

October 22, 2021

Staff, Parents, Students and Community Members,

We are nineteen months into a once-in-a-lifetime pandemic and it is necessary to acknowledge our collective fatigue. We understand that people are tired or frustrated of the never-ending stream of information and requirements placed on schools. This summer we prepared to open our schools for full in-person learning five days a week. Then were met by the challenges of the delta variant, lack of vaccination for children ages 2- 11, and rising cases in Maine and Androscoggin county. Most families can say they have dealt with the challenge of a 10-day quarantine. At the same time we must recognize our staff have been stretched thin with the demands placed on public education in response to COVID-19 as well as their “normal” day-to-day responsibilities.

During stressful times, the emotions of worry, fear, anger and frustration are normal reactions. However, as a community we must remain unified and civil. This letter is a call to you, an urgent call for kindness and civility. Throughout the last few weeks, there have been many public and social media displays of displeasure when families receive phone calls regarding quarantine or when staff enforce masking and social distancing requirements or during public participation at our School Board meetings.

When determining whether a student is a close contact or not, all school districts are expected to follow the CDC guidelines. These guidelines are often referred to as the SOP, Standard Operating Procedure. In RSU 16, our school administrators and nurses follow and enforce these expectations. When our school administrators and nurses call families to inform them that a student needs to be quarantined, they are doing their job. On several occasions it has been reported that they have been verbally berated, sworn at, or threatened for simply doing their job. Our school nurses are simply the messengers, and no matter your emotions, you should recognize that the messenger should be treated with the respect they deserve. Our nurses have been the guardian angels of our students during this pandemic and deserve your kindness, understanding and patience.

Additionally, our school administrators and school staff have been receiving more than their fair share of frustration and anger. Like the nurses they are simply doing their jobs. We ask that anyone who has participated in one of these unkind conversations or social media posts, please take a step back and remember, that each and everyone of these employees are people with a positive intent. They care about your children. We implore all members of the Regional School Unit 16 educational family, please make this level of incivility stop. We are all doing our best to navigate these uncertain times. We need to serve as the models for our children on respectful civic engagement and discourse even though we disagree with a plan, decision or requirement. The best way out of this pandemic is to stand together.

Sincerely,

Ken Healey and Amy Hediger