

VERNON PUBLIC SCHOOLS



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2020 Vernon Public Schools: Focusing on Students during Turbulent Times

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us...” This quote by Charles Dickens from ‘The Tale of Two Cities’ best sums up the year 2020...

Traditionally, during this time of the year, everyone looks forward to the New Year by making resolutions and striving to make the world around them a better place to live. 2020 has created “new norms” in all our lives and we need to reflect on this past year. In January and February, the district had been going strong, setting higher sights on student achievement in all our classrooms. Then on Friday, March 13, 2020 we “hit a wall” and moved to remote learning due to the COVID-19 health pandemic. The district did not have students in our schools from March to June of 2020 – almost one-third of the academic year. Teaching remotely was a challenge for all staff, students and parents and we learned much in those four months. The summer of 2020 was primarily spent on “how” we can open schools successfully without putting students, parents, teachers, staff, and the community at risk as well as how we can maximize learning for all. In September, we opened our schools in a hybrid model with a blended learning approach – some virtual student days and some in-person. We made an adjustment to the schedule in October for the elementary schools, however both middle and high schools remain in a hybrid model. Our re-focus became creating high standards of teaching and learning and creating an optimal educational environment (in and out of schools) for all students.

The key to successful leadership is taking a disadvantage and turning it into an advantage. Today's students have different academic, social, and emotional needs than those of earlier generations. Their needs are continually changing, and schools need to adapt, especially during this past year with the COVID-19 health pandemic. The Vernon Public Schools never wavered from its district core beliefs: *advocate a “whole child” approach to student learning, maximize student performance and set high expectations, and integrate family and community with the education system.* These core beliefs grounded us in the work to enhance student learning and support families during this past year.

In spite of all the turbulence in 2020, here are some of our proud accomplishments this past year:

- ✓ The best indicator of student learning is Connecticut’s Next Generation Accountability System Results, which is a broad set of 12 indicators that help tell the story of how well a school is preparing its students for success in college, careers, and life. Every school in Connecticut is ranked from 1 to 5, with one being the highest. Here are the Vernon Schools’ rankings:

The Vernon Public Schools, in partnership with family and community, is committed to provide a quality education, with high expectations, in a safe environment where all students become independent learners and productive contributors to society.

	2015-2016	2016-2017	2017-2018	2018-2019
Category 1	0	0	1	2
Category 2	1	5	3	3
Category 3	4	2	3	2
Category 4	2	0	0	0
Category 5	0	0	0	0

- ✓ Five years ago, both Center Road School (CRS) and Maple Street School (MSS) were identified in Category 4 as Focus Schools for Mathematics. Three years ago, both schools CRS and MSS exited the Focus School designation with higher rankings. In addition, schools with significant growth and achievement are deemed “Schools of Distinction”. For the past three years, Skinner Road School was a “School of Distinction” for its work in high growth for all students in ELA and high growth for high need students in ELA. For the past two years, Northeast School was deemed a “School of Distinction” for being a Category One School and for high performance and high growth for all students in ELA & Math and high growth for high needs students in ELA & Math. This year, Lake Street School was deemed a “School of Distinction “ for its Category One standing and high growth for all students in ELA.
- ✓ In September 2020, U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos recognized Vernon’s Northeast School as one of the [National Blue Ribbon Schools](#) for 2020. The recognition is based on a school’s overall academic performance and progress in closing achievement gaps among student subgroups. The coveted National Blue Ribbon Schools award (given to only 367 schools in the nation) affirms the hard work of educators, families, and communities in creating a safe and welcoming school where students master challenging and engaging content. Congratulations to students, parents, teachers, staff, and administration at **Northeast School** for their efforts and accomplishments in **being named a 2020 “Blue Ribbon School”**. The National Blue Ribbon School recognition is one of the highest accolades in the field of education. This award is a testament to the teaching and learning work at Northeast School.
- ✓ By June of 2020, 236 Rockville High School students received college credit through their academic studies. Students either passed Advanced Placement exams, UConn Early College Experience courses, articulated classes with Manchester (and Middlesex) Community College, or Goodwin University. Of these RHS students earning college credit, 124 were members of the graduating Class of 2020 - that is 64% of the senior graduating class. The credits our students have earned at RHS translate to a total of \$360,500 in savings on college tuition. In addition, 92 seniors were awarded community scholarships totaling \$275,110.
- ✓ Over 74% of the Rockville High School Graduates (Class of 2020) are furthering their education at the college level. Some of the colleges our students are attending include: University of Maryland, Springfield College, Bentley University, Worcester Polytechnic Institute, Georgia State University, Indiana State University, Sacred Heart University, Seton Hall University, University of Rhode Island, and the University of Connecticut.
- ✓ The CT State Department of Education conducted a data review and highlighted the Vernon Public Schools for strong improvement and increases in the four-year graduation rates over the last several years. Graduation rates increased from 76.5% to 78.2% to 85.2% over the past three years. The CSDE applauded Vernon for its sustained efforts within the district’s *Blueprint for Success*.
- ✓ Thirty-three (33) Rockville High School students were winners in the 2020 Scholastic Art and Writing Awards presented by the Alliance for Young Artists and Writers. RHS students received 57 awards this year, including 8 Gold Keys, 21 Silver Keys, and 28 Honorable Mentions - the

highest number of any participating high school in Connecticut. Two RHS students received a 2020 American Voices Nomination for Best in Show. Students whose works merit a national award are considered for scholarships, publication opportunities, and national exhibition.

- ✓ The Rockville High School Creative Writer had six platinum published award winners, two gold award winners, ten silver award winners, and 35 honorable mentions in UCONN's Connecticut Student Writer Magazine competition - more awards than any other high school in CT. In addition, RHS has four finalists in the 2020 "It's All Write!" National Writing Contest. Writers submitted an original flash fiction or poem that was judged by a panel of published authors.
- ✓ Rockville High School's Unified Sports program was honored by the Connecticut Interscholastic Athletic Conference as one of the best programs in Connecticut. The team received the Michaels Jewelers' Unified Sports Cup Award, which recognizes the team and its athletes for what they achieve both on and off the court. RHS's program also won a National Unified Champion School banner from Special Olympics. Unified Sports athletes compete in soccer, basketball, bowling, and tennis. The athletes, student mentors, and coaches also host an annual Snowflake Dance for area Unified Sports programs and sponsor an annual bowling tournament.
- ✓ The Vernon Food & Nutrition Services Department provided free meals to all children 18 years of age and under during the school shutdown. Meal distribution happened on Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays at Vernon Center Middle School from March until June. Each family received two meals (breakfast & lunch) for six days a week. From March until June 2020, over 60,000 meals were served to the Vernon Community! This program continued throughout the summer of 2020 in cooperation with the Town of Vernon's Youth Services. Over 27,500 meals were served in the summer of 2020 – that is 21,000 more meals served than in the summer of 2019. Vernon Public School system continues to serve students and families by providing meals 7 days a week.
- ✓ In June 2020, the district conducted an 'end of the year survey' of over 850 people in the community and received the following results: 85.4% of the people rated the Overall Education in Vernon a grade of "A" or "B". A majority (92.6%) say they receive favorable services from the teaching staff in our schools. Additionally, 91.3% of the respondents say the Vernon Public Schools is heading in the right direction based on the mission and vision statement in terms of educating their children.

"The function of education is to teach one to think intensively and to think critically. Intelligence plus character – that is the goal of true education." This quote by Martin Luther King, Jr. has never been truer than in 2020. It is more imperative today than ever that we all embrace life-long education for all children and adults. Learning is the key to success in life.

The COVID-19 health pandemic created a turbulent year in 2020 for all of us. We should be proud of these accomplishments that clearly demonstrate the potential of the Vernon Public Schools. Together - students, parents, families, teachers, staff members, administrators, and board members work towards educational excellence every day, and make our district a better place for all children. I am proud to be a part of this culture and I can say that though 2020 was a difficult and challenging year, we got through it together and we are a stronger school district for it. Thank you for your continued support.

Sincerely,

Joseph P. Macary, Ed.D.

Superintendent of Schools