

Community Unit School District 200

Administration and School Service Center

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Dear Families:

With the beginning of the second semester in just a few days, I want to bring you up to date on a few topics that may be of interest. Most important is our continued effort to help all students learn at high levels. Preliminary data indicate that we are making great progress toward that goal.

Results of State Testing

We continue to wait for the state to release official ISAT, IMAGE and IAA results from last spring's testing. This includes final scores for the district and its schools, as well as individual student results. The delay is significant in that schools and individual teachers are setting goals and changing instructional strategies without verifiable information from the tests. Nonetheless, the school improvement process is proceeding at each building and individual students continue to be targeted for extra help if other indicators show they are struggling to meet state standards.

Preliminary data for the elementary and middle schools provide evidence that scores on the state tests have increased for the fourth consecutive year. Not only did the percentage of students meeting and exceeding the Illinois Learning Standards in reading and math increase, but the achievement gap narrowed between the subgroups identified by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

Scores ranged from 90.6 percent to 96.8 percent meeting or exceeding state standards in math in grades three through eight. In reading, scores ranged from 88.7 percent to 91.1 percent. This is significant because it shows improvement over time and clearly indicates that the District's multi-faceted efforts to improve student achievement are working. These excellent scores and the progress that lower achieving students are making is a great tribute to our teachers and staff.

The high school data is not yet available, but will be reported as soon as it is received.

Citizens Finance Committee

A new committee comprised primarily of District 200 residents began meeting in December to recommend how the District can achieve financial stability and predictability. The committee is an outgrowth of a Board of Education goal adopted three years ago which called for broad community involvement in identifying the components of public education that residents most value. To that end, more than 1000 people participated in focus group discussions on the topic and another 500 took part in a community survey. A writing committee subsequently took that information and developed new vision and mission statements to reflect the feedback received. The finance committee will be guided in its work by these statements as it develops recommendations for the Board of Education. This committee is different than those we have had in the last several years. Earlier committees were charged with recommending budget reductions. While that could be a recommendation of this new committee, its broader purpose is to look at the financial outlook long term.

Speaking of finances, the budget for 2006-07 reflects the District's continuing efforts to contain costs and minimize reductions that directly impact classroom operations. The education fund—the main operating fund—is balanced, while other operating funds show a small negative balance. That is because money from those funds has been diverted to the education fund through the tax levy process. In future budgets, the District will have to adjust that practice in order to rebuild balances in the transportation and operations and maintenance funds.

Wellness Policy

All school districts that participate in the National School Lunch Program were required by federal legislation to adopt a wellness policy prior to the beginning of the current school year. Each policy must contain 1) Goals for nutrition education, physical activity and other school-based activities that promote student wellness; 2) Nutrition guidelines for all food sold on campus; 3) A plan for measuring the policy's effectiveness; and 4) Involvement from a broad group of individuals in the school community. A committee of school personnel, parents and community members was convened last year to develop the policy, which was adopted by the Board of Education in August. A copy of the policy can be downloaded from our website at www.cusd200.org. I have asked each school to form a Wellness Committee with parent representation to identify ways of implementing the policy in their school. The committees will assess what is happening in their building against the policy goals and then select three to five goals to begin implementing this year.

2007-08 School Calendar

Developing a school calendar that meets the needs of all families and staff is nearly an impossible task, especially in a district like ours that serves students from preschool through high school. We follow the recommendations of the Regional Office of Education as much as possible so that families that work or attend school in different districts have basically the same vacation dates. The calendar adopted by the Board on December 13 closely follows the county proposal, especially for the holiday and spring breaks.

In a somewhat related matter, we have had a number of questions about the timing of high school final exams. We have tried several approaches to exams in the past few years. This year we piloted an exam schedule that had students taking finals during the four days before the holiday break. The finals covered material taught to date. During the first week back at school in January, teachers are to cover the remaining material in the course, ending with a test if they choose. In any case, the week is intended to be one of full instruction so that all course objectives are taught before the semester ends. We will evaluate how this process worked and decide if it will be continued next year. There is a growing interest, particularly at the high school level, of having the semester end prior to the winter break. To have semesters of equal length would mean starting school earlier in August. Several years ago, we surveyed families to get their feedback on such a change and there were mixed responses. Elementary school and middle school families overwhelmingly preferred a later start while high school families would like to start earlier in August because many of their students have already become involved in school activities. Because we are a unit District, I cannot support different calendars for different levels. In the future, we may choose to reconsider this issue with the involvement of our families.

Hubble Middle School Update

Much has been written and reported about the Board's intent to build a new middle school in the southwest part of the school district. The District has tried to keep residents informed of the

correct information through our website at www.cusd200.org, but there continues to be some misinformation circulating. Below I will give you a succinct update on where things stand as of this writing:

- We are still negotiating a purchase price for an 18-acre site west of Herrick Road between Warrenville and Galusha Roads.
- Our first priority is and always has been the safety of students and staff.
- In response to concerns raised about the safety of the site due to its proximity to the BP Naperville Campus, several environmental tests of the property have been conducted, all finding no environmental problems associated with the site.
- Two additional steps are being taken to provide more information on the site's safety. One is a review by the Illinois Environmental Protection Agency and the second is a risk assessment based on the site's proximity to the BP facility. The risk assessment report will be presented to the Board of Education this month. The EPA estimates it will respond in a minimum of 90 days.
- If any report concludes that the site has risks greater than those on any other potential school site, the Board will abandon its plan to build there and seek other alternatives.
- The City of Warrenville and BP have an agreement that would allow the District to use vacant BP owned land adjacent to the proposed school site for storm water drainage. This would allow more open, usable space on the school site. While we appreciate the opportunity to use the BP's property, it is not required to make the school site viable.
- Land recently purchased by the Forest Preserve from BP across the street from the proposed school site is not contaminated. It has never been used by BP, which wants the land to remain as open space.
- At the December 13 Board Meeting, Legat Architects presented updated costs of new construction and renovation. The cost of a new school based on the needs and size of the program currently offered at Hubble is \$46.8 million, not including the land. Renewing and renovating the existing building based on a program driven design is \$55.7 million. Earlier estimates for a new school were based on the same square footage as Monroe Middle School, not the spaces required for delivering the middle school program. Previous estimates for the renovation of the existing building also were based solely on renovating existing spaces, not adjusting them to meet program needs.
- It is less expensive to build a new school on another site because additional costs would be incurred on the existing site for razing the old school and meeting new storm water drainage requirements. In addition, should the property be sold, that money could be used to offset the cost of the new school.

Implementing a long-term solution for Hubble Middle School has taken longer than the Board of Education, Administration or the public had expected. Due to the shortage of available land for school purposes and our inability to reach agreement on a purchase price for the property currently under consideration and others previously considered, we have not been able to move forward. We believe that very shortly we will either have a contract to purchase the site in question or walk away from it and pursue other options.

As always thank you for your continued support of our students and our schools. Best wishes for a healthy and happy new year.

Sincerely,



Gary T. Catalani, Ed.D.
Superintendent of School