

LEADING BY EXAMPLE

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HIGH SCHOOL PRINCIPAL JENNIFER SEUSING TEACHES LESSONS EVERYONE SHOULD LEARN



“Every day is an adventure,” she says, “I liken this position to sitting in the front seat of a roller coaster, heading down a huge hill, hands up in the air, screaming at the top of my lungs—with sheer delight and excitement! This job is the ride of a lifetime.”

—Jennifer Seusing '90

Some people start college knowing exactly what they want to do, and they do exactly that. For others, the direction may seem clear at the beginning, but by the time they finish their bachelor’s degree, they’re doing something completely different. Jennifer Seusing’90 is one of the latter—and for more than one reason, her eventual choice was all about her family.

As principal of Nashua High School South, Seusing is continuing a family tradition—she is the daughter, granddaughter and great-granddaughter of educators. “Ironically, my mother actually told me not to become a teacher, [instead] become a doctor or lawyer,” she says. Seusing initially followed her mother’s advice, earning an associate degree in business from Rivier in 1985. But with two small children at home, she soon realized that she wanted a profession with more flexibility and a more family-friendly schedule. “I earned my bachelor’s degree in elementary education from Rivier while working fulltime at a local day care, raising a family and attending classes at night,” she says. “A very long five years!” Upon graduation, she was offered a position as second-grade teacher at Mt. Pleasant Elementary School in Nashua.

Her 15 years in the profession have taken her from that position to assistant principal of the then-combined Nashua High School, then to principal of Dr. Crisp Elementary School (also in Nashua) to her current position as leader of a high-school with more than 2,200 students and 200 faculty and staff members. Moving from teaching into administration, she feels, gave her the opportunity to impact change at a greater level, while still allowing her to impart knowledge. “Even as an administrator, I am teaching every day,” she says. “Students, staff, parents, community members—I never stop teaching. My school is my classroom.”

Ask Seusing about her typical day and you’ll find out there’s no such thing. And for her, that’s the beauty of it. “Every day is an adventure,” she says, “I liken this position to sitting in the front seat of a roller coaster, heading down a huge hill, hands up in the air, screaming at the top of my lungs—with

sheer delight and excitement! This job is the ride of a lifetime.” That ride generally involves the regular school day, plus extracurricular activities and community events, which she considers particularly important given that she has only been in her position since the beginning of the 2005-2006 school year.

An important part of Seusing’s position is championing her profession to young people. “I tell anyone who asks, particularly students, that there is no more rewarding profession than teaching,” she says. Her own professional rewards include working with “a phenomenally talented, creative, and spirited student population, and such a positive, innovative, and caring staff.” Still, there are challenges: “As a year-old lifetime Weight Watchers member, not eating the warm cookies that are baking every day right across the hall in our school store.” To say nothing of her overloaded e-mail “in” box. “I receive, on average, 150 to 200 e-mails per day,” she says. “If I get one day behind, I’m doomed!”

Nonetheless, Seusing always finds time for her family. Her husband, John, is a captain with the Nashua Police Department. Their son, Christopher, is now a third-year law student at Suffolk University Law School, and their daughter, Amy, is a senior at Union College, majoring in psychology and Spanish. And then there’s Bailey—“my third child”—a 4 1/2-year-old chocolate Labrador. “I couldn’t have made it to where I am without my husband and children,” she says. She is especially grateful for their support during the past year, when she lost 75 pounds. “That was significant in my gaining the momentum and confidence to take on a job such as this.”

What does her future hold? “Hopefully, I’ll still be here at NHS South,” she says. “I’d also like to be a consultant, write a book, work on my Ph.D.—we’ll see.” With her husband planning to retire in seven years, she expects new adventures to pop up. “My mother-in-law told me that the best time of my life would be in my 40s and 50s,” she says. “I couldn’t agree with her more. You feel as though all your previous efforts—going to school while raising a family and working full-time—are finally paying off and you can take charge of your life. When everything falls into place, and you feel totally at home in a position, as I do now, you are able to confidently and effectively handle anything that comes your way.” ■

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