

Super News

Superintendent Newsletter

SAU 56, Somersworth School District, December 2023

FEATURING

Ode to a Spirited Fall Sports Season

The Falls Citizen and Teacher of the Year

The High School's Health Center Opens Its Doors

THE HIGH SCHOOL'S STUDENT HEALTH CENTER OPENS

GREATER SEACOAST COMMUNITY HEALTH (GSCH)—known locally for Goodwin Community Health, a provider of medical and behavioral services to many Somersworth residents and families—began meeting with SHS and SAU 56 administration in 2019 to discuss how to improve access for Somersworth students needing physical, mental, and behavioral health services.

Ashley Wright, Manager of Strafford County Public Health Network, a GSCH program, supported the exploration of a partnership that could help remove barriers to care within Somersworth High School (SHS) and the community.

Conversations initially focused on building connections and capacity to services and progressed to identifying the school district's most pressing health and behavioral care needs.

During the needs assessment, Wright says that transportation to and from appointments, among other barriers, arose as a significant roadblock for families over and over again. Parents and guardians

had to choose between taking their children to appointments and missing work. In effect, transportation issues were jeopardizing the ability of families to hold jobs and provide for their families. It also

prevented students from making appointments and, in many cases, from accessing basic healthcare. What students and families needed most was accessible resources that better met the students' needs and built upon what the school nurse and school counselors were able to provide.

Having a health center located on the Somersworth High School campus emerged as the best way to alleviate the stress of transportation and provide

easy access to care for students. After earning support from the Greater Seacoast Community Health and the Somersworth School boards, plans for a facility on the high school campus were developed. Somersworth School District would be responsible for building the facility, and GSCH would manage the Center's staff and services.



Ashley Wright (center) and Sarah Carsman (right) have been invaluable to the project. Martin Bernstein (left) will be the Student Health Center's on-site Behavioral Health Specialist. All are staff of GSCH.

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STUDENT HEALTH CENTER (Continued from page 1)

Now a few years later and with a brand new 550 sq. ft. facility on the Somersworth High School campus, the Somersworth Student Health Center has become a reality. Currently in a “soft opening” phase, SHS students have begun scheduling appointments. Sarah Carsman, the Healthcare Outreach Manager for the GSCH, has been working with the SHS Nurse Nan Soule and SHS Principal Chris Tebo to create workflows to ensure convenient, streamlined access for high school students. Carsman recently joined the project and says she feels lucky to have landed on the team.

Parents and guardians of Somersworth High School students will receive enrollment and consent forms after the holiday break, and the Somersworth Student Health Center will have its official launch. Center staff will include a behavioral healthcare specialist, a medical assistant, and a nurse practitioner.

Once parents and guardians provide consent for students to be seen at the Somersworth Student Health Center, available services for students will include:

- Acute care for illness and injury

- Primary Care: Wellness visits, vaccines, sports physicals
- Behavioral Health: Mental health counseling, substance-misuse counseling
- Referrals for services not provided by the Somersworth Student Health Center
- Sexual and reproductive health: Education, screening, testing, contraception

To access these services, students can connect with their high school nurse and counselor, who will help them receive the needed help or treatment. Appointments will be available three to four days a week.

SHS Principal Chris Tebo says, “Somersworth High School is incredibly excited to welcome Goodwin into our community to support students. We all know that students learn best when their emotional, mental, and physical needs are being met. By reducing the barriers to accessing these services, we are helping students be more successful within and outside the classroom.”

Stay tuned for more information or visit GetCommunityHealth.org/about/SSHC.

Dear Families, Faculty and Staff,

What makes the holiday season so special? The excitement and joy of children! Yesterday, in less than half an hour, my heart grew tenfold by simply observing our youngest students performing at Idlehurst Elementary School.

Together, they eagerly caroled with wide-eyed innocence and enjoyment, singing about snowflakes, mittens, and reindeer. Appearing on a stage filled with trees, lights, snowmen, and candy canes, I was struck by how proud they were of the reds, greens, silvers, and golds their loved ones had carefully dressed them in for their festive day. I was mesmerized by the beauty of youthful voices singing as one, their eyes filled with wonder and pure happiness.

No matter what you celebrate and the customs you observe, I wish you a child's heart and emotional energy



this holiday season. Take time to look, listen, and hear your children. Their innocence and what they teach us is astounding.

Peace and joy to you all!

— Lou Goscinski, Superintendent

TEACHER AND CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

ON DECEMBER 7, MAGGIE LARSON, the Chair of the Somersworth School Board, was named Citizen of the Year at The Falls Chamber of Commerce's Annual Winter Gala Business Awards Dinner. Global Studies teacher Erich Ingelfinger was named Educator of the Year.

The evening's presenter, Bonnie McNair, executive director of The Falls Chamber of Commerce, said that Maggie Larson "embodies the spirit of selflessness and community service. Her commitment to making a positive impact has touched the hearts of many and inspires us all." McNair noted that the recipient's nominator described the last couple of years on the school board as "incredibly taxing, intense, and overwhelming." This didn't prevent Larson from devoting countless hours to ensure Somersworth staff and students feel "safe, respected, and supported."

McNair continued, "Maggie Larson is celebrated as the Citizen of the Year for her unwavering dedication and selfless service to the community. Her tireless efforts and passion for making a positive impact have left an indelible mark on the lives of those around her. As an exemplary community leader, Maggie embodies the spirit of generosity and civic responsibility."

As if on cue, Larson thanked her family and Somersworth friends and neighbors during her acceptance remarks. Thanks and praise are

unsurprising coming from a person who penned handwritten, personalized thank-you notes to every employee of the Somersworth School District over the recent Thanksgiving holiday. "For me," says Larson, "expressing gratitude genuinely is one of life's highest honors—a sentiment akin to love, an action, a verb. This award is not so much about me alone but a celebration of the collective spirit of our citizenship! We are not just neighbors by proximity but partners in a shared commitment to making our community a better place for all."



The Falls Citizen of the Year, Somersworth School Board Chair Maggie Larson, enjoys the Winter Business Gala with husband Neil.

November's recent election results ensure that Larson will serve on the Somersworth School Board for at least two more years. She is just days away from beginning her seventh year as a Somersworth School Board member.

Asked how she handles stress, Larson says, "One of our greatest freedoms is deciding how we respond during difficult times. I remember to keep my promise to Somersworth's students and citizens by responding with dignity. I hold the line at being respectful. I remind myself that

Somersworth's children are watching and depending on me to act on their behalf."

In addition to her work for the Somersworth School Board, Larson is very involved and passionate about promoting mental health, early childhood education, and general well-being initiatives within the community. Larson and her husband Neil have three sons in SAU 56. Their twins are in their final

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THE FALLS AWARD (Continued from page 3)

year at Somersworth Middle School, and their oldest is in his second year at the high school. Larson says her family is proud and supportive, though they understand that her work isn't about them. "It's about all the children and citizens of Somersworth."

Bonnie McNair presented Erich Ingelfinger with The Falls Teacher of the Year Award: "Erich Ingelfinger, our Educator of the Year, has tirelessly dedicated himself to shaping the minds of our future leaders at Somersworth High School and Career Technical Center for more than ten years. He started off as a student teacher in Social Studies and Building trades before taking on the full-time social studies role. To say he is a favorite of many students may be the understatement of the year.

A former student nominated him, and truth be told, my own daughter would certainly say his teaching and ultimate stewardship impacted her over the four years he worked with her at SHS as her teacher and class advisor. His legacy as an outstanding



Maggie Larson and Erich Ingelfinger take a moment to congratulate each other.

teacher will almost certainly live on well past his tenure as an educator at SHS; however, his legacy for pacing in the halls wearing what has become known as "The Ingelfinger" which is an outfit comprised of tan pants and white and blue striped button up shirt, may well even out live that legacy.

All joking aside, Mr. Ingelfinger's passion for education is evident in the lives he has influenced and the knowledge he has imparted, and I am so proud to bestow this honor on him tonight. "

ODE TO A SPIRITED FALL ATHLETICS SEASON

ASK ANY ADULT ABOUT their most memorable childhood experiences, and you'll likely find out if they played a sport. They'll tell you about that monster block at the boards, that interception when the score was close, or the time their team had triple the kills as their rivals. And if you live in Somersworth, you might hear how it *felt* to be a spectator and know *that, too*, mattered.

Steve Hodsdon, the newly named athletic director of Somersworth School District, says that sports in smaller high schools depend on the number of kids who come out to play. Somersworth High School (SHS) has about 400 students and is one of New Hampshire's smaller schools. "When the rosters are

small, a team won't have the subs it needs to post wins. Getting kids excited about sports at an earlier age will be my primary focus over the next couple of years," says Hodsdon. He believes this will translate into a stronger athletic program across the district.

You can't ignore the benefits of playing sports. "Kids who participate in athletics experience mental health benefits like lower anxiety. They are more conscientious students and have higher levels of academic achievement. They are less likely to get in trouble in school," says Hodsdon. "My goal is to bring that mindset to the middle school and lower grades across the entire district."

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FALL ATHLETICS *(Continued from page 4)*

Plus, strong athletics are valuable for the city. “I’m from Somersworth, where we have always had a proud athletic tradition. Win or lose, teams get a lot of fans. This is a town that appreciates athletics.” As an athlete graduating from SHS in 1992, Hodsdon would know.

Somersworth High School’s football and volleyball teams dominated their divisions this Fall. The football team, under the leadership of head coach Jeremy Lambert, won its third straight Division IV title. The volleyball team was 17-0 during its regular season and, until the semifinals, was never behind during a game all season. As the Division III runner-ups, they, too, have good reason to be proud. Hodsdon, the team’s coach, boasts, “Ten of the volleyball team’s 15 players are members of the National Honor Society, and three weren’t yet eligible.” The link between performance on the court and performance in the classroom is strong in Somersworth.

Next year, SHS’s football and volleyball teams will move up to Division III and II, respectively. Somersworth is one of the few high schools in the state with a growing student population. It’ll mean competing at a higher level. If visits to the weight room and passion for your sport are an indication, both teams will rise to the challenge.

Cheerleading roster numbers are also predicted to rise. The cheer team graduated a big class in 2023, and this is a rebuilding year. With half a dozen freshmen going out for cheer in the fall, the squad stayed on the sidelines during the fall but is looking at three or four competitions this winter. They’ll be back strong soon enough. Still, cheerleaders and the band members were partially responsible for the crackle of energy experienced during fall home football games.

Hodsdon says the same unifying approach to increased participation holds true for soccer. ROSO Soccer Club, a local organization serving Somersworth, Rollinsford, and other surrounding towns, is seeing strong numbers. While they are teaching young athletes to learn and play, Hodsdon will build relationships with Somersworth children and help the group grow its numbers. They’ll be a great feeder for future teams in the Somersworth School District.

Parents and Somersworth community members looking to get involved in Somersworth’s athletic programs can email Steve Hodsdon at shodsdon@sau56.org or visit SAU56’s athletics website at somersworthhilltoppers.com for team schedules and team stores.



The Somersworth Football Team had a lot to celebrate this past Fall.