

A New School Year Begins in Gardner
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Just a short time ago our school staff and students returned to begin the 2011-2012 academic year. This was by all accounts a very smooth opening thanks to the efforts of our principals and staff. We have started what promises to be an exciting year for the Gardner Public Schools. At the same time we look back with pride to the past school year. There are many examples of the source of this pride. The Helen Mae Sauter School was named a National Title I Distinguished School, one of only two in Massachusetts to receive this honor. This designation was a reflection of the hard work of the principal, teachers, and staff who worked diligently to improve student test scores and sustain that improvement. Elementary students created artwork in the form of painted tiles to adorn two different locations within the new wing of Heywood Hospital, and the students had the honor of attending the grand opening of the new wing. A Gardner Middle School student won a first place medal in the state track and field competition in the spring. GFA Federal Credit Union sponsored a Financial Education Fair for juniors at Gardner High School, and several students took part in a new initiative that gave them the opportunity to be part of a Student Advisory Group at the GFA. Our seniors had a wonderful graduation at Watkins Field on a gorgeous June day. Many of those graduates are now ensconced in some excellent colleges and universities. For example, our valedictorian is attending Harvard.

In January 2010 we opened an alternative high school program at our Prospect School location. By the fall of 2010, the Gardner School Committee had voted to seek separate school status for the program, and the program became a school called Gardner Academy for Learning and Technology or GALT. In June 2011 twenty-five students received their high school diplomas at this new school. During the 2010-2011 school year, teachers from Gardner and several neighboring districts created online courses in all of the core areas. As a result, students at GALT and at Gardner High School were able to take these courses for either credit recovery or acceleration of their high school education.

We applied for and received grant funding for three roof projects through the Massachusetts School Building Authority's Green Repair Program. This summer contractors worked to install a new roof on the Gardner High School building along with new roofs on sections of both Elm Street School and Waterford Street School. They are now completing the final stages of work involving edging, masonry details, and roof drains. Also, using another grant, we were able to convert the oil heating system at the Helen Mae Sauter School to a gas-fired system that saved us in excess of \$20,000 last year. The City of Gardner provided funds to replace a hot water boiler at Gardner High School. This summer some of our students took part in a summer youth employment program where they painted, did landscaping projects, and made many small repairs.

Mayor Hawke and the Gardner City Council made it possible, using City funds, to offer school bus transportation for eligible students in all grades at the high school starting in the fall of 2011. This means that for the first time in many years all eligible students in

grades kindergarten through grade twelve have bus transportation available on yellow school buses with no fees.

Entering freshmen at Gardner High School have the opportunity to participate in a new mentoring program. Students who participate are assisted by adults as well as upperclassmen to improve organizational skills, receive academic support, and plan for their futures. In the area of security we are getting ready to implement, along with the Gardner Police Department, a crime tip reporting program called TipSoft at both the middle and high schools.

What really matters in our school is what goes on in the classrooms. Our teachers continue to work to refine their practice by improving content knowledge and instruction and by assessing student learning on a daily basis. We have expanded our participation in professional development in Balanced Literacy and First Steps in Mathematics. Teachers are sharing lessons and working together within the district and with colleagues in neighboring districts to improve student achievement. The data teams in each school and the district data team continue to collect and analyze data with the goal of identifying students' academic and social needs and formulating plans to address those needs.

We could not operate our schools without the assistance and support of the Mayor, School Committee, City Council, School Councils, City officials, parent groups such as the PTO's, and our many community organizations. All of these individuals and groups form a cohesive structure within which our students are nurtured and challenged. The guiding principle within the City of Gardner is to create the positive environment highlighted in the mission statement of the Gardner Public Schools. This environment fosters academic success and a commitment to community service. I look forward to a successful school year.