

NEWS

*From the Office of the
Superintendent*

Dr. David Baker



January 2024

Dear Parents, Guardians, Staff, and Community:

I hope everyone enjoyed the Holiday break. It seemed that it went by quickly and, for those who celebrate Christmas, it was certainly not a white one. No matter what your tradition, this part of the winter, sometimes referred to as the Solstice, signifies hope and light. On December 21st, we celebrated the darkest day of the year. We know that each day from this point until summer we will see more and more light. It hopefully mirrors this holiday season with promise for better things to come. No matter what your politics, our world is in a dark place right now and we need the light—we hold on to that promise of hope and light no matter what faces us.

On a personal note, this has been a difficult November/December for the Baker family. We learned in mid-December that our 5-year old grandson, Sam, has Burkitt Lymphoma Stage III. This is a very aggressive cancer that requires a very aggressive treatment protocol on a variety of medications, including strong doses of chemotherapy. As I write this newsletter, Sam is in the hospital receiving treatment. He has been there through the Christmas season, and it looks like he will remain in the hospital for up to a couple of months. I don't share this for any extra sympathy, but rather to stress the fact that we are all susceptible to the unexpected and often harsh twists and turns in life. This is exactly why we need family, friends, coworkers, and community. It is what gets us through. Life goes on, but we do need to slow down and get our priorities straight. Sam has taught me a lot this holiday season about just that message. As we face other tough decisions in our school district, let's not forget that we need each other, and no disagreement is worth sacrificing relationships. It sounds simple but can be very hard—but certainly no harder than the battle that Sam faces over the next several months.

This is going to be a busy couple of months. The boards are working hard on the budgets to be presented. Each of our communities face their own challenges, but never alone. That is the beauty of small, rural communities—we are all in it together.

One more announcement from the supervisory union. Our Director of Finance and Operations, Brittany Currie, is moving on to a new and exciting job at Littleton Regional

Hospital. Board members will testify that Brittany was a strong asset to our SU. She was organized, knowledgeable, and accurate in her budget reporting and operations work. She will be missed. We wish you the best Brittany.

We are now splitting Brittany's job into two functions—Finance and Operations. We have two members of our current supervisory union management team that are willing and able to step up into these positions at least as interim for now. They are both local and have made great contributions in their current roles. Starting on January 15th, Joe Houston will be our Interim Director of Operations and Annie Houston will be our Interim Director of Finance. I am thankful they were willing, and I am certain that they will do a great job moving forward. And, the best part, with some coaching by Brittany, we will keep the district moving through this budget season. Welcome Joe and Annie!

Here are a few more updates for January:

Budget Season: As stated above, we continue to work with school boards on our budgets that will support our schools next year. In March we all come together to vote on those budgets. This year will be a little different especially as we look at the revenue side of the budgets. We have been depending on "Equalized Pupil" to determine our revenue. This year Act 127 is causing a change from this formula to a "Long-Term ADM (Average Daily Membership)" formula. Because the revised "weights" depend more on rurality, sparsity, and poverty, our towns should do better on the revenue side. In other words, the legislators acknowledged that educating in a rural area provides additional challenges.

How do pupil weights impact local homestead property tax rates?

Not surprisingly, it looks like the new Long Term Weighted Average Daily Membership (LTWADM) will be good for all of our districts. We are rural and we are sparse, so the weights add to our daily membership and our weighted enrollments have all gone up. This will make our LTWADM per pupil expenditures go down. This should help us budget for the services we need for our students and still maintain reasonable tax rates. This is exactly how the legislated formula was intended to work. It was supposed to provide educational opportunities for students who live in rural areas and where communities do not have the adequate tax base. Stay tuned for the public budget hearings where we try to explain this in more detail. For a deeper dive into the weighted pupil formula, you can read Frequently Asked Questions to Understand Pupil Weights provided by the Vermont Legislative Joint Fiscal Office.

The public annual school meetings are as follows:

Hazen Union School District:

February 28, 2024, at 7 p.m.: Public Informational Hearing on the FY25 Budget

February 28, 2024, at 7:30 p.m.: Annual School District Meeting

Wolcott Town School District:

February 29, 2024, at 6 p.m.: Public Informational Hearing on the FY25 Budget

March 5, 2024, fifteen minutes following the adjournment of Town Meeting: Annual School District Meeting

Craftsbury Town School District:

March 5, 2024, at 9 a.m.: Annual School District Meeting

Mountain View Union Elementary School District:

February 27, 2024, at 6 p.m.: Annual School District Meeting

February 27, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. Public Informational Hearing on the FY25 Budget

Stannard Town School District:

March 5, 2024, at 9 a.m.: Annual School District Meeting

Report Cards and Understanding Proficiency-Based Grading: The first Trimester or Semester (depending on the school) has now ended. We are currently in the process of sharing report cards with families. Many of you have already accessed report cards through the PowerSchool online portal. Information about signing up can be found [here](#). All families will also receive a hard copy of their student's first trimester or semester report card by January 15, 2024.

In an effort to communicate clearly with families, here is more information about proficiency-based grading in OSSU.

In all OSSU schools, students are assessed on grade level standards. Many of these standards are not fully taught until the end of the school year, as they are year-end standards. When report cards are sent home, your student's class will not have completed instruction in all areas on the report card. You should expect that your student may have 1's and 2's on their Trimester One or Semester One Report Card, as the entire class is progressing in their instruction on various standards, with some standards just being introduced. This is a snapshot of their progress in a particular moment. This can be confusing for parents, as this was not how we were assessed when we were in school.

Please see the image below, which clearly defines what the numbers 1-4 represent on your student's report card. If you have questions, please contact your student's teacher. We want to hear from you. We are all in this together and will do our best to support you in understanding your student's progress in school as we make this transition!

4	Exceeding	The student is exceeding expectations and demonstrates an in-depth understanding which can be applied independently across content areas.
3	Proficient	The student is proficient and meets expectations for the targeted knowledge and skills by demonstrating sufficient understanding through application.
2	Developing	The student is developing proficiency towards the expectations and shows partial understanding of the foundational knowledge and skills.
1	Beginning	The student is not demonstrating sufficient proficiency or evidence of progress towards the expectations of the foundational knowledge and skills.

PowerSchool Parent Portal: PowerSchool is where parents can keep tabs on student grades and attendance, update your contact information and submit required school forms. For parents who have never logged in, please take a moment to log in today at <https://ps.ossu.org/public/>. If you have more than one student, you can link all of them to your account so you can see each child's progress, grades, attendance, etc. with just one login.

If you need help logging in for the first time, please reach out to your school's administrative assistant.

NEW PowerSchool Mobile App: Download the **PowerSchool Mobile app** from the Apple App or Google Play Store and get anytime, anywhere access to grades, attendance, forms, schedules, and more on any iOS or Android device. **Please note:** *Before downloading or logging into the PowerSchool app, you must first have a Parent Portal account set up from a computer.* If you need help in [creating an account](#), please reach out to your school's administrative assistant.

Why use the app? With the PowerSchool App, you will have convenient access to your child's grades and attendance information **in real time**. After downloading the app, you will sign in with the **OSSU district code: JHLB**. You will also need to enter your Username and Password that you use to access PowerSchool from a computer.

- We encourage you to [watch this video](#) for a how-to on downloading the app.
- [Click this link for instructions on downloading and using the mobile app.](#)
- [Click this link](#) for resources and more information about PowerSchool parent and student portals.

Access Control

OSSU is in the process of updating our school safety procedures to meet the requirements of VT ACT 29. A component of this legislation requires us to revisit how we allow visitors to access our campus buildings. With limited exceptions, all exterior doors other than a dual door main entry are to remain locked at all times when students and staff are present in any OSSU building. This includes after school so adjustments may have to be made for athletic and after school program pickup. In addition, during pickup and dropoff, parents/guardians may accompany their students to the exterior access door but shall not enter the building with limited exceptions.

Another requirement of the new ACT 29 law is for schools to engage in training and drills for options based response to an intruder in the building or on campus. OSSU has adopted the ALICE training system to meet this requirement. Schools will be conducting ALICE training with students. The ALICE system utilizes a trauma informed approach with age and ability appropriate lessons and strategies. Each school will be holding an information session prior to beginning training with students so that parents/guardians can gain a better understanding of how ALICE will be presented to their children. [Click this link to read the full communication, including policy and procedure that was sent out from Dr. Baker on December 22, 2023.](#)

Afterschool Programming: Once a week during the Fall WonderKids Afterschool program, students from Craftsbury, Hardwick, Wolcott, and Woodbury Elementary schools made colorful handmade gifts. Felted soaps, tie dyed scarves, and rolled beeswax candles were bundled with decorative papers they had stamped, and holiday greeting cards. On December 21, these gifts were donated, going out to about 100 families through the Craftsbury and Hardwick Food Pantry. What a wonderful gift these generous elementary school students shared this holiday season!

Policy Work: We continue to prioritize policies that are required by law as we review and revise across the SU. This work needed to happen. Many of our policies were sorely outdated. Remember, you can find the adopted policies [here](#). In January, we will review **Responsible Computer, Network & Internet Use**. We hope to adopt **Prohibition of Firearms and Weapons** and **Volunteers and Work Study Students**. If you have feedback on any policy, please contact a board member or me. If you want a current contact list of board members you can find that [here](#).

Board Meetings: Our school boards have been very busy and as previously mentioned, are now in budget season. I feel very fortunate to work with such committed members. Our Board chairs are as follows - Kasey Allen (kallen@ossu.org) in Craftsbury; Elliot Waring (ewaring@ossu.org) in Wolcott and OSSU; Steven Freihofner (sfreihofner@ossu.org) in Hazen; and Samantha Friend (sfriend@ossu.org) in our elementary union district. We do have our regular meetings in December, and we welcome community participation. All of our school boards want to hear from the public. Here are the dates, times, and meeting links for January meetings:

[OSSU Board Meeting- January 2, 2024, 6-8 p.m.](#), OSSU Central Office

[Stannard Board Meeting- January 3, 2024, 5-6 p.m.](#), Stannard Town Hall

[Mountain View Board Meeting- January 9, 2024, 6-8 p.m.](#), Hardwick Elementary

[Craftsbury Board Meeting- January 10, 2024, 6-8 p.m.](#), Craftsbury Academy

[Hazen Board Meeting- January 16, 2024, 6-8 p.m.](#), Hazen Union Library

[Wolcott Board Meeting- January 17, 2024, 6-8 p.m.](#), Wolcott Elementary

OSSU is Hiring! We are always looking for capable and passionate community folks to work in our schools! We encourage you to take a look at all of our part-time and full-time open positions and consider applying to work with us – or sharing job descriptions with a qualified candidate! You can see the open positions at [this link](#).

Portrait of a Graduate: We are coming to a close on the feedback stage that will provide us themes related to attributes we want for all of our graduates. We have interviewed and/or surveyed multiple stakeholders throughout this phase. Our last step is to meet with all board members to let them have input on their hopes and dreams for an Orleans Southwest graduate and present a final draft in late January. Once the Portrait is adopted, we move on to an even more critical phase where we look at our “Current State of Analysis” (CSA) against the indicators in the portrait to see our strengths and our weaknesses and build a very specific strategic plan with action steps, timelines, and assigned responsibilities. Our goal is to have a draft action plan in place by the end of this school year. It is aggressive, but so important for the future of all our schools.

Equity Update:

The Equity Team has been hard at working creating an implementation plan for the district Equity Policy. With help from multiple stakeholder groups throughout the SU we are very close to a rollout so lookout for updates. Before break both Wolcott and Hardwick hosted the Anti-Racist Storytime for adults where we engaged in community conversation and shared our December holidays lesson. Thanks so much to those who participated, we plan on hosting more in the future. [Click this link to view the Anti-Racist Storytime scope and sequence on the OSSU website.](#)

Testing for Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs): We have received the test results for Hardwick Elementary School. Not surprisingly, there were a few rooms that exceeded the allowable levels. We are working with the state to determine the exact source and to abate the PCB traces. While this work is going on, we will make sure that none of the identified rooms are in use. On a positive note, we were told that the levels were not as significant as other findings across the state. These tests were taken as part of the State of Vermont mandated testing schedule. Our next schools to be tested according to the State of Vermont schedule are Hazen Union School and Lakeview Elementary in the spring of 2024 with Craftsbury Schools and Woodbury Elementary following in spring of 2025. Because of its construction date, Wolcott Elementary School does not have to be tested. If you have further questions about this testing, please contact OSSU Facilities Director Joe Houston at jhouston@ossu.org or (802) 472-2934.

37th Annual Vermont State Scholastic Chess Championships to be held at Craftsbury Academy, Saturday, March 23, 2024: The tournament is open to Vermont students in grades K through 12. Participants must be Vermont residents or be enrolled in a Vermont public or private school. No prior tournament experience is necessary. High School and 8th Grade sections will be USCF rated, and current USCF membership is required for

participation in those sections. K-7th Grade sections will be unrated, and USCF membership is not required in those sections. In addition, Craftsbury Academy will be hosting a 6th - 12th Grade Winter Scholastic Chess Tournament on Sunday, January 28th for anyone who would like to compete before the State Tournament. Individual and team prizes will be awarded. [Click this link to register for one or both events.](#) **Sponsors/Volunteers:** If your business would like to SPONSOR the state championship event or if you're able to VOLUNTEER to help at either event, please email [April Royan](#).

The Arts Update:

Hazen Union School

Performing Arts

All high school band and chorus students, along with members of high school drama club, will travel to Burlington in January to participate in a gallery tour and art-making workshop with Burlington City Arts, and to attend a performance of *Come From Away*, the Broadway show on tour, at the Flynn Theater. This is an exciting opportunity for Hazen music and drama students to experience a fully-staged, professional musical theater production.

Congratulations to senior Grace Cloutier, who was accepted by audition to the highly competitive **New England Music Festival Chorus**. Congratulations as well to the twelve students who were accepted by audition to the Vermont Northeast District Music Festival: **Juniper Book (chorus), Chloe Cloutier (chorus), Grace Cloutier (chorus), Manny Fliegelman (band), Ethan Gann (chorus), Ursa Goldenrose (chorus), Will Helms (chorus), Lewis LaPierre (band), Abe Leveillee (chorus), Quinn Molleur (chorus), Seville Murphy (band), and Daniel Pougner (band)**. Four Hazen students and one Craftsbury student are currently preparing to audition in January for the Vermont All State Music Festival.

After a busy December - featuring winter concerts for middle and high school, a coffee house open mic night, a chorus performance at the Craftsbury Community Care Center, and a school-day concert for Hardwick Elementary fifth and sixth graders - Hazen's music students are learning new music in preparation for spring concerts:

Middle School Band & Chorus Spring Concert: Wednesday, April 17, at 7:00 p.m.

High School Band & Chorus Spring Concert: Thursday, April 18, at 7:00 p.m.

Coffee House: Wednesday, March 13, at 6:00 p.m.

Visual Arts

This year Mrs. Camber, Art Teacher at Hazen Union, is sponsoring a chapter of the National Junior Art Honor Society for students in grade 8. Last month, this small group of dedicated art students worked diligently to create beautiful hand painted papers that they then collaged, making winter landscape scenes on holiday cards. The students were excited to distribute these cards to their middle school teachers on the last day of school before the break. Hazen's NJAHS is looking forward to another community building art project later in the winter, possibly something fun for Valentine's Day!

Craftsbury Schools

Winter Artist Showcase: Wednesday, February 21, 2024, at 6:30 p.m. (Snow date: Tuesday, March 12, 2024 @ 6:30 p.m.)

We are happy to announce that the Theater/Communication Arts class and Art Class at Craftsbury Schools are collaborating to present a Winter Artist Showcase. We are hoping to present students' original works ranging from live performances, theater, electronic media, film, and all forms of their artistic expression. Craftsbury teachers, Robert Toms and Alayne Tetor, along with the students, are excited to share their creative journey. We hope you can join us.

OSSU Art in Bloom: Mark your calendars for the OSSU Art in Bloom Celebration on Tuesday, May 14, 2024! This year's celebration will invite students in grades 4-6 to spend a day at Highland Center for the Arts (HCA) in Greensboro and will feature a music and theater matinee performance by those students. The celebration will be followed by Hazen Union's Senior Solos and Small Ensembles concert, also at HCA, that evening. Student artwork from grades 4-12 will also be on display for all to enjoy. All members of our local and school communities (Craftsbury Schools, Hardwick Elementary, Lakeview Elementary, Woodbury Elementary, Wolcott Elementary, and Hazen Union School) are invited to celebrate the arts with us this spring!

Athletics Update: The winter sports season is in full-swing! We encourage you to come out to a game, meet, match, or race to cheer our students on!

Elementary - 5th and 6th Grade Nordic Ski Team: All OSSU 5th and 6th grade elementary students are invited to join a 5-8 middle level Nordic ski team at Hazen Union. If interested, please complete [this form](#). Official signups are on the [Hazen Union athletics page](#). For information about transportation, practice, equipment, etc., please contact Coach English at menglish@ossu.org.

Afterschool Nordic Ski Team for OSSU Students in Grades 3-12: Are you interested in joining a new and exciting sport? If so, please complete this [Form](#) so we can assess interest. We meet at Hazen Union on Mondays for grades 3 and up and on Tuesdays for grades 4 and up; we ski from 3:30-4:30 p.m. Transportation is available from Woodbury Elementary and Wolcott Elementary. Bring Nordic equipment (skis, boots, poles) if you have them; if you don't, contact us and we will get you equipment! Questions? Contact Coach English: menglish@ossu.org.

Hazen Union Athletics:

Cross Country: Congratulations to Cassandra Royer who was named Female Cross Country Runner of the year by the Caledonian Record. Royer finished her senior season with three first place finishes, a fifth place finish at the NVAC Championships and a fifth place finish in the Division III State Championship at Thetford.

Varsity Boys Basketball: The boys are off to a fast start this season with a 5-0 record including winning their fifth consecutive Dave Morse Tournament Championship over Williamstown 72-27.

Varsity Girls Basketball: The girls are off to another great start this year with a 4-1 record that includes a win over Division IV Champion West Rutland, ending their 40 game winning streak.

Indoor Track: The track team has already gone to the University of Vermont twice this year for competitions and are excited to go to Norwich for a new event hosted by St. Johnsbury Academy next weekend.

Craftsbury Schools Athletics:

New Craftsbury Interim Athletic & Activities Director: We are thrilled to announce that Sarah Hunt has been chosen as Craftsbury's Interim Athletic and Activities Director. Drawing from her experience as a high school and college athlete, a former high school coach and teacher, and as a parent of a student-athlete at Craftsbury Schools, Hunt is well positioned and eager to embrace this new role. You can read the full story and Sara's bio [here](#).

New Craftsbury Athletics Facebook page! Please follow Craftsbury Athletics on their [NEW Facebook page](#) or visit the [website](#).

Varsity Boys Basketball: From Head Coach Brandon Berry: "Some of our basketball highlights include a season-high 25 point game from Dylan Washer against Richford and a hard fought game against Blue Mountain, where we were able to take our first lead of the season, even though we lost."

Nordic Racing: From Head Coach Hallie Grossman: "The ski team has had limited race opportunities due to fickle weather. We are excited to start the new year strong with races both this week and next at the Craftsbury Outdoor Center!"

Middle School Coed Basketball: From Head Coach Mark Royan: "The Middle School Chargers had a great win on January 3 against People's Academy! They exhibited strong teamwork and made some great shots. The next game is Friday, January 5, against Troy at home starting at 6:00 p.m. We would love to have some fans come and cheer us on!"

Bowling: Bowling has their first home match this Saturday, January 6, at Missisquoi Lanes in Lowell. Please come support the Charger Bowling Team!

3/4/5 Basketball: The grade school team is undefeated so far, winning both of their games!

Craftsbury Booster Club Bingo Night Athletics Fundraiser: Join us on Friday, March 8, at 6 p.m. (doors open at 5:30 p.m.) for a fundraiser for Craftsbury Athletics! \$5 per bingo card; food will be available for purchase. To donate a bingo prize (valued at \$50 or more), contact [April Royan](#).

Nordic Ski Club and Winter Wellness at Lakeview - Open to Mountain View Students: We're excited to announce that there will be a K-6 Nordic Ski Club at Lakeview on Thursdays from 3:00-4:30 p.m. for ten sessions beginning January 4 through March 14, 2024. This is open to all Mountain View families based on available spaces. [Click this link to learn more and to register!](#)

Woodbury Elementary Athletics: Basketball is in full swing, and our players are excited for games! If you or anyone you know would like to ref any games, we are desperately in need of refs for our home games. Please reach out to [Amber Foster](#). [Click this link to view the schedule on our website](#) and come out and support our players!

Lakeview Elementary Athletics: Basketball is in full swing, and our players are excited for games! If you or anyone you know would like to ref any games, we are desperately in need of refs for our home games. Please reach out to [Amber Foster](#). [Click this link to view the schedule on our website](#) and come out and support our players!

Hardwick Elementary Athletics: Basketball is well underway, and all teams have played in their first games of the season. Please come out and support your Bobcat teams this season. If you or anyone you know would like to ref any games, we are desperately in need of refs for our home games. Please reach out to [Amber Foster](#). [Click this link to view the schedule on our website](#).

Wolcott Elementary Athletics: Our 5/6 boys and 5/6 girls basketball teams are playing games and we are looking forward to an awesome season!

Weather Closures: The snow has made its official appearance and it's time to think winter safety! Remember that many things factor into making decisions about closures, delays, and early releases. Our school district is vast geographically and varies considerably in elevation. Although you may not be experiencing adverse weather/conditions at your residence, others in our district might be experiencing a radically different weather landscape. Our buses need to be able to safely navigate all of our diverse locales. To stay informed, it's imperative that we have your updated contact information, including primary contacts and emergency contacts. [Log into the PowerSchool parent portal](#) to check your contact information today. You can check closures at WCAX and also help us spread the word through our social media channels. Follow OSSU and share posts [on Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#).

I think that is it for now. Let's hope for better weather going into January. We have already missed four days of school. And to keep with the four-day work week tradition, we ended up with four days the week we got back. Always feel free to reach out to me, and please continue to keep updated by following news on our [OSSU website](#) and school websites, as well as our [Facebook](#), [Instagram](#), and [LinkedIn](#) pages.

David Baker
Superintendent of Schools
Orleans Southwest Supervisory Union

