

Opinion

SHAPING OUR FUTURE TOGETHER/October 23, 2014

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As the leaves fall and we begin to don our cold-weather clothing, I am warmed by the fact that exciting things are happening in our schools. Since last spring, the Winnisquam Regional School District has been busy developing a Strategic Plan that will guide our work over the next five years. Beginning today, I would like to share aspects of this plan and its implementation because our vision for success includes every leader and citizen in our community. Allow me to explain.

The future of our community depends on how well we prepare our young people for the rapidly changing society they will soon inherit. In the old days, it didn't matter if each and every student received a great education because there were jobs for everyone and we lived in simpler times.

Today, an aging population and a hyper-connected and global society require that we develop a much larger pool of talent than existed in previous generations—and that each individual in that pool have a broader and deeper set of skills than has ever been necessary. In fact, many of the jobs that our children will hold in the coming years haven't even been invented yet; hence, our children need a well rounded education that enables them to adapt to the times.

In other words, the world is changing and so must our schools.

The 20th Century school system focused on “the 3Rs”—reading, writing, and arithmetic. Today, the 3Rs are still absolutely necessary, but they are not sufficient. Today, every young person needs to walk out the door of our high school having mastered the basics, plus an array of skills in the areas of communication, collaboration, problem solving, technology, analysis and synthesis. This is a tall order, but one that we must fulfill if our students are to thrive in the years ahead.

How do we get there? Fortunately, we have a good foundation in place. But to move our system from the 20th to the 21st Century, we have quite a bit of remodeling to do. Imagine you live in a 1920's home. While it has many wonderful features, you surely don't want to live in a home with 1920's plumbing or electricity. In fact, it would be illegal to do so. Similarly, while we have many assets in our district, we must remodel how teaching and learning happens. Fortunately, there is a lot of new research on the

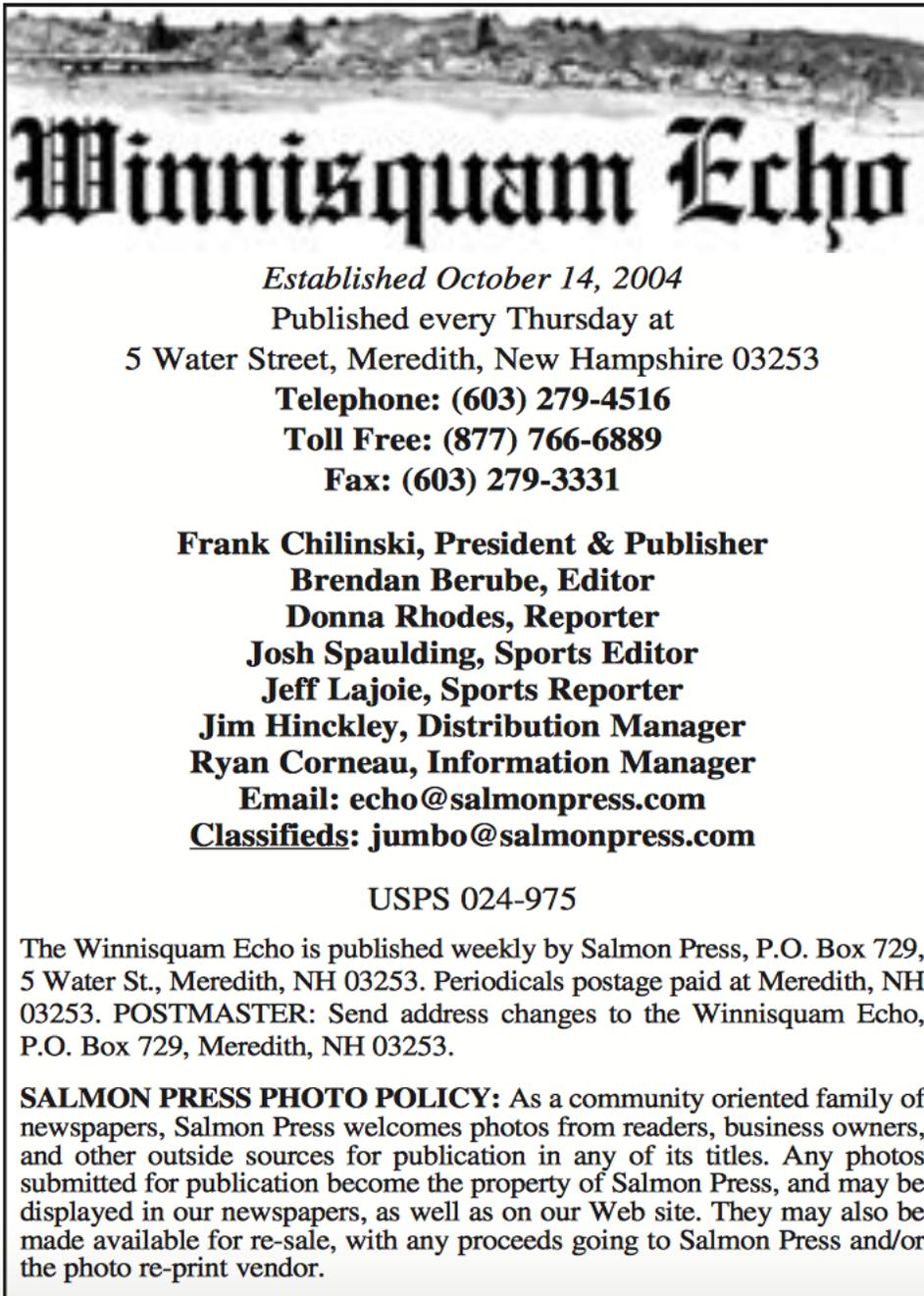
brain that can guide us in our efforts to update our system, and new technology that makes innovation possible.

Change is not easy, but I am confident that, over the course of several years, we can create 21st Century learning environments that are second to none. Just before the summer, a diverse group of people came together at a community forum to learn about what it means to be a high-performing organization and we continue to learn about the key elements of a world-class school system in the 21st Century.

One important element is community participation. Previously, school and community existed as separate entities. There was very little connection between the two, and oftentimes the relationships have been adversarial—a competition for resources. This has been true across the country.

In a world-class 21st Century district, the community is closely connected to the schools. Business and community leaders share their knowledge with students, by coming into our schools and by inviting students into their workplaces. In addition, young people are charged with solving real problems in the community, whether it's developing a new recycling plan or helping town planners think about youth-friendly public spaces. WRSD is looking to all of you to become a part of us. It's a strategy to build capacity, and to bring us together as a community in more meaningful ways.

In the coming months, this column will become a place where I share pieces of our new strategy as we put it into place. Stay tuned, and please feel free to share your thoughts and ideas with me.



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