

In Laconia schools, 22 portraits help guide today's teaching and learning

- By STEVE TUCKER, Laconia School District

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- At the opening for the Laconia School District on Aug. 27, the staff saw video messages from 22 graduates from the Laconia School District. These portraits gave our staff a picture of what some of our students are doing after graduation. Their experiences in the Laconia schools spanned from 1949 to 2017.

The graduates talked about what they are doing now, their gratitude for what they learned, and how their education and experiences in our schools helped them reach their goals. The staff heard from an owner of a construction company, five educators, a police officer, a vice president of a car dealership, a dean of students, a professional football coach, a children's author, a general manager of a heating oil supplier, a plumber, a town manager, a nurse, an administrator in human resources, an attorney, a pilot, an investment banker, a public relations consultant, a nursing student, and an owner of a communications firm. Some of them live locally, and others are working all over the world. They are also spouses and parents serving their respective communities and pursuing personal interests. They are much more than their careers.

After graduation, some of the alumni went to schools like the Boston College, Clemson, Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), New Hampshire Technical Institute (NHTI), Plymouth State University, St. Lawrence University, and the University of New Hampshire. Some took different paths. One graduate said, “Early in high school, I decided that college was not the path for me.” He then talked about how his school counselors helped him “devise a plan” that allowed him to participate in the band, play sports, take a wide variety of classes and complete the plumbing and heating program at the Huot Technical Center. This helped him pursue his goal of becoming a licensed master plumber. This alumnus and the other graduates clearly credited their successes to what teachers in Laconia did for them while in our schools.

It was powerful to hear what the 22 alumni learned in our schools. One graduate said, “I can’t remember the answers to all of the tests that I took, or the plots to all of the stories that I read.” Like all the graduates who spoke, this graduate realized that his community and relationships with his teachers who helped him along the way were keys to his success. He and his fellow Laconia alumni talked about broad, transferable skills that they learned were critical in his success after graduation. Writing, reading, independence, collaboration, hard work, and research were some of those attributes that were mentioned. These are some of the attributes that our community is considering in our effort to create a Portrait of a Graduate.

Hearing from the 22 graduates was a way for us to celebrate the successes of some of our students. This year, our work to develop a Portrait of a Graduate for our school district ensures that we are preparing students for the future. The Portrait is a collective vision of a learner in Laconia. This Portrait will include four to six 21st-century skills that will drive teaching and learning in our schools to support student success in the classroom and in college, career, community and life after high school. Though our students are a part of one community, they have different personalities, backgrounds, strengths, challenges, interests, and goals. Our job is to engage them in a broad range of experiences that allow them to learn about the world they live in so that they understand their place in it.

Teaching these skills through the academic program creates a curricular focus and relevance. If we are working together as a school community to equip our students with skills they need for the future, a world of choices and opportunities will be opened for them in our schools and beyond.

Steve Tucker is superintendent of the Laconia School District.