

November Staff Dev. News

November 1st, 2025

SPS Mission

Seward Public Schools - a district rooted in excellence - in cooperation with family and community members is committed to the development of the whole student and affirms that all students will have the skills to become productive, resilient, and contributing members of their community.

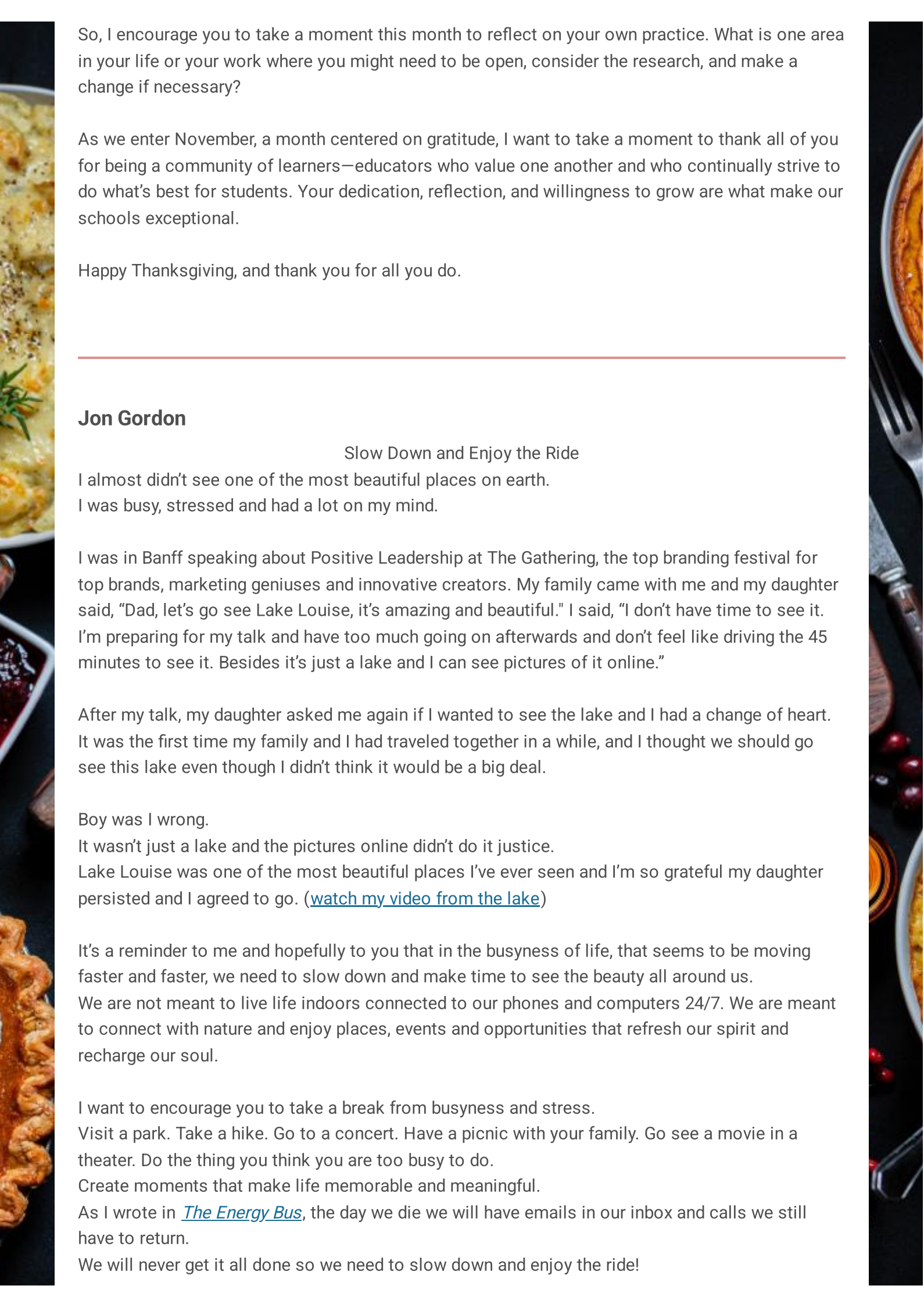
Message From Matt: When We Know Better, We Do Better

I've always considered myself a flexible person—someone who pays attention to current research and is willing to make changes in practice when needed. After all, when we know better, we should do better.



However, I also hold some deeply rooted convictions about teaching reading. Yesterday, I attended a literacy training for district leaders, and as the presenter began sharing some of the latest research and best practices in literacy, I noticed my heart rate increase and my frustration rise. I asked myself why I was having these feelings when I've always trusted research.

After reflecting, I realized that many of my beliefs about teaching reading were formed long ago—shaped by incredible professors, reinforced through my own classroom experiences, strengthened by outstanding professional development during my time at a Reading First school, and validated by the success I've seen in the schools I've served. These beliefs are foundational to who I am as an educator. But I also realized something else: sometimes we have to pause, listen, and truly consider new perspectives. I stopped my brain from pushing back and instead opened my mind to what the presenter was saying. I thought about the students we still struggle to bring to grade-level literacy, and I recognized that in order to reach *every* learner, we may need to think differently. The research she shared challenged me—and that's a good thing.



So, I encourage you to take a moment this month to reflect on your own practice. What is one area in your life or your work where you might need to be open, consider the research, and make a change if necessary?

As we enter November, a month centered on gratitude, I want to take a moment to thank all of you for being a community of learners—educators who value one another and who continually strive to do what's best for students. Your dedication, reflection, and willingness to grow are what make our schools exceptional.

Happy Thanksgiving, and thank you for all you do.

Jon Gordon

Slow Down and Enjoy the Ride

I almost didn't see one of the most beautiful places on earth.
I was busy, stressed and had a lot on my mind.

I was in Banff speaking about Positive Leadership at The Gathering, the top branding festival for top brands, marketing geniuses and innovative creators. My family came with me and my daughter said, "Dad, let's go see Lake Louise, it's amazing and beautiful." I said, "I don't have time to see it. I'm preparing for my talk and have too much going on afterwards and don't feel like driving the 45 minutes to see it. Besides it's just a lake and I can see pictures of it online."

After my talk, my daughter asked me again if I wanted to see the lake and I had a change of heart. It was the first time my family and I had traveled together in a while, and I thought we should go see this lake even though I didn't think it would be a big deal.

Boy was I wrong.

It wasn't just a lake and the pictures online didn't do it justice.

Lake Louise was one of the most beautiful places I've ever seen and I'm so grateful my daughter persisted and I agreed to go. ([watch my video from the lake](#))

It's a reminder to me and hopefully to you that in the busyness of life, that seems to be moving faster and faster, we need to slow down and make time to see the beauty all around us.

We are not meant to live life indoors connected to our phones and computers 24/7. We are meant to connect with nature and enjoy places, events and opportunities that refresh our spirit and recharge our soul.

I want to encourage you to take a break from busyness and stress.

Visit a park. Take a hike. Go to a concert. Have a picnic with your family. Go see a movie in a theater. Do the thing you think you are too busy to do.

Create moments that make life memorable and meaningful.

As I wrote in [The Energy Bus](#), the day we die we will have emails in our inbox and calls we still have to return.

We will never get it all done so we need to slow down and enjoy the ride!

The Power of Being Explicit

The Power of Being Explicit

Inspired by *It's Possible* by Pati Montgomery and Angela Hanlin

One of the central messages in *It's Possible* is that great reading instruction doesn't happen by accident—it happens by design. Pati Montgomery reminds us that **explicit instruction** isn't about making learning easy; it's about making it *clear*. When we teach explicitly, we tell students exactly what they need to know, why it matters, and how to do it. We model, we guide, we provide practice, and we give feedback. There's no guessing game for students—they see, hear, and experience what good reading looks like.

Montgomery challenges educators to think about how intentional our instruction truly is. Do we clearly state our learning goals? Do students know what success looks like? In explicit classrooms, teachers don't assume students will "pick up" phonics patterns, vocabulary, or comprehension strategies by exposure alone. Instead, skills are taught systematically and directly—step by step, with multiple opportunities for students to apply what they've learned. It's teaching that leaves nothing to chance.

Finally, Montgomery points out that explicit instruction is not just a teacher habit—it's a schoolwide commitment. For explicit instruction to thrive, schools need shared systems: structured literacy blocks, consistent routines, and ongoing professional learning that keeps everyone aligned. When we as educators create clarity for students, we create confidence—and when every teacher in a building commits to being explicit, every student gains access to the tools they need to become a successful reader.

Patriotic Holidays

Nebraska Revised Statute 79-724 requires the following:

Appropriate patriotic exercises suitable to the occasion shall be held under the direction of the superintendent in every public, private, denominational, and parochial school on George Washington's birthday, Abraham Lincoln's birthday, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s birthday, **Native American Heritage Day**, Constitution Day, Memorial Day, **Veterans Day**, and **Thanksgiving Day**, or on the day or week preceding or following such holiday, if the school is in session.

Veterans Day is November 11th

Thanksgiving Day is November 27th



Seward Public Schools

