

Suffield High School

April 12, 2012

From the Principal...



Dear Parents and Friends:

Spring has definitely arrived and, with it, there is a change in the energy at Suffield High School! There is much to report this month – and a packed schedule of activities to keep up with, posted on our district website.

This week, several of our advanced level French students departed to Tours, France with their teacher, Mr. Casinghino. The students will be staying with host families and attending our sister school with students they have been video-conferencing with all year! At the end of the trip, they will visit Paris for a few days to sightsee and absorb the culture. We wish them a safe journey.

On April 25th, the ninth grade International Studies classes will enjoy a presentation by El-Fadel Arbab, a native from Darfur, Sudan. Mr. Arbab was twelve years old when the janjaweed (militia) attacked his village. He escaped and, for four years, lived in a garbage dump in Khartoum. He was ultimately reunited with his mother and brothers and arrived in the United States in 2004. This is a repeat visit by Mr. Arbab and students who have previously seen his presentation have been most inspired by his story of perseverance and diligence. The speaker is a strong advocate for humanitarian aid to Darfur; several students are planning a fundraiser in the coming months following his visit.

This month, I want to inform our families of the very important curriculum initiatives underway within Suffield Public Schools. During the course of this school year, we have begun transitioning to the use of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). This shift reflects a state led initiative to establish common, consistent and clear K-12 academic standards in English language arts and mathematics. The CCSS are intended to provide a new framework for the knowledge and skills students need to develop in grades K-12 to prepare them for success in college and in the workplace. These standards will help students and their parents understand what children need to know and be able to do throughout their educational experience.

Connecticut is one of 45 states who have adopted the CCSS with the expectation of full implementation by June of 2014. Our teachers are engaged in various professional development activities that will expand their understanding of the CCSS while we modify curriculum and instructional materials accordingly. We are also focusing our resources around materials and supplies that will support the implementation of these new standards.

As we align our curriculum and instructional practices to the CCSS, some of the shifts that will occur in the teaching of English language arts include: the additional use of non-fiction texts in our classrooms; having students provide evidence directly from the text when they are answering questions; requiring students to write in additional formats (such as to inform and argue); etc. As we align to the CCSS in the teaching of mathematics, instruction will emphasize: having students make sense of problems and persevere in solving them; applying math to everyday life; analyzing data and constructing arguments; etc.

As we move through the transition to CCSS alignment, and prepare for assessment changes that follow, we will regularly communicate with our families in order that we best work together to support our students' learning.

Finally, as I regularly do this time of year, I must once again caution parents of seniors regarding the popular game, "Assassin!" As you are probably aware, the game includes members of our senior class chasing each other with squirt guns, lying in wait, and ambushing assigned "targets." Please note that this game is NOT sanctioned by the school – nor is it allowed to be played anywhere on school grounds or at school events. That said, teenagers will make their own decisions – hopefully with their parents' knowledge and participation – and I will worry until the game has concluded about their safety in the event they take friendly competition a bit too far by playing the game in motor vehicles or in other situations that may be unsafe. I have already received reports from the police regarding high-speed traffic violations connected to this game this year. I share this with you so that you, as parents, might have the opportunity to talk with your student about *your* expectations and boundaries around this game.

The countdown to our April vacation is on, after which we will officially be in the "home stretch" to the end of the school year and graduation. Whatever your plans, I hope the break proves restful and rejuvenating to you and your young people – and they return to us healthy, happy and ready to travel the last mile with us.

Respectfully,

Donna L. Hayward