

# Letters & Opinion

## Souhegan High School Project Graduation 2015 THANKS YOU!!

To the editor:

On June 5th, 2015, approximately 110 graduates from Souhegan High School attended the 2015 Project Graduation celebration at the Nashua Sports Academy. Project Graduation is an all-night, organized, substance-free, adult-supervised, post-graduation party. Thanks to all of our corporate sponsors and community donations and support, the graduates enjoyed a wide variety of entertainment, activities, food, and prize raffles throughout the event. It was a wonderful and safe way to celebrate graduation, and it would not have been possible without the tremendous generosity of the community. The SHS Class of 2015, along with the 2015 Project Graduation committee, would like to thank the following businesses and individuals for their generous donations and sponsorship. In addition we would like to recognize the many volunteers who setup, cleaned up and staffed the Project Graduation event – it truly was a community effort and we thank you for your donation of time and effort!

**Business Contributors:** All-State Insurance-Jim Parolin, Allen Remodeling LLC, Bank of America, Boys & Girls Club of Souhegan Valley, Canobie Lake Park, Chuckster's, Cinemagic Theaters-Merrimack, Clark & Leighton PC, The Copy Shop, Common Man Restaurant Group-Merrimack, Countryside Self-Storage, Cranmore Mountain, Dunkin Donuts-Milford Rd. Merrimack, Dr. Kenneth G. Edwards DDS, First Student Inc., FunSpot, Granite Bank, Hayward's Ice Cream Milford, Hitchiner Manufacturing Co., Inc., Dr. Klopfer-Orthodontist Milford, Mel's Funway Park, Nashua Sports Academy, Party Vision LLC, People's United Bank, The Pie Guy, Dr. Joseph Raczek O.D., Souhegan Lighting Products LLC, Taggart Ice, Vertical Dreams, Visual Persuasion, LLC.

**Individual Contributors:** Baum Family, Peg & Ward Bennett, Jim Belanger & Elizabeth Comeau, Jonathan Berry, Robert & Barbara Beck, Debra Clarke, Polly & Thomas Culver, Judi & Stephen Defilippo, William (Bo) Dean, the DeFranco Family, Patrick Deshazo & Jane Nilles, Meg & David Dworkin, Diane Ehrlich, Susanne, Gerald & Jorek Ehrenstein, Jim & Michelle Emmond, William & Veronica Foley, the Hanks Family, John & Carol Hopfenspirger, James & Denise Jacobs, Bill & Susan Kenny, Jeffrey & Oivvia Kibbie, Douglas & Michelle Kolb, Anne Lederhos, the Learned Family, Dr. Jennifer Madden, Kerri Miller, Barbara & Ron Nelson, Martin Nevrla & Donna Riley, Mary Ellen & Stephen Noble, Jim & Jacqueline O'Dowd, Tina & David Ohlemacher, Dan Sequin, Susan & Paul Smith, Amy & Rich Sparks, Richard Upton, JudyMarie Wall, Donna & John Woods, Jennifer & Bob Young, the Zifchak Family, Hannah Whitney (SHS student), and Jorick Ehrenstein (SHS student).

We are very appreciative of the following members of the Souhegan High School staff, who helped us throughout the year and during the event. Your help and support is vital to the success of PG! Lynda Conley, Peter Gagnon, Christina Len, Dick Miller, Maggie Paul, Pam Paul, Rhonda Pisani, Denise Raymond, John Smith, Sally Varanka.

A special thank you to all our volunteers who helped throughout the year with fund raisers, setting up, chaperoning, and cleaning up at the event. We would like to recognize in particular Vicky Leknes and Karen Urbanik who continue to chaperone the entire event every year!

*Thank you all from your 2015 Project Graduation Committee:*

*Michelle Caraccio & Lisa Maresco (co-chairs), Barbara Baum, Peg Bennett, Mary Beyers, Cindy Bossi, Barbara Bowman, Patty Casey, Bonez Dupre, Sherry DeFranco, Kris Ezequelle, Cheryl Forster, Krista Hanks, Carol Hopfenspirger, Wendy Kolopsky, Lynne Maloney, Mary McKenzie, Nancy Protzmann, Lauren Riccio, Helen Schweizer.*

### PUBLIC NOTICE

## Town of Amherst, NH

### BOARD OF SELECTMEN

Town Hall, 2 Main Street, Amherst, NH 03031  
Landry Meeting Room, 2nd Floor

### NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARINGS

The Amherst Board of Selectmen, pursuant to NH RSA 41:14-b, do hereby announce to the Citizens of Amherst the convening of two public hearings to take input on a proposed amendment to "Signs on Town Property Ordinance".

The public hearings will take place in the Town Hall, 2 Main Street, Amherst, NH at 6:30 p.m. on Monday, July 13, 2015 and Monday, July 27, 2015.

## Letters To the editor:

The Amherst Citizen is eager to serve as a community forum. We welcome your letters, opinions, and commentaries and make every effort to run them in their entirety. We do reserve the right to edit. The views and opinions expressed do not necessarily represent the position of the staff of The Amherst Citizen.

Please direct your letters, views and commentary to the Editor, The Amherst Citizen, P.O. Box 291, Amherst, NH 03031-0291, or e-mail your submission to: news@amherstcitizen.com. We will attempt to run your letter as submitted (space permitting) providing it is signed and phone number is included.

Ellen Grudzien  
Amherst

www.amherstcitizen.com

## Souhegan School Board Preparing and Planning for the Future

A discussion of the facts....

To the editor:

My frustration was great when I opened The Citizen online last week and read several letters to the editor lynching the Souhegan School Board. To watch these individuals consistently complain, point fingers and publicly insult these members of our community and volunteers who give hours of their time each week frustrates me. So, time to get involved I say! A few hours of chatting and research was quite eye opening.

Here's what I thought you should know:

I first wondered if the information that Amherst has spent millions more than other districts, which was reported in a former letter, is true. Turns out Bedford's annual school expenditures run just short of \$56 million per year, while the combined cost of the Amherst and Souhegan school expenditures (including only 85% of the Souhegan budget that is funded by Amherst Taxes) runs just under \$40 million per year. That would tell us that Bedford spends \$16 million more than Amherst a year in school expenditures. As for Merrimack, they spend \$63 million. These neighboring towns should be spending more than Amherst, they are larger. But this does leave many to wonder why our district was compared to these in the former letter.

I'm sure we can all agree that Souhegan's spending per pupil is high. We have heard many comments about it and it was a hot topic for one candidate for school board who based his platform on it. He and, what has been stated on Facebook as a small group of residents, has consistently said the board isn't doing enough. What I found out through reading published information from the board and speaking with some directly is that the school board has been working on reducing the spending per pupil when no other district in the state was able to! How did they do it?

- Over the past two years they have eliminated 13.7 positions,
- Closed one of the two cafeterias
- Negotiated a contract with teachers that included a 0% increase in salaries. By negotiating this contract Souhegan teachers went from the 5th highest paid in the state to the 12th highest paid in the state. It is anticipated that next year they will dip even lower on the list. We are also being compared to Hollis Brookline who did not have a teacher contract for a number of years. They have agreed on one and we will see this affect their salary/benefit expenditure by raising it. Bedford has also committed to increasing teacher salaries.

It was mentioned in a former letter that our benefits and salaries package is seen as the Cadillac for collective bargaining in other towns. After going from 5th highest paid to 12th highest paid it seems that it may be more like a Camry now. Still good indeed, but certainly not flashy.

The author of one letter also stated that Souhegan has a cap on the number of teachers who can retire in one year. False! There is no cap on the number of teachers who can retire from Souhegan in one year. There used to be, for budgeting purposes, but it was never used so they abolished it. The board has stated they do have plans in place if the district (Souhegan) has a number of teachers retire in the same year. There was an entire paragraph dedicated to this in the letter and it kind of pointed a finger at the taxpayer for not paying attention. That was not very kind.

There was a big hub bub around election time that the board had not been fiscally responsible and lacked planning for the future. As I mentioned above, a candidate for the board used this as a consistent platform and one letter was titled with just this spin. What I found out was prior to the election, and actually dating back now 2.6 years, the board has met to analyze and compare every aspect of the budget. This year they met every two weeks. A recent three hour session resulted in the culmination of these many meetings with multiple, thoughtful and further recommendations for further responsible reductions keeping all stake holders in mind. Doesn't that sound like planning? I'm sure we will all be notified in an informative manner when these recommendations are public. Maybe we could all go to the meeting? Or we could all read the minutes?

There's been a lot of buzz that our town budget should be raised while our school budget should be reduced. Did you know that the school budget percentage of the town taxes has actually gone down while the town budget percentage of our taxes has gone up? Yes indeed. The town tax portion has increased by 18.8% percent since 2011 and the school budget increase was only 2.43% in that same time frame. I found that interesting, informative and in contrast to what had been written.

And then we have the ever popular NECAP debate. Well fellow residents, you may be happy to hear that NECAP is a thing of the past (insert clapping emoji here). Turns out this outdated test had many flaws. Still, it has been reported that Amherst has consistently scored below our neighboring towns and in some cases was below the state average. The latest NECAP scores on the Department of Education Website show that we outperformed Bedford in the area of writing, outperformed Hollis in the area of Reading and we were significantly better in all categories as compared to the state averages. Our math scores are where we really need to focus. It is expected that those scores will come up as the new math program was only recently introduced at the high school level.

So that was a result of sitting down for a couple of hours and asking questions. I must mention that when discussing the letters with one of the board members there was some confusion. It seems a couple of board members sat with one author of a letter for hours showing him the strides they have made and plans moving forward, then he never mentioned them in his letter. I was surprised by this too.

Let's lead by example and use our energy in a positive way to create change. Lashing out, pointing fingers and insulting the hard work of volunteers does not seem like the neighborly way to facilitate progress that we all want to see.

## With Advice from Community Council ...

To the editor:

Following the advice of the Community Council, Souhegan High School decided to discontinue class ranking of students. If this is being followed how was Valedictorian and Salutatorian determined?

Eileen Naber  
Mont Vernon

## A Growing Sense That Something Was Wrong

To the editor:

I have been a supporter of Souhegan High School since it was established, even though my children did not have the opportunity to go there. I like the philosophy of the school, and I have heard much anecdotal evidence that our kids are well prepared for college and life in general.

Having said that, over the last four or five years, I've had a growing sense that something was wrong, especially as I have seen the school taxes increase sharply. My interest quickened over the last year or so as I did a bit of research. I will say that the more I looked at things, the more I felt that the school has somehow lost direction and that long range planning and better financial controls were needed.

1) Cost per pupil as defined by the NH Department of Education is the cost of running a school divided by the number of students after subtracting capital costs, transportation, cost of food service, and out-of-district tuition from the total. This allows comparisons of true daily operating costs between school districts having widely differing bussing needs, new or old facilities, and/or the need to send students to other districts (as Amherst did with Milford before SHS was built).

2) Bedford and Hollis-Brookline (H-B) are used for comparisons, since the two schools are very close to Souhegan High School (SHS) in demography of the student populations and the communities.

3) SHS is committed to operating under a list of Ten Common Principles of the Coalition of Essential Schools. The 9th principle states that the cost per pupil should not exceed traditional schools by more than 10%. <http://www.sau39.org/domain/182>

4) All data are from the 2013-14 school year, since data from the current year is incomplete.

Looking at the rise in cost and taxes, here's what I have come to understand:

The cost per pupil at Souhegan High School (SHS) is \$19,012. The cost per pupil for Bedford is \$11,028, and for Hollis-Brookline (H-B), \$12,686. [http://education.nh.gov/data/documents/cost\\_pup13\\_14.pdf](http://education.nh.gov/data/documents/cost_pup13_14.pdf)

- SHS has the highest cost per student of any high school in the state that has more than 350 students. (Very small schools are a different ball game).

- When the school was first established, the cost per student tracked with or very close to the goal of being not more than 10% higher than a comparable traditional school. About 10 years ago, things began changing. Today, we are much higher on a cost per pupil basis – 50% higher than H-B, 72% higher than Bedford.

Note: Since Bedford did not begin operation until 2008, Exeter is shown in the chart because it represents the typical rate of growth of cost per pupil of schools in southern New Hampshire during the time period.

- To put it another way, over the last four years, we spent about \$74,000 to put one student through high school. Bedford and H-B spent \$44,000 and \$47,000, respectively to do the same thing.

- Last year, there were 842 students in the SHS. At \$19,012 per student, it cost us \$16,000,000 to educate them. The cost for the same number of students at Bedford and H-B would be \$9,300,000 and \$10,700,000 respectively. Amherst taxpayers pay a premium of between \$5 million to over \$6 million per year.

- A major reason for the high cost at SHS is the staffing – teachers, administration, and other staff. When the school population started dropping, the school board did not make commensurate cuts in staff.

- Today, here's how SHS compares with H-B:

	H-B	SHS
Students	830	842
Teachers	63	79
Instructional Support	18	17
Librarians	1	1
Specialists	12	14
Admin Support	4	8
All Other Support	11	25
All Staff	109	144
Student Teacher Ratio	13.2	10.7
Student-Staff Ratio	7.6	5.8

Letter and charts continue on page 5

## Swimming Pools

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