

## Shining the light on the Class of 2021

*By Matt Haney - MDI High School Principal*

It is an honor to have been asked to share my thoughts about the Mount Desert Island High School Class of 2021. While it's undoubtedly true that we have collectively had our share of struggles, I'd like to use this space to shine the light on some of what the class of 2021 has learned.

We learned how much our families, community and educators love our students. Spring of 2020 was about staying connected, supporting each other and coming to grips with our emerging reality. We learned how important we are to each other. We finished out that school year with a renewed appreciation for our need for connection and how badly we missed each other.

We learned how complicated change is in schools, and how vital it was to our students that we bring them back into the building in September. The summer was filled with a mixture of determination, creativity and collaboration all aimed at putting together a senior year for this group of students. Those involved in the planning knew how critical it was that students returned to rigorous and meaningful educational experiences.

When we came back to school, what we learned from each other transcended the content areas that we teach in school. We invited students into our homes via our computer cameras, and they invited us into theirs. We realized that we were sharing a once in a generation experience that we could only endure through empathy and love.

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When we returned to school in person, we realized that maybe we didn't need to start school at a time that caused our young adults to wake up well before the sun. Maybe changing our routines at school to allow for just a little more time for the students to breathe and enjoy each other's company would mean that not only would they be healthier and happier, but that they would also be set up to thrive during their time spent in classrooms.

Throughout this school year, there has been a team working tirelessly to ensure that the Class of 2021 has had the senior year they've been working towards their whole lives. While very little looked quite the same as it did in the "before" times, students have had opportunities to participate in performing arts, athletics, school-based clubs and many other previously taken for granted privileges.

A dedicated group of parents even pulled together to replicate some of the rites of passage that as a school were not feasible to organize this year.

While it's certainly true that many things have gone wrong in the last 15 months, my hope is that, in the end, among the messages that stand the test of time are that perseverance does pay off, and that the greater MDI community loves its young adults and will move mountains to support them. I wish the Class of 2021 my heartfelt congratulations for their accomplishments and will miss them greatly.