



SOUTHBRIDGE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Dr. Russell Johnston
Interim Receiver

For Immediate Release

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New Educators Start School Early with Southbridge 101

Administrators and new teachers toured town by bus to learn history, meet community members

Southbridge – Southbridge Public Schools administrators and new teachers boarded donated AA Transportation buses yesterday for "Southbridge 101," an exploration of the town's past, present and future. The tour was part of the final day of New Teacher Orientation and was planned in collaboration with school district staff, parents, town officials and community partners. The tour and accompanying panels of speakers were developed with the goal of sharing and celebrating the rich and diverse history of the town; understanding how non-profits, the town, and faith-based organizations are meeting current needs; and looking at the future with an economic lens.

"Building relationships with the students and families we serve will create the conditions for effective teaching and learning. Parents led our bus tours across the town, and it was powerful to hear their personal connections to the community," Acting Southbridge Public Schools Receiver Russell Johnston said. "Our teachers can start the school year with a taste for what Southbridge has to offer and remember what it felt like to see students in neighborhood parks and backyards."

Southbridge Education Association President David Williams said the tour was valuable. "The tour of the town and presentation from community leaders has given me a sense of hope for the future," Mr. Williams said. "The new leadership team sees our history and diversity are our greatest strengths and the foundation for building a successful school system."

This summer, Southbridge Public Schools added a Department of Family and Community Engagement, and yesterday's tour and panels showcased what that department hopes to accomplish. Throughout the day, participants were asked to think how the experience could help them communicate, connect, collaborate and celebrate in order to improve teaching and learning.

"Communication is key, teachers and parents working together to strive for excellence in education. 'It takes a village,' they say," said Michelle Sweeney, mother of a rising fourth grader at West Street School and a rising 10th grader at Southbridge High School. "We must collaborate together to provide the tools necessary for our kids to succeed."

Through the district's Department of Family and Community Engagement, Southbridge Public Schools will be increasingly proactive in how it assesses and addresses needs and opportunities.

"It was great to see such a diverse mix of teachers who are obviously anxious to get the school year started," said Peter Cournoyer, president of Big Bunny Market and chair of the Southbridge

Business Partnership. “I am now more encouraged than ever that this will be a tipping point year for the system.”

More details of yesterday's event are in the attached itinerary. Southbridge Public Schools appreciates the generosity of all the speakers who donated their time; the Dark Horse Tavern and Cannery Music Hall, which donated their space; and the Optical Heritage Museum, which helped sponsor lunch.

If you are a parent, community member or organization interested in becoming more involved in the Southbridge Public Schools, we encourage you to reach out to Jabían Gutiérrez, director of family and community engagement, at jgutierrez@southbridgepublic.org or 508-410-7109.

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