

THE LITTLE ENGINE THAT COULD



One of my children's favorite books, and mine too when I was little, is The Little Engine That Could. We all remember the plight of the children on the other side of the mountain who would have no toys or candy unless a small blue locomotive brought these treasures over the mountain to them. The little engine huffed and puffed, saying "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can....." until she actually made it up the hill and arrived with cheers on the other side.

Well, that type of determination resides here in SAU 39 right up the hill in Mont Vernon. For the past four years, a determined team has been saying "we think we can, we think we can..." until it has brought proven educational results to the children of our town. The team of teachers, citizens, school board members and administrators have pulled together to improve the climate of the building, the scores of students and the support from the town.

Led for the past four years by soon-departing principal Meredith Sumner Nadeau, the Mont Vernon Village School (MVVS) decided to spend most of its precious staff development time concentrating on improving reading and writing. They spent every "late start" day in faculty study groups, learning new teaching techniques and studying student data. They invented their own measures of assessment and applied them consistently across all grades. They let the parents know what they were doing, and they kept a very supportive school board informed.

What resulted? The highest fifth grade NECAP writing scores in the state. An overall school improvement in NECAP reading of five percentage points over 3 years and of eight percentage points in mathematics scores over this same period. What other results? A sense of pride and accomplishment, and many cheers from "all the boys and girls" and the citizens of Mont Vernon.

This week they celebrated their Million Minutes Challenge...a contest between the MVVS kids and the entire Mont Vernon community on who could first reach a million minutes of documented reading this year. As you might guess, the kids won!

But everyone wins in SAU 39 when a little engine like the 240 student Mont Vernon Village Schools proves that it can make a big difference. We take away valuable lessons in staff development, goal setting, and leadership. Thank you, Mont Vernon, and best wishes Meredith Nadeau as you go on to further administrative challenges in your career!

*Mary Athey Jennings,
Superintendent of Schools*