

TO: Members of The Board of Education

FROM: Randy A. Ehrenberg, Superintendent

RE: ***Annual Evaluation Report 2007-08***

DATE: November 2008

As the school year began this fall, the Maplewood School District was successfully annexed with North Colonie. We were committed to creating a smooth transition for all involved and this was accomplished. We also celebrated the rededication of Shaker High School on the anniversary of its fiftieth year. We welcomed back individuals who had fond memories of time spent at Shaker High School over the past five decades. Special recognition was recently afforded to Loudonville Elementary School on its selection as a 2008 No Child Left Behind Blue Ribbon School of Excellence. Loudonville joins the ranks of other North Colonie schools who have received Blue Ribbon recognition: Shaker High School was named a Blue Ribbon School in 1985, Shaker Junior High School received the award twice in both 1993 and 2000, and Southgate Elementary received the award in 1997.

This year's Annual Evaluation Report represents North Colonie's twenty-first annual accounting of instructional and support programs. This is the eighth such report that I have been in charge of producing. The Annual Evaluation Report is our district's internal educational audit. The information contained within the document comes from reports submitted by our principals and supervisors. Their examination of each program, analyses and recommendations lead us forward and help us continually raise the bar for our students and ourselves.

North Colonie is extremely fortunate to have two assistant superintendents with remarkable talents and with tremendous long-term commitment to our school community and also an exceptional administrative team unparalleled in the Capital Region. I am deeply indebted to both Joseph Corr, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, and Thomas Rybaltowski, Assistant Superintendent for Business and our district administrators, for their assistance completing this document and for their tireless efforts on behalf of North Colonie.

A number of talented staff members gave of their time and experience in the preparation and printing of this report. My thanks are extended especially to Rhonda Madigan, who worked diligently to produce this document, Janice Patrie, Sue Krosky, Marian Coffey, and Michelle Krege for their assistance. I also wish to thank Anne Manzella, North Colonie Art Supervisor, and the North Colonie Art Department for the cover picture and the photos in the art section, and Joy Horsman and Mike Cavaleri for the photos included in the report.

Aside from those of us who create this report, the individuals who spend a great deal of time reading and scrutinizing it are the nine members of the North Colonie Board of Education. As with a myriad of other materials that they receive on a weekly basis in their roles on our Board, they review this document with great care in their continuous efforts to support the work of all of us in this district and to understand where we have been as we continue to advance. Without the support they provide, we would not accomplish all that we do and, on behalf of all of the employees of this district, we dedicate the 2007-08 Annual Evaluation Report to Paula D'Orazio, Ann Foster, Linda Harrison, Joan Hart, Theresa Joslin, Mary Nardolillo, Jacqueline Orr, Sandy Pangburn, and Mary-Ellen Raup, and we thank them for their rich contributions.

The two pillars of strength in our district are our program of academic excellence and high achievement and our strong, responsible fiscal management. These two features of our district account for our repeated standing as one of the top districts out of 85 in the Capital Region as determined annually by the Capital District Business Review. This year we were ranked second by The Review. What is most remarkable about our annual evaluation by the Capital District Business Review is that we remain consistently and constantly in the top 3 since these rankings were begun, about ten years ago. This consistent high ranking is a testimony to the systemic and systematic commitment of our faculty, staff, administrators, support personnel, students and families to teaching and learning. This commitment to excellence is best epitomized at the Shaker High School graduation ceremony held annually each June. This year's graduation at Shaker High School was again a celebratory event, as over 96% of our students graduated with Regents diplomas, 69% with advanced Regents diplomas. We continue to take pride in these outstanding achievements. We remain committed to both providing high quality comprehensive educational programs in North Colonie and to fiscal responsibility to the taxpayers.

The overview section of our annual evaluation is a generic description of the philosophy, components, and activities that characterize each of our academic programs. Many of these elements remain constant over time and therefore, this overview is a document that will contain minor revisions from year to year. After the overview section, there is a section where the assessment results, highlights, and district goals for each academic subject are featured. Commentary on the assessment results may be found after the charts highlighting the data, in the highlights or in the goals section.

This year's annual evaluation continues the new format adopted for the 2006-2007 report. Each content area has an overview section that is a generic description of the philosophy, components and activities that characterize that academic program. This overview document remains constant with the document from the previous year with only minor revisions as needed. After the overview of each academic area, there are sections where assessment results, highlights, and district goals for each content area are featured. The reader will find commentary on the assessment results after the charts highlighting the data or in the highlights or goals section. We believe that separating the overview from assessment data highlights and goals provides a document that is clearer and more understandable.

This past March, our faculty gathered together to look at the skills required by our students to function effectively in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Included among these skills are the ability to problem solve, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively both in written and spoken word, use mathematical and scientific reasoning, and work collaboratively in diverse groups. More importantly, we are increasingly aware that the 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce will be a highly mobile one where our graduates of 2008 and beyond may be required to shift jobs seven to twelve times during the course of their career. Therefore, our students will require a strong set of basic skills that allow them to transfer their learning into different contexts. This is the challenge we face as we prepare our students to thrive in the future.

Our challenges are not only academic. In an increasingly global world, we must foster greater tolerance, appreciation for diversity, and a greater awareness of the differences and similarities found in each of us. The development of character and the corresponding virtues of compassion, justice, integrity, honor, commitment and hard work are and should be at the backbone, of not only North Colonie, but of our educational system in the United States. While we value achievement on all standardized assessments, what is far more important is the quality of character developed in our students as they take on a world challenged by technology, a global economy, a threatened environment and challenges to peace and stability. It is a rapidly changing world and one that can cause troubling and vexing uncertainty. Our mission to develop understanding minds in all of our students is now more important than ever and our commitment to this vital task must be unwavering.

To move forward in our effort to make global citizens of our students, the district will implement a foreign language program in grades 5 and 6. In grade 5, students will do two 6-week exploratory foreign language experiences in Spanish and in French. This will be followed by two corresponding 6-week experiences in 6<sup>th</sup> grade in German and Russian. The addition of this valuable program represented a collaborative effort led by Mrs. Galina Kats, Ms. Kerry Flynn, and the foreign language staff of Shaker Junior High School and Shaker High School. With strong support from our Board of Education, our students will now be exposed to foreign language and culture at an earlier age. The excellent work done by our teaching staff over the past two summers and during the school year 2007-2008 serve us well as we prepare to implement a program that engages our students in the joy of language learning and the exploration of other cultures.

The 2007-2008 school year also marked even stronger commitment to infusing technology into teaching and learning. In 2007-2008, under the capable leadership of Dr. Elizabeth McNamara, our new District Director of Information Technology, we moved even further along in this critical process. A four year replacement cycle was established that will allow us to significantly upgrade technology in all our schools. The use of new technologies is proliferating as teachers throughout the district use video, Mimio, and the Smartboard to enhance instruction. Concomitant staff development is also critical to this process and the participation of our teaching staff along with our Technology Resource Teachers in ongoing professional development, is crucial for the effective integration of technology into instruction. We remain committed to the fact that our students must be literate and effective users of technology if they are to be effective

in the 21<sup>st</sup> century world and workplace. Our renewed commitment to technology infusion and the subsequent consolidation and reorganization of administration under a single district director has marked an important advancement in the use of technology throughout North Colonie.

Our 21<sup>st</sup> century students will need to demonstrate a high degree of literacy. Our balanced literacy approach continues, and we provide consistent and ongoing staff development to our new and veteran staff. Our reading turnkey trainers have taken control of the professional development process and are capably guided by elementary principals Candace Lobdell and Jerri Lynne Dedrick. These turnkey trainers provide assistance to our building principals and offer new teachers a proper orientation to the reading program while helping to clarify issues in providing professional development to veteran teachers as new issues arise. Our district has made an important stride in having a standardized reading program across all six, now seven, elementary buildings. This past year, significant effort was directed to bring the Maplewood staff on board with our balanced literacy program. Our Maplewood colleagues participated in professional development throughout the summer and will receive ongoing support throughout the 2008-2009 school year by their mentor teachers and our reading turnkey trainers.

Likewise, a sizeable amount of work was done on the writing curriculum 2007-2008. Our teachers met at the elementary level, implemented new writing units, and designed an introductory unit entitled "The Writerly Life" that was implemented this past September. The initial feedback on these units has been extremely positive as the elementary teachers begin to implement the writer's workshop approach to the teaching of writing. This past summer, they were also involved with their new Maplewood colleagues in beginning the process of curriculum mapping. At the secondary level, teachers are making use of a writer's workshop approach as students begin the use of a writer's notebook, mentor, writing pieces, and exploration of various genres as they develop a sense of voice and awareness of audience. Continued work on the writing project has occurred at the secondary level and this past fall, a group of English teachers met for four half-day Saturdays to extend this important work.

At the elementary level, we implemented a new math textbook series. Professional development was provided to all our teachers in the September workshops as well as in the November session. Our teachers also were given access to some very valuable online resources in mathematics offered by the publishing company. Although any new math series adoption takes some adjustment, the initial response of our teachers, students and parents is most positive given the many new resources that have been made available for math instruction. Likewise, at the secondary level, we witnessed the first administration of the Integrated Algebra Regents. Our students did very well on this exam and their success is a result not only of their hard work, but of the concerted efforts of our junior high and high school faculty to meet the demands of this new curriculum.

North Colonie remains committed to developing the entire child. This means that physical and emotional wellness, appreciation for art and music, and character education are essential components of a comprehensive education. We are proud to report that all of these programs are thriving and doing extremely well in North Colonie.

Participation is high as witnessed by the excellent efforts of our art and music students in the numerous shows, exhibits, concerts, and performances that occurred throughout the year in the district. Likewise, revisions in our health curriculum continue to develop the critical thinking skills of our students as we develop their skills to make wise decisions about health and wellness issues. Our character education program also remains strong and the recognition of the Blue Creek Peaceable School's program along with the efforts of counselor Eileen Satterlee by the Academy for Character Education provided further affirmation of our efforts to develop "Peaceable Schools" and sterling character.

Standardized testing results continue to be strong. North Colonie avoids the trap of "teaching to the test." Instead, we focus on developing the essential content understanding and skill acquisition embedded in the New York State Learning Standards. We continue to use other assessments including district, departmental, and the IOWA Tests of Basic Skills to provide us with additional information to make solid decisions with regard to providing programming for our students. This past year, we used a newer version of the IOWA Tests of Basic Skills, and we continue to work with the information technology department on the use of data to inform our instructional decision making process.

Our summer curriculum work for 2008 represented the strongest and most participatory effort to date. We are grateful to the support of our Board of Education and community as we continue our research and development of our educational program. A record number of K-12 staff participated in 52 curriculum writing and staff development projects. These projects were vast in scope and covered the entire curriculum. They included all curriculum areas, including special education, health, career and technical education, foreign language, English language arts, science, math, and social studies. These annual summer efforts are vital in keeping our curriculum and instruction timely and effective.

### **Summary of Assessment Results**

On standardized assessments, North Colonie students continue to perform well. In all instances, the number of our students attaining level 3's and 4's improved at all grade levels in both English Language Arts and mathematics and our students out performed their New York State cohorts on both exams at all grade levels. Furthermore, our position in the Suburban Council improved on the English Language Arts exam and the mathematics exam as we moved to the middle and slightly above in ELA and into the upper third in mathematics.

We continue to be at or near the top of the Suburban Council for the five Regents exams needed for graduation. Our performance on the New York State exams indicates that the instructional program at North Colonie is preparing our students to meet the standard of achievement for content and skill acquisition necessary for a comprehensive K-12 education. Furthermore, our achievement on other standardized measures including the IOWA Tests of Basic Skills at the elementary level, and the Advanced Placement exams and SAT Achievement Tests at the secondary level, represent the continued strong efforts on the part of our faculty, staff and administration

to identify the needs of all students and meet those needs through a variety of programs and interventions.

Results on other New York State tests continue to be very strong. In social studies, the 5<sup>th</sup> grade social studies test is administered each November. Testing content from grades 3 and 4, students are required to demonstrate the knowledge and skill essential required by the New York State learning standards. Ninety-six percent of our students achieve competency by scoring at level 3 or 4. On the grade 8 social studies assessment, we showed a marked improvement from the previous year, as 96% of our students achieved at level 3 and 4 compared to 88% the previous year. In science, 96% of our students attain competency on the grade 4 test where as at the junior high school, our achievement on the science 8 exam was at 95% of our students scoring at levels 3 and 4. Our science and social studies instruction continues to be of high quality and is critical to developing the skills that students need to be effective critical thinkers and solid participants in a democratic society.

In June 2008, 96% of our students at Shaker High School graduated with a Regents diploma. This is a continuation of a very high graduation rate and is demonstrative of our commitment K-12 to providing our students with an outstanding education that focuses on meeting their individual needs. A record 91% of our students completed three or more years of foreign language and 49% of our grade 12 students completed a five year foreign language sequence. We continue to challenge our high school students with college level work as evidenced by the fact that in May 2008, 290 students sat for 540 Advanced Placement examinations. Of those sitting for these rigorous tests, 92% scored 3 or above. The University in the High School, College in the High School, and partnerships with Schenectady County Community College, Hudson Valley Community College, and the University at Albany provide other venues for students to attain college credit and get experience with a rigorous college level curriculum. The drop out rate diminished from 2007 from 1.5% to 1.3%. Shaker High School students actively pursue post-secondary education as 94% plan to attend two or four year colleges with 58% attending a four year college. These outstanding results are reflective of the cumulative hard work of our faculty and staff K-12.

Our comprehensive general education program focuses on developing students equipped with the requisite skills needed for success in post secondary education or the work place. Constant reflection and review of our teaching methodology and the necessary monitoring and adjusting essential to promote better student learning are the cornerstones of our program. Through the combined effort of a committed and talented faculty and staff, an engaged, knowledgeable and supportive Board of Education, and an active, involved and supportive community, North Colonie remains a community of learners committed to achieving teaching and learning excellence.