The month since our last School Board meeting was characterized by lots of snow and extremely cold weather. Nevertheless, our hardy North Country kids were able to complete five Winter Program afternoons so far without any complaining. Alpine skiers and snowboarders travel to Cannon Mountain for instruction and some fun skiing/riding. Our Nordic skiers do the same at Bretton Woods Ski Area. The Winter Fun group has explored a plethora of activities, including snowshoeing at Ski Hearth Farm, skating at the Franconia ice rink, tubing at the Franconia Inn, and building snow castles here at school. All of our students participate in our Winter Program so that they will learn about outdoor activities, get some exercise and stay fit for life, and learn how to stay safe and have fun in our cold climate. Unfortunately, we have to cancel our last day (tomorrow) due to the exceedingly low temperatures and wind chill factors. Many thanks go out to our rugged staff and parent chaperones that made this program possible!

Teachers are analyzing our recent NWEA test results in mathematics and reading. These mid-year assessments indicate the amount of growth that occurred during the first half of the year. We will be conducting similar testing at the end of the year to document a full year’s growth in achievement. Keeping in mind that standardized testing is only one variable of the complex indicators that comprise student achievement, we nevertheless, use this information to determine best teaching practices and strategies in our classrooms.

Students were actively engaged in three huge events this month. Our annual Scripps Spelling Bee saw 52 students signed up to participate in grades 3-6. Round after round went by until finally, in the Championship Round, Sachin Umashankar was declared the winner. Similarly, our annual Geography Bee was also held this month with 40 students wanting to participate. The questions got harder and harder until only Julia Ogburn-Beers and Sachin Umashankar were left in the Championship Round. Sachin managed to win this event as well, sending him to the next round of competition at the State Level. Our most recent Community Meeting focused on civil rights as every classroom made either a video, an animation, sang a song, recited a poem, or performed a play. We heard the kindergarteners sing a friendship song, the third graders act out how Mahatma Gandhi preached non-violence, and the sixth graders recite Walt Whitman’s famous, “Oh Captain, My Captain” among the seven presentations. This powerful sharing of what our students learned from studying civil rights highlighted how being kind and watching out for others can start within each of us and grow globally. Our students not only learned
about civil rights, they also learned about how important the “presentation” of a piece of information is to the audience. As an ancillary learning opportunity, students were reminded about how to be good audience members. These are all highly important attributes to a well-rounded education and not always quantifiable on standardized tests.

Our request for a full-day Kindergarten program for next year will be voted upon at next month’s Annual School Meeting. This initiative has the support of the teachers, administration, School Board, and parents. The goal is to better meet the new and more rigorous expectations for learning that the Common Core State Standards have set. The additional time will allow our youngest students to both have the time to developmentally grow and play as well as focus on more academics. As we are the last school in our area to have a part-time Kindergarten, we feel that we have put off this opportunity for long enough. It is time to forge ahead with new strategies to increase student achievement.

The bids for our new wood pellet heating system will be in the mail this week. We are looking for the most competent and reasonably priced contractor to install this boiler and silo system and to hook it up to our heating system. This hybrid, wood pellet and propane gas heating model will hopefully reduce our annual costs for heating fuel. Construction/installation of this system is scheduled for this summer, after the students are out of school.

These cold temperatures remind us that more efficient windows and insulation can carry huge savings of energy and monies. Both of these items are to be addressed in a Warrant Article this year. The goal is to replace the 1963 windows and doors (52 years old) in our old part of the building with more energy efficient ones. As there is no insulation below or above the existing windows, these areas have to be insulated as well. This project will coincide with a painting of the building’s wood trim that is also sorely needed before our trim boards deteriorate and need replacement.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions you may have regarding this report or the school in general.

Respectfully submitted,

Gordie Johnk
Principal