

August 16, 2010

Dear Parents of Elementary Students:

It is with great pleasure and the anticipation of wonderful experiences for your children that I welcome you to the new school year. This is my 38th year in education and 30th in North Colonie as a teacher and administrator. As your new Superintendent, I look forward to working with you and your children to provide you with a wonderful start to your child's journey through school.

The opening of school and the first day of attendance for elementary students will be Wednesday, September 8, 2010. Please keep in mind that there is no school Thursday, September 9, due to Rosh Hashanah. Each year all new families to the district are welcomed at the Newcomers' Picnic, it will be held beginning at 4:45 p.m. on Thursday, September 2, 2010, at Shaker High School. Food and beverages are provided by the district, and we hope to see all new families then. In addition, each new family will be provided with free tickets to the Shaker-Colonie football game to be held on Walker Field beginning at 7:30 p.m. We look forward to meeting our new families at this exciting event!

Over the years, the North Colonie Central School District has been recognized by various organizations and publications for academic excellence. In North Colonie, we remain committed to ongoing school and district improvement. To this end, the district focuses on growing and sustaining teaching and learning. We continue to be committed to promoting the growth and development of each child in the North Colonie district.

Each summer, we make improvements to our buildings and the sites around them. Among the projects undertaken this summer were:

- New energy efficient boilers and 19 new unit ventilators at Southgate
- New energy efficient boilers and a building addition to house boilers at Shaker High School in the H-Gym area
- Replaced air handling units in H-Gym and installed new unit ventilators in Upper A and B Wings at the high school
- Installed new T-5 energy efficient lighting, new bleachers, repainted entire ceiling, and refinished entire H-Gym floor at the high school
- Removed asbestos floor tile in auditorium and seven classrooms and replaced with vinyl tile flooring at Latham Ridge
- Upgraded energy management system district-wide to web based version and installed temperature sensors in all district classrooms
- Created resource room in Southgate ASC classroom
- Constructed new serving area in LaFollette cafeteria serving area at the high school
- Installed new air handling unit for gymnasiums at the junior high school
- Installed new roof top air handling unit for Forts Ferry auditorium
- Replaced entry doors at Maplewood
- Replaced entry doors to cafeteria and gymnasium at Boght Hills
- Replaced air handling system for gymnasium and auditorium at Loudonville
- Installed new T-5 energy efficient lighting in gymnasium at Loudonville
- Repainted three banks of hallway lockers in the junior high school
- Installed new fencing around asphalt play area at Loudonville

New York State Testing

State officials announced in July that they were raising the “cut scores” on the New York State tests in grades 3-8 English Language Arts and Mathematics. As a result, North Colonie and schools throughout New York State saw a dip in test scores as a result of these changes. It is important to note that although fewer students were considered “proficient”, student performance remained about the same as in prior years. We want to make clear the fact that your child did not learn any less than last year or that students and teachers did not work as hard as usual. Rather, due to raising the performance bar, the proficiency rate declined. We will continue to review and analyze test data, identify problem areas, and prepare for the upcoming year. We remain committed to providing your children with the very best educational experience possible.

Safety a Priority

Please assist us by reinforcing safety consciousness as students go to and from school. A safe and secure school environment is one in which student learning is enhanced. Our district strives to provide our students with a safe and secure learning environment. Our safety rules will be reinforced by our teachers and bus drivers during the first days of school.

Planning and preparation for possible emergencies is critical. To prepare for a possible emergency, periodically, children participate in bus safety drills. Please stress to your children that they need to be conscious of traffic and other vehicles when at the bus stop and when walking to and from school. In addition, please remind them that crowding or pushing into a bus line can result in an accident. When traveling to school, sporting events, or extra curricular activities on the bus, children are expected to remain in their seats, keep conversation at a moderate level, and exhibit proper behavior.

Each student also will receive the “Handbook of Student Rights and Responsibilities”, which explains the district’s policies and procedures. The book summarizes the district’s behavioral expectations, as well as our disciplinary code. Cooperation among school faculty, principals, students and parents is critical to promoting a positive, safe school climate.

The Town of Colonie Police, in collaboration with the district, has developed a policy regarding sex offender notification. Notebooks that are updated monthly are available in each of the town buildings, as well as in the main offices of all the district schools, the central administration at Goodrich, and the transportation department office; these list all level 2 and 3 sex offenders residing in the Town of Colonie. These books are available for review upon request. In addition, district residents may also visit the Town of Colonie website at www.colonie.org/police to obtain this information. If the Colonie Police Department deems a sex offender to be a serious threat, the district will initiate a mailing to inform all district parents of this threat.

Parent Communication

We have an emergency phone notification system to notify our families of emergencies, such as early closings, or to provide them with additional non-emergency information about the district. E-mail is another way to communicate with your child’s teacher. We encourage parents to share their e-mail addresses with the district through the district web page. Please log onto www.northcolonie.org. You will see a link that will bring you to a form to record your preferred e-

mail address. This will be used as another means to communicate efficiently with our families. We are utilizing other forms of communication as well. North Colonie is now on Twitter. Please visit the district website to find out more and sign up to receive information through Twitter. We will also be implementing the School News Notifier (SNN) this year. Parents will have the opportunity to sign up through the web site or at open houses held in September throughout the district's schools. This service will allow parents to receive frequent and periodic updates about school events, closings, or emergencies via e-mail or text message. Finally, the Parent Portal, available through our student information system, has been opened up for use by all of our elementary schools and Shaker Junior High School. In September, this will be made available to high school parents as well. The Parent Portal provides parents with access to their child's attendance, progress reports, report card, and assessment results and transcripts.

Parent Involvement

Involvement in your child's learning can take many forms and can incorporate experiences both inside and outside of school. Try to incorporate some of these positive experiences in your child's life by way of simple activities such as reading, visits to museums, and attendance at cultural events, including concerts and plays. These are excellent family events that do much to nurture a child's growth and development.

Parents are also welcome to become involved in their child's school. Each school has a building council that works directly with the building principal and faculty on key issues. Your school principal will be able to tell you about the building council and how to become involved with it. The district curriculum steering committees are another venue for participation. Should you be interested in participating in one of the major subject area committees, please contact our Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction at 785-5511, ext. 3377, or email us for more information.

The Board of Education meetings are held monthly and committee meetings on topics such as curriculum, budget, and long range planning are regularly held between these monthly meetings. We encourage you to attend these meetings as they provide our school community with a way in which to gain familiarity with important issues concerning the district. The district web page lists the dates and location of all Board of Education meetings.

We are all well aware of the current financial crisis. This past year was a difficult budget year for North Colonie and the 700 other New York State school districts. Unfortunately, budgetary planning for the 2011-2012 school year will pose even greater challenges. As a result, the district plans to start the budget process earlier than ever with meetings beginning in late September or early October compared to the typical late February to early March start. We encourage you to check the web site and participate actively in the budget process. You may also wish to participate as a part of the district budget committee. Please contact us through the website or by phone at 785-8591 if you wish to part a part of the committee process.

Curriculum and Instruction

Each summer our staff spends time doing curriculum revision and development. Even in difficult financial times, our Board of Education has recognized the need for faculty to refine existing curricula as well as to improve their teaching skills. These summer workshops are

focused on addressing district objectives, aligning curriculum with state standards, continuing collegial dialogue, collaborating and innovating to enhance student learning. We also work throughout the school year in collaboration with the district Staff Development Committee to continuously improve our curriculum and instruction. This past summer, the staff worked on many projects including infusing technology into instruction, revision of the elementary writing curriculum, kindergarten curriculum, and elementary report card as well as English Language Arts, foreign language, mathematics, social studies, science, health education, art, music and career and technical education at all levels, K-12. The combination of thoughtful staff development and new and better technologies enables our students to navigate with 21st century skills.

Finally, we recognize the value of establishing good character. In each of our schools, programs focus on character development and the promotion of a civil society. Through our globalization program we work to promote staff development focused around book clubs that provide our staff with a greater appreciation of diversity.

North Colonie/Shaker Community School Foundation

The North Colonie/Shaker Community School Foundation has been established to support the educational mission of the North Colonie Central School District. The goal of the Foundation is to enrich the overall educational process of the North Colonie Schools by supporting programs and projects that traditionally are not or would not be financed through local tax dollars or other public resources provided by the annual school budget.

Monies raised by the Foundation will be used to support student scholarships, The North Colonie Forum and other improvements to the District that fall outside the scope of the annual budget and might not be initiated or continued without supplemental private funding. This fall we will be holding our first annual fundraising event.

On October 2, 2010 we will be hosting a community-wide picnic to kick-off the North Colonie/Shaker Community Foundation. The picnic will be held at the Shaker Road Fire Department on Old Niskayuna Road in Latham.

The purpose of the picnic is to raise money and awareness of the North Colonie/Shaker Community Foundation. Our goal is to build new partnerships and strengthen community support for the district. Our hope is that our district's faculty, students, families, community members, and businesses will sponsor and attend this worthwhile event.

At this time, we are looking for ideas and volunteers to make this fundraising event a great success. We are looking to have food and entertainment donated by our community members and organizations. We would like to sell food items such as pizza, hot dogs, hamburgers, snow cones, cotton candy, and popcorn. For the entertainment, we are hoping to find live bands, a bouncy bounce, games, clowns, and face painting.

If you or anyone you know would be interested in supporting this event please contact Mary Yodis at myodis@ncolonie.org or at 928-4249. We are looking for any fun ideas, donated goods and services, and volunteers for the day of the event.

Wellness

With extensive national attention directed toward the areas of childhood obesity, fitness and wellness, the district has dedicated its focus on promoting health and fitness. *Choose Sensibly* products are now offered in all our cafeterias K–12. *Choose Sensibly* products emphasize baked goods instead of fried, low fat or no fat products, more fruits and vegetables, and whole wheat instead of processed grains. The fitness center at Shaker High School with updated weight machines, aerobic exercise machines including stationary bicycles, elliptical trainers, and treadmills provides a more pleasant and inviting space to promote overall fitness and lifelong activity for our high school students and school community.

North Colonie is committed to maintaining, sustaining, and growing a respectful and caring school community. Our faculty and staff work with our students at developing the qualities of character and integrity. We have developed programs that target the issues of bullying and harassment. In these programs, attention is directed toward teaching students about the negative consequences of bullying and harassment and providing them with the strategies to effectively deal with these behaviors in a positive and proactive manner. Should you have any concerns about bullying behavior or if your child has voiced such concerns, please feel free to contact the district. You are strongly encouraged to report this behavior to an adult at your child's school building. Our Director of Pupil Services, Mr. David Semo, oversees the district anti-bullying and character education initiative. He may be contacted at 785-5511 ext. 3333, if you have any thoughts or suggestions on this topic.

I wish the best to you and your family as we move forward to a wonderful year for the children of North Colonie. As I embark upon my first year as Superintendent, I look forward to working with you and your children.

Sincerely,

D. Joseph Corr
Superintendent of Schools

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