

January 2024

December was packed with the vibrant spirit of the winter holidays permeating all aspects of the Monarch school environment. The learning theme focused on the “gift of giving”, and our students explored many ways of helping others in the community, especially during the holiday season. Classroom projects included raising funds to purchase and donate pet supplies to a local animal shelter; a canned food/dry goods drive for a local food pantry; thank you cards for Monarch staff, friends, and family; and more.

This generous and heartwarming atmosphere has certainly carried over as our staff and students returned from the winter school break with energy and enthusiasm, ready to reconnect with one another and re-engage in their learning routines. Anyone driving by either of our Monarch school campuses can see the marquee signs displaying a New Year message that reflects the excitement of our school and the positive energy that we would like to share with our community:

**“So Much in Store
As We Welcome 2024”**

While every new year brings hope for positive things to come, 2024 is especially notable for Monarch as it marks our 50th anniversary. It is important to understand the context for this significant milestone in our history.

Beginning in the late 1960s, visionary community members came together to organize and create a system to support children with disabilities. This work laid the foundation that ultimately led to the official designation as a nonprofit school, in 1974, which is why we recognize and celebrate 50 years of service this year.

The founders of the Monarch School of New England were truly pioneers for the right of *all children* to be educated, as the federal law guaranteeing children with special needs a free and appropriate education was not established until late 1975.

It is remarkable that several years before that, here in southern New Hampshire, the establishment of quality programming for children of all abilities was already taking shape. Those who understood the importance of stepping outside of the mainstream to make a positive difference in the lives of children and young adults with disabilities did not wait for a rule or law to tell them to do so. The staff, families, and community members in those foundational years recognized the importance of a school that celebrates the potential in *every* individual, and provides opportunities for *all* individuals to reach their fullest potential.

We have much to remember and honor as we mark our 50th anniversary. We equally have much to look forward to as we continue to seek innovative approaches and new possibilities to assist our students to flourish. In the coming years, Monarch is poised to not only maintain our current high quality of student services in the nurturing, robust, educational environment that we’re known for, but to also embrace the pioneering spirit of our founders as we strive for excellence in Monarch’s special way of ensuring our students’ success.

Wishing all the best for this year and many to follow,
Jeanette Souther, Executive Director