August 2013

Dear McAlister Families,

Summertime greetings to all of you! We hope this letter finds you making the most of this recent stretch of picture-perfect, summer weather. For our part, we have been busily engaged preparing for another exciting school year, writing new curriculum units of study in math and language arts, scrubbing our classroom walls and waxing our floors, repaving our parking lot and back playground, and reflecting on that which makes McAlister Intermediate School such a special place within which to live and learn. Without question, our partnership with you – our parent community – is central to our success.

With the first day of school just a few weeks away, we take this opportunity to update you on summer-related school happenings.

STUDENT ENROLLMENT

At the time of this writing, we are preparing to greet 491 students (and counting!) on August 27. This year, we will have seven classes in grade three, and eight classes each in fourth grade and fifth grade. Class sizes currently range from 19-21 students in grade three, 21-23 students in grade four, and 21-23 students in grade five.

STAFFING

With mixed emotions, we share news of those who are leaving the McAlister Intermediate School community to pursue other opportunities, be they personal or professional, and we send our very best wishes for their future happiness and success. At the same time, we are most pleased to be able to introduce a familiar face joining our permanent teaching faculty.

With this said, we fill you in on staffing changes as we head into another new school year.

In Grade 3…

Ms. Ashley Molden and **Ms. Amber Garofolo** will be leaving the McAlister Intermediate School community to pursue new opportunities within our district. Ms. Molden is excited to be joining the Suffield Middle School and Suffield High School learning communities, where she will share her time and her passion for reading and language arts as a secondary reading teacher. Though with us for only one, short year, Ms. Molden was an engaged member of our staff, making an immediate and positive impact at McAlister both within and beyond her classroom walls. Recognized for easily establishing warm and supportive relationships with her students, Ms. Molden captivated her students with challenging and exciting instructional activities to promote a love of learning. We are also appreciative of the leadership Ms. Molden demonstrated through her enthusiastic, voluntary involvement with our grade five Student Council.

After five years teaching grade three at McAlister, Ms. Garofolo departs to join the staff at Spaulding School as its newest second grade teacher. Ms. Garofolo began her teaching career at Webster Hill School in West Hartford

before joining the McAlister Intermediate School grade three team in 2008-09. During her time here, Ms. Garofolo became well known for capitalizing on students' natural interest in animals and facilitating meaningful activities that promoted both academic learning and students' active citizenship. Under Ms. Garofolo's direction, her grade three students organized our schoolwide "Trick or Treat for Pets" pet food drive, annually collecting and donating over 200 cans and 100 pounds of cat and dog food, as well as treats and toys, to the Newington Humane Society. On a more personal note, we congratulate Ms. Garofolo on her marriage this summer! As Ms. Garofolo transitions to her new position at Spaulding School, she will be known by her a new name, Mrs. Lonardo. Congratulations, Mrs. Lonardo!

We wish Ms. Molden and Mrs. Lonardo continued success as they enter this next phase of their professional careers, confident and grateful they will continue making a difference in the lives of our students here in Suffield.

No News is Good News in Grade 4, but in Grade 5…

Things will feel a little bit different this year, as we bid farewell to a dedicated and caring teacher who has devoted the last 20 years of a 39-year teaching career educating the children of Suffield. With mixed emotions, we extend our very best wishes to **Mrs. Deborah Newby** as she announces her retirement and prepares to move back to her home state of Tennessee, where she can once again enjoy "real pecan pie" and begin "life after teaching."

Mrs. Newby's love of U.S. history inspired hundreds of students to want to read, write and learn more about the birth of our country and its struggles during the Civil War. It was Mrs. Newby (or "General" Newby, as she was often called) who created, organized and commanded the most highly anticipated day of the year for our grade five students, *Civil War Day*. Under Mrs. Newby's direction, our fifth grade hallway and back field was transformed into a Civil War encampment, replete with reenactors dressed in blue "woolies" (no matter how hot the weather) actively engaging students with various aspects of life as a Union soldier. Civil War Day brought students, teachers, parents and community members together for a truly memorable and enriching learning experience.

Most importantly, with a passion for teaching and enthusiasm for continuous learning, Mrs. Newby communicated high, but reasonable expectations for students' academic, social and emotional growth, and masterfully created a climate for learning within her classroom that facilitated this process. By the end of their fifth grade year, our students left Mrs. Newby's class, and our school, as beneficiaries of a teacher who instilled confidence, character, and most importantly, a love of learning that will serve them well into the future.

Please join us as we express our gratitude to Mrs. Newby, with warmest wishes for a well-deserved, happy retirement!

As one door closes, another one opens, and we feel incredibly fortunate to welcome **Mrs. Kelli Tosone** as the newest member of the grade five team. Mrs. Tosone is a well-known and highly regarded classroom teacher who has served McAlister Intermediate School in various capacities since returning to her teaching career after taking time to raise her family. Over the last four years, Mrs. Tosone has filled a number of long-term substitute teaching positions at McAlister, including two, temporary, full-year positions in fourth grade for teachers who took extended child-rearing leaves of absence. Throughout her time at McAlister, Mrs. Tosone has distinguished herself with instruction of the highest caliber and a natural ability to connect with her students as she motivates them to meet her high academic, social and behavioral expectations.

We are most pleased to be able to welcome Mrs. Tosone as a grade five teacher and permanent member of the McAlister Intermediate School faculty!

Our Special Education Team…

…will also experience a change this year, as we fondly bid farewell to **Mrs. Alaena Podmore**. After two years of special education teaching at McAlister Intermediate School, Mrs. Podmore is leaving to become principal of a Catholic School. We will miss Mrs. Podmore's steadfast belief in her students' abilities, her high expectations for their achievement, and the collaborative spirit with which she delivered instruction to meet their learning needs in the least restrictive environment. We thank Mrs. Podmore for her many contributions to our school community, and we wish her much success as she prepares for her next professional endeavor.

Bucket-Filling "The McAlister Way"

We are ever mindful of the critical role a healthy and positive school climate plays in promoting student learning. We have a caring and dedicated faculty that is deeply committed to providing a school environment in which all students feel safe, supported, engaged, and helpfully challenged. Without question, McAlister Intermediate School is a happy, healthy place for our students to live, learn and grow.

To this end, our School Climate Committee, consisting of teachers, non-certified staff members, parents, administrators and community members, in collaboration with our Student Council, established "The McAlister Way" as a strategy for clearly communicating "what we do at our school" and promoting students' positive behavior grounded in the Six Pillars of Character:

1. We **respect** ourselves and others and celebrate the unique qualities in each of us.
2. We show **caring** and kindness to all.
3. We treat everyone **fairly**.
4. We take **responsibility** for our actions, our work, our property and our mistakes.
5. We are **trustworthy** and honest in all we do.
6. We show **citizenship** by taking care of our school and helping others in our community.

We show "The McAlister Way" by filling each other's buckets. Bucket-filling is an easy-to-understand concept: *Everyone carries an* ***invisible bucket that holds our good thoughts and feelings. When our buckets are full, we feel happy and when our buckets are empty, we feel sad.***

The concept is based on the popular book titled, *Have You Filled a Bucket Today: A Guide to Daily Happiness for Kids,* by Carole McLoud, and its sequel, *Growing Up with a Bucket Full of Happiness: Three Rules for a Happier Life*. Children quickly understand that they can fill buckets when they do and say things that are kind, considerate, caring, and respectful. They also learn that when they are mean, inconsiderate, uncaring, or disrespectful, they dip into buckets and remove those good feelings. We all understand that actions and words can either fill a bucket or dip into it.

There are three rules and corresponding laws to keeping your bucket full and living a happy life:

Rule #1: Be A Bucket Filler (When you fill someone's bucket, you fill your own bucket, too!)
Rule #2: Don't Dip (When you dip into someone else's bucket, you dip into your own bucket.)
Rule #3: Use Your Lid (When someone dips into your bucket, your lid controls how much is taken out.)

All adults at McAlister are intentional and focused on recognizing students when they fill each other's buckets and show "The McAlister Way" through their positive behavior. We use this common language when we speak with students about "what we do at our school." "The McAlister Way" is posted throughout our school, in every

classroom, hallways, cafeteria, office, etc. as a constant reminder of how we live and learn at McAlister. This systemic, schoolwide approach helps define, teach and support students' appropriate behavior and character development.

We are committed to celebrating the many examples of respect and kindness that happen so frequently at McAlister! During this school year we are encouraging, reminding, and recognizing everyone's efforts to be bucket fillers at home, at school, and everywhere they go.

IN CLOSING…

We invite you to join us for this year's **Annual Before-School Open House,** which is scheduled for **Thursday, August 22 as follows:**

Grade 5	**12:30 p.m. to 1:30 p.m.**
Grades 3 and 4	**1:30 p.m. to 2:30 p.m.**

At these times, students and their families are given the opportunity to visit their new classrooms, meet their new teachers and classmates, and renew old friendships and acquaintances.

And finally, if any students are in need of an additional copy of the Summer Reading Log, families can pick one up in our school's main office or visit our district website at www.suffield.org, and under the "Central Services" tab, click on "Curriculum and Instruction" and then "Summer Reading." Students should bring their Summer Reading Log along with one of the books they read to share and discuss with their new class by **Friday, August 30.**

We hope that the remainder of your summer is both peaceful and restful, and we look forward to seeing you all at the end of August! Until then, we will be busy preparing for an exciting opening day and anticipating another fruitful school year working together with you as partners to deliver an outstanding educational experience and promote a love of learning.

Sincerely,

Karen E. Carpenter-Snow	Jack Ferraro
Principal	Assistant Principal