

Report from the Ellis School Principal

Becoming the Principal of Ellis School has been one of the greatest experiences of my professional career. The students, staff, and community are the greatest. In these first few months I have had the pleasure of getting to know many members of our school community. Ellis School is not just the school our kids attend, but the heart of the Fremont Community.

While I have met many of the parents of students at Ellis, I feel I need to introduce myself to the greater Fremont Community. My name is Andy Haas and I have been in education for over 20 years. My career began as a special educator and football coach in Los Angeles, CA. After my wife, Pam, and I moved to New England in 2000. We have two sons; Peter (14) and Connor (12). As a classroom teacher, I touched many students, but as an administrator, I was able to work with many more students; and this is the course my career has taken. I fully believe that every student has the right to the best possible education to prepare them for college and career.

In addition to myself being new to Ellis School, there are several staff members who are either new or have moved into new positions this year and we are so lucky to have them.

Brigid Connelly, Assistant Principal. Ms. Connelly has over 15 years of experience in Early Childhood education and served as the preschool teacher for Ellis for the last seven years. She is passionate about providing equal access to early education and inclusion for all students. She has brought this passion into her position while working with all of the students who attend Ellis. Ms. Connelly has a son, Ian (3).

Cheryl Rowell, Library/Media Technology Assistant. Ms. Rowell has been a substitute teacher at Ellis for seven years. This year she joined us full-time in the library. Ms. Rowell is a long time resident of Fremont and her two children attended Ellis School. She has a love for books and reading.

Hannah Gage, Fourth Grade Teacher. Ms. Gage spent last year living abroad in Dublin, Ireland. While in Ireland, she traveled around Europe. Ms. Gage is a recent graduate of Keene State College where she played field hockey. She loves the outdoors and spending time with her family and dogs.

Erin Drake, Third Grade Teacher. Ms. Drake is a resident of Fremont and has two daughters who attend Ellis School. Ms. Drake taught second grade for many years before taking time off to raise her family. Last year she returned to education as a paraprofessional. Ms. Drake has an infectious sense of humor.

Karen McCusker, School Nurse. Ms. McCusker has over 30 years of experience in the nursing field with the last 20 in the school setting. She has worked with elementary, middle and high school students. Ms. McCusker has four children and three grandchildren and has a love of horses.

Dana Crowell, Library Media Specialist. Ms. Crowell joined the Ellis staff last year and has over 12 years of experience as an elementary and middle school Library Media Specialist. She has a lifelong love of books that began when she discovered presidential biographies. Besides reading and technology, Ms. Crowell spends her time renovating her 200 year old farm house and barn.

Jaime Bolduc, Music Teacher. Like Ms. Crowell, Ms. Bolduc joined the Ellis staff mid-year last year. She has been teaching for 16 years and is completing her masters in theatre. She enjoys time with her family and raising her daughter, who attends Ellis School.

Melissa Simard, Elementary School Counselor. Ms. Simard is in her second year at Ellis as the Elementary School Counselor. She has over 10 years of experience working with youth ages 2-16. She enjoys working with students individually, in small groups, and going into the classroom and teaching positive life strategies and skills. Ms. Simard enjoys the outdoors with her husband, 2 dogs and cat. Ms. Simard is expecting her first baby this spring.

Melissa Olms, Fifth Grade Teacher; Social Studies. Ms. Olms has taught at Ellis for many years. This year she returned to the classroom after working in Title I.

Gail Wentworth, Second Grade Teacher. Ms. Wentworth joined the Second Grade team this year. Previously, she taught with the Fifth Grade team.

Lisa Marggraf, Preschool Teacher. Ms. Marggraf returned to her roots in Early Childhood Education when Ms. Connelly accepted the position of Assistant Principal.

This year, the staff has been focusing on many mandates and initiatives. The main initiative is improving the Climate and Culture of Ellis School. A positive school climate has many positive impacts on student behavior and academics. It has similar effects on staff. The largest impact is on student learning and achievement. Part of adjust our culture is also having a Growth Mindset. This means understanding and believing that all members of our community had the capacity to grow and continuously develop. This does not simply apply to our students, but to us as adults as well. Positive teacher-student interactions; an environment where students feel safe, engaged, and connected; where the focus is on student learning and high expectations for achievement are the hallmarks for a healthy school. The staff of Ellis has accepted this challenge.

In addition, we have begun the difficult task of looking at our instructional practices and asking if what we are doing is best for student learning. In the fall, teachers spent time gaining a greater understanding of how they can personalize learning for students. Personalized learning creates rich, engaging learning environments that result in dramatic improvement in student achievement. In addition, the staff is continuing the work begun in previous years on transitioning to competency-based learning outcomes in Mathematics and English-Language Arts. This is perhaps our greatest task as in doing so, we are examining why we are teaching

something, how we are teaching it, and how do we know students learned it? We know that learning does not happen only in the classroom and that not all students learn the same. Creating opportunities for students to grow as learners and to be able to express their learning in individual ways will allow our students to better prepare for high school. Many of the initiatives that we have begun to undertake are directly designed to ensure our students are on par, if not ahead, of their peers from Sanborn Middle School as they enter Sanborn Regional High School.

A major initiative to help foster personalized learning is our one-to-one computer initiative. We know that students today live in an “online world”. Much of the information they acquire today is done through the internet. Today, students do not access information; nor learn the way students in the past did. Teaching students the proper ways to use technology for their academic learning is important. It is also important for us to prepare students for high school; where they will work and live in this environment. This also means that our staff will need to shift our methods of instruction. This will be done through Google classroom, teaching students to find and cite information in a digital age that is reliable and accurate, and how to communicate appropriately and effectively in a virtual world.

Programs such as our STEaM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, & Math) class allow students to experience an integrated curriculum where they can apply their knowledge in various ways. STEaM allows students to develop their skills in problem solving and critical thinking; which colleges and employers tell us are the most important skills students need. We are also committed to improving our World Language program through acquiring a full-time teacher who can provide a rich curriculum to all our students. This year, we were unable to receive any applicants for the part-time position we had available, but there was interest from prospective teachers if it was a full-time position. Luckily, Ms. MacEachern, our Algebra teacher and a native Spanish speaker, offered to instruct our seventh and eighth students so they would at least be exposed to a World Language before entering Sanborn. And, by improving our Music offerings we are ensuring ways we can continue to educate the whole child. These programs, in addition to, Destination Imagination, Future City, and Literacy Club stimulate growth in our students and enhance their learning in other academic areas.

This year we also redesigned our Title I program to meet the needs of some of our struggling students. Traditionally, this program was offered during the school day. Students were often taken out of class during instructional time to receive more one-to-one instruction in an area of needed improvement. This meant that students missed valuable instruction and the ability to work collaboratively with their peers. The newly designed program focuses on working with students after school. This enables us to use certified teachers to work with students during a focused time; not interrupting their learning during the day. We currently have 20 students meeting after school.

To provide our students this opportunity, it will take our entire community – students, parents, families, teachers, staff, and community members – to invest their time and energy into each individual student and Ellis as a whole. It is through collaboration and working together that we

ensure our students can thrive. As a community member, parent or guardian, I encourage you to be involved in the education of our students. Together we can ensure the success of your child's education and well-being.

Respectfully submitted,

Andy Haas
Ellis School Principal



Voters in attendance at Town Deliberative Session in the Ellis School Gymnasium
02 February 2016

Photo courtesy of Heidi Carlson