

November 2009

Dear Colleagues,

This year marks my ninth year as the North Colonie Superintendent of Schools. It also will mark my last year in the position. On July 30, 2010, I will retire. I have enjoyed my years here working with all of you, but have concluded that the time has come to retire from my position.

As I reflect on my years in North Colonie, I have thought about the tremendous number of teachers (over 60%) and administrators (over 80%) who have been hired during the past eight and a half years. My goal has been to retain the North Colonie culture, even as large numbers of the individuals responsible for creating this culture have retired from the district. I think that this has been accomplished through the dedication and hard work of our administrative team and, in large part, due to the remarkable mentoring done by our teachers. The district has maintained its culture, its quality, and its essence. I am extremely pleased that this is the case.

I continue to be most appreciative of the work of all of our staff. It is apparent on a daily basis that our bus drivers and bus mechanics, teacher aides and assistants, hall monitors, cafeteria workers, custodians and maintenance workers all take tremendous pride in the work they do. The members of our clerical staff are extremely dedicated individuals who make the school district run as smoothly and efficiently as it does. Our nurses work tirelessly to assure the health and safety of all within our schools; last spring and this fall have presented even greater challenges with the advent of H1N1. A number of individuals are responsible for the smooth functioning of our business and payroll operations and they bring much talent to their work. The individuals who work in the relatively new Human Resources Department are making a difference in the lives of our faculty and staff members. Our faculty and administrators are the highest quality individuals who put students and their needs ahead of all else and value teaching and learning as paramount in importance.

With regard to the joys, I think of the numerous improvements made to all of our physical facilities, our technology infrastructure, and the improvement in our financial position. The addition of the traffic light outside Shaker High School, the renovated fitness center at the high school, and the newly designed counseling center and writing center are all recent examples of changes that have had a very significant impact. In the past several years, we have made a substantial investment in the area of instructional technology and are seeing the integration of classroom technology across all curriculum areas. The district's improved bond credit rating allowed us to borrow money for construction projects with a relatively low interest rate; the new credit rating is the highest of any school district in the Capital Region.

We have accomplished a great deal in the curriculum area. Our elementary students now begin foreign language in grade 5. Our language arts program has seen very important changes that have led to our students becoming lifelong readers and writers. We have

accomplished much in the area of differentiated instruction. Further, we have established a highly successful science research program and the quality of work of our students in this program will have long lasting implications for our society, especially in the field of medicine. We have continued to invest and creatively expand our outstanding art, music, and physical education programs, understanding that these programs are critically important in the education of our students. We have consistently seen 96% or higher of our graduating seniors acquire Regents diplomas, with 70% of them receiving advanced Regents diplomas. We have created several new programs for “students at risk” and have worked diligently to continue to provide a program of systemic advocacy for all students. We have worked to make our schools places in which families of all forms, cultures, and backgrounds feel welcome. We have expanded our exchange programs and are showing our students a world beyond this community. We have continued our strong commitment to a highly inclusionary special education program and our goal of educating all North Colonie children in North Colonie Schools; our district has consistently been among the leaders in New York State in the share of special education students who graduate with Regents diplomas.

The successful annexation of Maplewood took a concerted effort on the part of two school communities. This annexation stands as a highly successful model for New York State of how districts can work together to achieve mutual gains. It has also brought significant financial benefits in many forms to North Colonie and these benefits will persist for years into the future.

North Colonie’s successes have been recognized by The Business Review of the Capital Region, which has ranked us as the top district in the region in six of the last nine years, and by Standard & Poor’s, which has named North Colonie as one of the forty-seven “outperforming” school districts in the state because our students’ academic achievement is so much higher than predicted, given the socio demographic and economic backgrounds of our students.

As strong as these successes are, the sorrows have been equally powerful. Two months after I arrived in the district, our country experienced 9/11 and the world as we knew it changed dramatically. Over the years, we cried together and hugged one another as we mourned lost colleagues and loved ones, and we struggled together as a school community to cope with the deaths of a number of our students. In the past year, we have seen friends and family members lose employment as the country faced a severe recession. Together we have continued on, all the time understanding the importance of the work that we do and the fact that the children we serve have only one chance at a great kindergarten year or a great junior high experience. We have figured out how to cope, to be resilient, and to be optimistic in light of whatever storms we were facing. We have worked together to make the district a safe haven for our students and a place where they could achieve beyond what they and their families ever imagined, and I am so very proud of this.

To have played a role in the life of this district has been a tremendous privilege and an important part of my forty-two year career in public education. I am extremely grateful to have had this opportunity and fortunate to have worked with such outstanding colleagues, wonderfully supportive and dedicated Board of Education members, and a very positive parent/guardian community.

When I retire I will miss being part of all of this, and I am pleased that I will be working here for the next nine months before I leave my position. Even when I am gone,

North Colonie will retain a place of great importance in my heart. In the months ahead, I look forward to seeing two high school student representatives become part of our Board of Education for the first time in our district's almost sixty year history. I am also working to "resurrect" the North Colonie Foundation in the hope that as financial woes continue to plague our nation and state we will have another financial avenue available to encourage and support innovation in our classrooms. Constructing and designing the school district budget for the 2010-2011 school year will also be a large part of our work in the months ahead.

I know that my retirement plans will include work in the field of education in some capacity. It will also include spending more time with my very supportive husband who has commuted from Ithaca to Latham most weekends for the past eight and a half years, thus enabling me to fully dedicate myself to working in North Colonie in the manner that I feel a superintendent needs to serve. Like I do, my husband proudly champions our district at every opportunity. Further, I am looking forward to spending more time with our four grandchildren in the Washington, D.C. area; they are only now just beginning their own educational journeys.

Thank you all for all that you do for our district and our students. My best wishes are extended for the continuation of a great year here in North Colonie.

Sincerely,

Randy A. Ehrenberg
Superintendent of Schools

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