

Good Morning and welcome back to the
2021-22 School Year! I am honored to greet
you and to thank you all for coming back.

I have not yet met most of you, so allow me
to start by introducing myself: my name is

Tom Dolan and I am thrilled to be the

Interim Superintendent of the North Shore

School. There is no hyperbole when I say

that this is a place I have always wanted to
work.

MIDDLE SCHOOL ONLY

There are two announcements that I'd like to make here at North Shore Middle School, specific to this faculty and this building. I hope you all read my email sent earlier this summer wishing Rob Dennis the best of luck as principal of Northport High School...his alma mater. I told him that was like

Welcome Back Kotter on steroids. Soon after I had the great honor and pleasure to recommend Jen Imperiale as the Interim Principal of our Middle School and even the short time I have had to work with her has been exciting and invigorating and promising. Jen, congratulations and I look forward to working with you.

The next item is not as joyous and that is the status of some building projects here:

The Middle School saw the most aggressive and enviable schedule for work over the summer. The pandemic situation we all are still experiencing has had its impact on production and delivery schedules and as a result our contractors did not meet their

goals. That is NOT for lack of effort by the district, the business office, John Hall and others. It is especially NOT a function of our own Middle School staff...as they have done everything possible to get everything ready, and in fact deserve our applause. (hint)

Our priority was to get the largest spaces done, as there is no substitute for them.

These include the library, band room and some other spaces. They will be available, and the ventilation in them will meet guidelines, but we hope to improve upon them in the first 15 days of school. If that date is extended, you will hear from me about it, and rest assured that we are

exerting all the pressure we can to move

these projects along.

I'd like to offer some brief, perhaps not unheard before, thoughts as we open for the year.

Schools are unique institutions in at least two ways that I'd like to speak about on this day. One of the practices that sets this enterprise apart from others is...this. Today. We get to start over, start anew, every year. Other Businesses have seasons and patterns and commemorations, I am sure...but we have

Opening Day. Other than baseball, I don't know who gets to do that every year. The question is: how do we take full advantage of it?

Part of starting over is the fact that we get a break. Summer might not mean not working for many of you, but it is a respite from the usual patterns, and so I hope that it served as a chance for you to do what you needed to do in July and August, in order to best prepare you for September.

Part of starting over is anxiety producing. I know that first hand...trust me...and the Dolan family knows it. If you'll allow me to share, today is the first day of fourth grade for my son Brian. It's a new building for him, and a whole new experience. I'd be lying if I did not tell you that there were a few tears associated with that start. Now, before you worry too much about Brian...he is 40 years old and this is his 17th year of teaching. He's just going to have to adapt to his new teaching assignment!

And thank you for suspending judgment for just a minute there and accepting the premise that I was young enough to have a Fourth Grader!

Part of starting over, and maybe the most important part, is tossing away that which did not work, holding on tight to all that has been effective, and finding the balance between the new and the old, the explored and unexplored, the comfortable and the uncomfortable. That is where we have the greatest opportunity, and

this ability to re-invent our practice each

September is what I'd like to focus on for a couple of minutes.

An old text that I used to rely upon, one that has fallen out of favor these days, is Teaching as a Subversive Activity by Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner. It contains a few digestible nuggets regarding teaching practice.

One of them is the suggestion that you post these three questions somewhere on your desk:

- 1.) What am I teaching today?
- 2.) Why is it important for kids to know this?
- 3.) And, how do I know that? That is, how do I know that it's important for students to know that which I am teaching to them.

That might not be the perfect reflective activity, and the year I tried it, I found it very, very challenging; however, it is the kind of practice that might help you sort as the school year begins. I anticipate that many of you have already found the right set of motivators,

lessons, activities, and assessments. The lesson you have on gerunds, geometric proofs,

Greenland's independence and geologic ages

might be perfect and capable of achieving every purpose you, or even Pearson, could hope for.

But this year there is something different about that lesson. This year, everything changes. To

illustrate that point, I hope you'll watch a brief, seasonally inappropriate video clip. It is only

about two minutes in length. First, let me get ready.

OK ?:

Play

The line that always gets me there is this one:

Play short version.

Kids???? It's like poor George had forgotten that he had any, and his reaction is full of joy and anticipation. Kids!! As easy as it might be to get caught up in all of the peripheral noise associated with education, we would all be well advised to remember the joy associated with

working with kids, and the alchemy that can occur when we do. The student that sits before you is there for the first time, in most cases.

They are a variable to your teaching, and they might change your perfect lesson...for the better...if you let them.

KIDS! We have all heard statements like this is his or her only year in fifth or seventh or ninth grade, and that is true. We hope that students will be exposed to a given class only once. If that's the case, then they are the true variable

that might influence the effectiveness of a lesson, and WE can be the variable in increasing the probability for their success and happiness. What a noble aspiration, and welcome challenge.

This year is different for another reason though and that is related to the condition in which our students return to us... Like you, they have had a very difficult 18 months leading up to tomorrow. They return to school after some fits and starts, some stop and go events, some

“yes’s” and “no’s”. They will be decompressing in some ways, and that’s why I hope we can all remember that they are kids in those first few days. Kids first, students second, recognizing the fragile state some of them might be in. We will get to the hard academic work soon enough, but our “kids” deserve some time to adapt to school as they formerly knew it.

So do you! I hope each of you will monitor your own emotions as we embark on the next few challenging days.

As I prepared for today, I made a rookie mistake when I went to see our Director of Guidance, Dan Doherty, with a question. I asked him how his counseling staff could help me ensure the well being and safety of our students as they returned. He quickly and appropriately reminded me that every staff member, teacher, teacher aid, monitor, all of us can serve in that role...to keep an eye out for that child who is having trouble coming back, and to direct them to the right person, the right

office. We have all never been more important to the safety of our kids.

At yesterday's administrative retreat I had a chance to say to all of the building administrators Directors and others that 'we are all in this together.'" I'd be proud to join with each of you in your efforts as well.

I must also acknowledge the difficult circumstances under which we are opening. If you want a laugh, go back and read the letter I put on the District web site on July 1...my first

day. I predicted a more normal opening of schools than what you had all experienced last year. As I look back, I now realize how much all of you actually accomplished and the degree to which this district set a standard for other districts to emulate.

But, we do open this year with masks, as I referenced before, and my promise to you and the community is to monitor health conditions and modify our plan as the year moves ahead.

How we approach our “Kids” will make all the difference in the world to them.

I know that I look forward to welcoming our students any chance I get, and I hope to be in your buildings and even your classrooms frequently, starting tomorrow...Opening Day.

In conclusion, as we start this year, you might want to measure time using a different calendar. Typically, we describe our age based on our birthdate and how many of those have passed. Some cultures measure age by the

calendar year, that is, how many times January 1 has passed. Perhaps we, as educators...and I include everyone in this room under that title...could measure our years by the number of Septembers that we have celebrated the beginning of a school year, the arrival of a new group of kids, and the fresh start that a day like this represents. Thank you for your attention, and for making me, this 42 year old, feel so welcome.

Thank you and have a great day, and a great
year.