as boilers breaking down, pipes freezing, a water main break, septic issues, or equipment replacement. Technology reserve funds are important as we keep up with changing technology and to be able to replace technology that becomes old and obsolete. The Board appreciates all of the support from the community in approving the reservation of fund balance in these ways.

The Board thinks reserving fund balance in these ways makes sense for the Town of Derby. We are able to take care of our school and educational programs **without incurring debt.** We consider ourselves fortunate that we haven't had to borrow money, as other schools in the area often do. We have been debt free for many years. There may come a time in the future in which we have to ask voters to approve incurring a debt through a loan for building repairs and educational upgrades, but fortunately, that time is not now.

Over the past several months, North Country Supervisory Union has engaged in a series of conversations to inform community members of Act 46 and solicit input on how to proceed. The goals of the law are to address equity, quality, efficiency, transparency and educational costs. Goals we have always sought to advance in our school and together as a supervisory union. The legislation encourages the consideration of centralized governance, and elimination of local school boards, to achieve these goals. We are interested in hearing from our school-community before considering what direction to take. We encourage you to participate in an open discussion at the end of our Annual Meeting during "*Any Other Business to be Conducted*" to ensure we hear all voices and understand the wishes of our community. You can find more information on Act 46 at [www.NCSUVT.org](http://www.NCSUVT.org)

The Derby School Board is proud of our school, and appreciates the support of the community, as well as the hard working and dedicated staff of teachers, para educators, office staff, kitchen workers, bus drivers, custodians, and administration.

As Board Chair, I would also like to thank my fellow Board members for their support and dedication to our school and for the time away from their families needed to operate our school to the best of their ability.

As elected officials we welcome voter questions and participation. We believe that the elementary program balances costs within a framework of mandates, quality, and equal access for all students in the district. I encourage community members to call me at 766-5941 with questions about our proposed budget, and/or to make an appointment to tour the school with me to examine the school program and facilities first hand.

### **Principal's Report 2016 – Stacey Urbin**

I am proud to both live in Derby and be the principal of the school here! We have such an involved, caring, and knowledgeable school board, teachers, office staff, kitchen staff, bus drivers, para educators, administrators, nurse & guidance staff, and custodians. They represent and serve the interests of the community well.



Every year, Derby teachers challenge themselves to learn more and improve their skills for the benefit of the children. One initiative for the 2016-17 year has been the implementation of our new *Bridges in Math* program. It is a comprehensive rigorous, coherent, and engaging K–5 math curriculum based on the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. It is aligned with our goal of making learning accessible to all learners.

Teachers are focused on building mathematical thinking by developing students' deep understandings of mathematical concepts, proficiency with key skills, and ability to solve complex and novel problems. This is done through hands on and direct instruction, structured investigation, and open exploration. It's definitely not the way you and I learned math growing up!

Another new initiative for 2016-17 includes Student Led Conferences (SLC). Teachers at each grade level are developing action plans to learn and implement SLCs within the next year. Research supports that when children take ownership of their learning, achievement increases. SLCs are one way that children can show they are leaders of their own learning. In Student Led Conferences, students and teachers prepare together in class, and then students lead the conference with their parents while teachers support on the side. Students and parents actively review and discuss work and progress, as well as reflect on achievements and challenges. The message is that the students are responsible for their own success.

We are pleased to be expanding opportunities for children to be physically active at school. This year, new Assistant Principal Sherrie Gentry organized multiple Winter Activity Days for children in grades 4-6. Children chose to downhill ski or snowboard at Jay Peak, skate or Nordic ski at Jay Peak, or have an outdoor education experience at Siskin-Coutts. Derby Elementary became a foundation school at Jay Peak, providing discounts for our children on the mountain throughout the entire season.

Music teacher Hannah Chambers and 6<sup>th</sup> graders worked on their construction skills, and we added a Gaga Ball pit to our playground. It has been a huge hit with children in grades 3-6. We have plans to add a smaller Gaga Ball pit for grades K-2 in the spring of 2017.

For 2017-18, each child K-6 will have physical education twice per week. This is in keeping with Vermont's Educational Quality Standards, as well as best practice. The Center for Disease Control says it best, "...physical activity can have an impact on cognitive skills and attitudes and academic behavior, all of which are important components of improved academic performance. These include enhanced concentration and attention as well as improved classroom behavior."

We have experienced a higher demand and interest from our children for band and chorus. We could not offer chorus to 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> graders this year due to lack of staff. However, we have added a part time music position and have hired Mr. Todd Cubit to help Ms. Chambers. We are pleased to bring back chorus for grades 3 & 4 in 2017-18.

I am excited about more summer program opportunities for our children through the Encore program. This summer, you can expect our program to be full days with a more fun, camp-like, experiential learning program, at a very affordable cost for families. The more students experience and learn over the summer, the more their prior knowledge is built and achievement increases.

Finally, we have one retirement to announce at this time. Fifth grade teacher, Robyn McCarthy, will be retiring this year. She has been at Derby since 2000, and has had a positive impact on countless children and families at Derby Elementary – we wish her much happiness.

In closing, thank you once again for your support in providing such wonderful learning opportunities for the children in Derby!

**Annual Town & School Open Meeting**  
Monday, March 6, 2017 at 7:00 p.m.  
At the Derby Elementary School, Elm St.

**Australian Ballot Voting**  
Tuesday, March 7, 2017  
8:00 a.m. to 7:00 p.m.  
At the Municipal Offices (Lower Level)  
124 Main St. Derby