

## NEW SCHOOL SHOES

“Welcome back” is a phrase we will be hearing often here at SAU 39 as 2800 students and 600 staff members return to school for the 2008-09 school year. Our maintenance and custodial staff have been working overtime getting the buildings in tip-top shape, particularly in Amherst where the dust of major renovations is settling. The construction at Clark/Wilkins Schools and Amherst Middle School, plus four more modular classrooms at AMS, are the most visible signs of change from last year. While we started last school year with a fire at the Wilkins School, we are starting this year with new fire sprinkler systems and new windows at Clark and Wilkins.

Less visible, but the most important change for this school year is the educational programming we’ve designed for our children. We’re in Year 2 of a five-year strategic plan that focuses on assuring that all students improve their performance in all subject areas, by focusing on reading across the curriculum. This year we’re continuing our work with literacy and adding a concentration on the use of data to inform instruction. To accomplish this, we have developed a year-long teacher in-service that will take place during the ten late-start days we have built into the school calendar. Amherst joined Souhegan and Mont Vernon in adopting this results-proven in-service model. Now we’re all headed in the same direction during the same time.

New administrators to the district include Mont Vernon Principal, Gail Westergren; Clark/Wilkins Assistant Principal, Susan Blair; Souhegan Dean of Students, Bob Thompson; Souhegan Athletic Director, Chris Lavoie and K-12 Literacy Coordinator, Nancy McGuire. In total we’ve interviewed and added twenty-seven professionals to our ranks—in most cases filling retiring or transitioning faculty.

I’m not sure who is more nervous the night before school begins...staff or students? Both groups want to make a good first impression towards a relationship that will continue daily for the next nine months. Everything is set for us all to step off on the right foot. The only question that remains is, “do you have your new school shoes?”

I hope so. We’ve got a lot of traveling to do together! “Welcome back.”