August 14, 2013

Dear RMSEL Parent Community,

It has been a truly amazing start to the school year. We are back in full swing after just three days. Many aspects of our school strategic plan are in their third year of implementation and are more successful than we originally planned and/or imagined. This year we are focusing on consistent, clear, and efficient aspects of communication school-wide, including from the classroom and the administrative team. Many of our improvements are tied to the technological advancements made in the past year. On Monday, we launched our new school website that is significantly more user friendly. With the launch of the new website, we will no longer be sending Field Notes from School Fusion, as the platform is no longer available. We will begin using My Big Campus to post Field Notes once all users are logged into the program. To ensure a consistent flow of information in the interim, Field Notes will be sent through the Infinite Campus Messenger. Once we transition to My Big Campus, we will notify all RMSEL families. As shared in the last communication, we will be using My Big Campus to communicate with RMSEL parents and students.

During your school level Back to School Night, we will be assisting parents with an introduction to the basic functions of My Big Campus, as well as other aspects of each crew leader’s curriculum for the school year. Back to School Night is a great opportunity to connect with your son/daughter’s teachers and learn more about the classroom and RMSEL. All parents are strongly encouraged to attend Back to School Night.

Tomorrow at 6:00 pm we will be having our Back to School BBQ following the RMSEL High School Back to School Night. PACK hosts this amazing kick-off to the school year as a gathering of our entire school community. The BBQ is an opportunity to meet and greet new families, teachers, and administrators, and for students to connect. We look forward to seeing many members of our school community tomorrow evening at the BBQ. We also want to thank PACK for organizing this great event.

This year we are also focusing on “Character Counts.” Crew leaders and students are reviewing school-wide expectations tied to our Character Values and Design Principles. RMSEL intends for students to grow toward self-discipline, to accept responsibility, and to learn to appreciate the rights of others. Character is dynamically integrated into all aspects of student learning and instruction at RMSEL.

Many of you may have picked up a copy of the Denver Post or logged into a Colorado news source and saw the release of 2013 TCAP scores. Today is the official public release of information. We have many aspects to celebrate this year, as well as areas on which to focus for improvement. In a K-12 school, we administer every test annually. In 2013, RMSEL “Met/Exceeded” the state average in 89% of all tested areas (24/27). In Reading, Writing, and Science, we “Met/Exceeded” the state average in 100% of tested areas (19/19). In Mathematics, we “Met/Exceeded” the state average in 63% of tested areas (5/8). Along with our TCAP student achievement data, our 11th grade students exceeded the state average on the ACT for the first time in three years with a composite score of 22.2! We are making considerable improvements annually at RMSEL. Our focus remains on in-depth learning expeditions that teach students complex problem solving that can transfer to any assessment. We are not assessment driven, but assessment focused, as this provides our teachers valuable information in organizing various case studies focusing on the acquisition of various concepts and skills within a learning expedition.

During the 2013-2014 school year, we will be implementing a new mathematics curriculum K-5 to help close the achievement gap between our students’ ability in Reading/Writing and Mathematics. This is
clearly evident across multiple grade levels, but is extremely evident at the high school level where we observe that while 78% of our students are proficient or advanced in Reading, only 19% of this same group is proficient or advanced in Mathematics. As with any root cause to a problem or gap, we are not looking at a single grade level, but how Mathematics becomes an integral part of our instructional framework at RMSEL. This year parents will be informed regularly of updates regarding our focus on Mathematics. I am extremely excited by the opportunity to work with a talented group of teachers who are dedicated to closing the Mathematics achievement gap at our school. We know that this is possible and took the first step last year with the addition of Mathematics ability groups in the 6th grade. In 6th grade last year we improved 8% from 5th to 6th grade, where the state of Colorado is measuring a 3% decline. Where others are declining, we are improving! Also, the gap between Reading and Mathematics is only 14% in 6th grade where it is 59% in high school. We have implemented the ability groups in grades 6-8 this year and will continue to implement these flexible ability groups in Mathematics at RMSEL. Students will continue to receive instruction in homogenous groups in their crew for Humanities and Science in grades 6-8.

If you are interested in accessing school-wide student achievement data, you can find this at www.schoolview.org. Click “School Performance” and then you will be directed to a menu where you can type in our district name, Expeditionary BOCES. Also, we will be distributing individual student score reports at Back to School Night, which is one month earlier than last year.

We are very excited for an amazing school year. Welcome back to RMSEL!

Sincerely,

Chad