**E. Ethel Little School**

**Blue Ribbon Ceremony**

**January 27, 2020**

Good Morning and welcome to the E. Ethel Little School Blue Ribbon Celebration! We are so excited to have you here with us today. Special thanks to:

* Governor Charlie Baker
* Representative Brad Jones
* Senator Bruce Tarr \*
* Town Administrator Michael Gilleberto
* Members of the Select Board
* Members of the School Committee
* Superintendent Dr. Patrick Daly
* Retired Superintendents Kathleen Willis and Jon Bernard.
* My colleagues and members of the Administrative Council
* Members of the Little School PTO
* My husband Wayne, daughter Samantha and son-in-law, Ryan.
* And most importantly… To our most fabulous faculty, staff and students

Thank you all for taking time out of your busy schedules to be here with us today!

So here we are! I must say, the last 18 months have been an amazing time for all of us at the Little School and I’m a little sorry that 2019 has come to an end. It’s been a time filled with pride and celebration. In September of 2018, the accountability data was released and we were surprised to have been designated as 1 of 52 “schools of recognition” in Massachusetts. Superintendent Jon Bernard, Patrick Daly and I accepted that award on behalf of the Little School Community at a State House ceremony in June of 2019. At that time, I thought…wow…this is pretty awesome. “It doesn’t get much better than this.” Or so I thought. A few months later…and I will never forget this day. I received a frantic text message from Superintendent Bernard. Actually, I believe I received two text messages in rapid succession and I say they were frantic because I remember lots of exclamation marks. “Check your email…check your email.” I remember thinking, Oh No…what now? Fearing the worst (as most principals would), I returned to my computer and cautiously checked for the news of an impending bus issue or a parent concern. I have to say, I think I read that email five times until I could wrap my head around what it was saying. We were informed that the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education had nominated the Little School for a National Blue Ribbon Award. Honestly, I had no idea what that meant. So I Googled it. I found out that the award has been given by the U.S. Department of Education since 1982 and that only a handful of schools from Massachusetts receive the award each year. To say I was stunned that day is putting it mildly. We soon came to realize that a very detailed application would need to be completed in the coming months. Thank you to the members of the Little School faculty and community who assisted with the completion of what ultimately ended up being a 27-page, single spaced document. I could not have done that without you.

Months passed, the seasons changed and we waited for word. The waiting was torturous. Finally, on September 26, 2019, the formal announcement came via email with those long-awaited words, (and I quote)… “Congratulations! The E. Ethel Little Elementary School in North Reading has been designated an Exemplary High Performing School and National Blue Ribbon School for 2019 by U. S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos. Your school is one of 362 schools in the nation and one of six schools from Massachusetts to be recognized in 2019.” It was truly one of the proudest days of my life and certainly of my career. I was bursting at the seams that morning to share the news and as we gathered the staff and students in the cafeteria for the videotaped announcement, you could feel the overwhelming excitement and pride from everyone. It was a day filled with tears and cheers…a very thrilling time for not only the Little School, but for the North Reading Public Schools.

If I thought the field trip to Boston was special, well you can only imagine how we felt to be travelling to Washington, DC to attend the Blue Ribbon conference and to accept the award. Jon Bernard, Patrick Daly and I, were joined by educators from all over the country for this two-day event. As we walked on stage to receive the plaque, I could only imagine how wonderful it would have been to have all of you there with us…For this is an award that belongs to everyone at the Little School. We all had a hand in this achievement.

As I look back, I am actually grateful for the arduous application process. It afforded me the opportunity to reflect on every aspect of our school. A strong curriculum, expanding technology, challenging STEAM initiatives, a robust art and music program, and a commitment to health and wellness, are a huge part of who we are. We constantly seek ways to ensure that our students are prepared for the future. All this is vital to the success of a school. But most importantly, what became obvious to me throughout this process was that, while all these things are important, it is the culture and the people of this community who make us successful. And I mean that. Our faculty and staff are simply outstanding. They work tirelessly in the classroom, volunteer for a wide variety of committees and they work collaboratively to constantly seek ways to improve their practice. They make decisions based on what’s best for children. I can speak from the heart about them as I have a unique perspective. I was once a classroom teacher in this very building. I have known most of this staff for over 16 years. These are great people! Smart, hard-working, compassionate, and driven. They care deeply for each other and most importantly, love the children and will do anything for them. Whether you are a teacher, a paraprofessional, a nurse, a secretary, a custodian, or a food service worker, your presence has made a difference in the lives of hundreds of children. What better reward is there? I am honored to work with you every day and I applaud all of you for your hard work and success.

I must extend a special “thank you” to the custodial staff and the grounds crew for all their hard work always, and especially over the past few weeks , as they worked day and night to get the building prepared for this week’s event. Thank you for all you do.

We are blessed to be supported by a strong senior administration and school committee that always keeps the best interest of the children in mind when faced with making critical decisions. I applaud you for all you do to ensure that our schools have what they need to succeed. Thank you to my administrative colleagues and past and present superintendents who have made children their central focus, who have been mentors, confidants, and a guiding force in all we do and for making all our schools the excellent institutions they are. Thank you for your unwavering support and commitment.

Our school families and Parent Teacher Organization are simply amazing. They support our vision and share in our quest to provide unique and engaging opportunities for our children. Our PTO has been instrumental in providing technology to our classrooms, field trips, enrichment programs and exciting family events to build community spirit. Let me tell you, if you want anything done, give it to the PTO. When I said that we needed a new playground, we had a new 6 figure, ADA compliant structure within 18 months. When we needed SmartBoards in the classrooms, they provided. Thank you for your generosity and for all you do. You are a huge part of what makes this school successful.

And finally…there are our students (our kids)…the reason we are here, the reason we come to work every day, and the reason we are celebrating this award. You would be hard-pressed to find a nicer group of children, all 348 of them). Our kids arrive at school ready to learn and they are genuinely happy to be here. They admire and respect their teachers, they are steadfast in their support of each other, they persevere and try their best. They will build strong friendships here that will continue to grow year after year. No doubt, the kids are the best part of our job and we congratulate them on a job well done. This Blue Ribbon award belongs to all of you (and to our sixth and seventh graders, now at the Middle School who were here in the Spring of 2018 and whose scores were a huge factor in this success), some of who will be singing here today.

To all of you, I hope you will be filled with a sense of pride when you see the Blue Ribbon flag flying outside the Little School, for it symbolizes the hard work and shared vision of this entire school community.

In closing, I’d like to share the words of Henry David Thoreau, “Success usually comes to those who are too busy to be looking for it.” And I would say that this is absolutely true. Educators are busy people. We don’t look for accolades and we never expect to win awards. So this past year has been an incredible time for all of us. We recognize that our recent success was the result of a team effort and we know our work is never done. An hour from now it will be business as usual. But for now, we celebrate! So, from our Little School family to all of you, we thank you all for being here today to share in this joyous occasion.