

TO: Members of the Board of Education

FROM: Randy A. Ehrenberg, Superintendent

RE: ***Annual Evaluation Report 2008-09***

DATE: December 2009

This year represents North Colonie's twenty-second annual accounting of instructional and support programs. This past year was another highly successful year for North Colonie. We saw 96% or higher of our graduating seniors acquire Regents diplomas, with 70% of them receiving advanced Regents diplomas. We created several new programs for "students at risk" and worked diligently to continue to provide a program of systemic advocacy for all students. Twenty-six out of twenty-seven of our varsity teams earned recognition as Scholar-Athletes. We continued to work to make our schools places in which families of all forms, cultures, and backgrounds feel welcome. We 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 leader in New York State in the share of special education students who graduate with Regents diplomas. North Colonie's successes were recognized once again 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.

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 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 dedicated efforts on behalf of the students in our district.

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. Thanks also go to Janice Patrie, Sue Krosky, Marian Coffey, and Kimberly Aiai for their assistance. I also wish to thank Anne Manzella, North Colonie Art Supervisor, and the North Colonie Art Department for assistance in selecting the cover picture and for the photos in the art section, and Joy Horsman and Mike Cavaleri for the other photos included in the report.

Compliments are extended to our Board of Education members for their support of the work of the district and their careful scrutiny of this report. We thank them collectively and individually for their fine work. They are wonderful examples of individuals who believe strongly in the importance of community service. Once again this year we

dedicate the annual evaluation to Mary Nardolillo, Linda Harrison, Paula D’Orazio, Ann Foster, Joan Hart, Theresa Joslin, Jacqueline Orr, Sandy Pangburn, and Mary-Ellen Raup, and with very special thanks to Theresa Joslin, who is now in her fourteenth year as a Board member. In her time on the Board, Theresa has served as Board vice-president and president, and she has worked tirelessly on behalf of the children in our district.

The annual evaluation is comprised of two sections. The first section contains each content area and has an overview that is a generic description of the philosophy, components, and activities that characterize that particular academic program. In the second section, assessment results, highlights, and district objectives for each content area are featured.

An overriding vision that drives teaching and learning in North Colonie is that we embed key skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and communication into the teaching of all our academic areas. Also referred to as 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills, these are the essential skills that our students will need to be successful contributors to society in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. They include global awareness, financial, economic, business and literacy in entrepreneurship, civics, literacy, and environmental issues - all essential to individual and societal well being. We are working with our staff on various projects, such as Understanding by Design and curriculum mapping, to infuse these ideas into our curriculum work. At the core of all these literacies is the ability of students to gain “deep understanding” of subject area content. Deep understanding is achieved not merely by responding well to short answers and essay prompts on standardized and state assessments, but in the creation of assessments that are more authentic and involve students in real world projects where they are called upon to take their skills and knowledge and transfer learning into a different context. It is exciting work that we have just begun and we believe that it is critical to developing our students as 21<sup>st</sup> Century citizens and most importantly lifelong learners.

Some salient examples exist to illustrate our work in this area. A considerable amount of work has been done in English/language arts at both the elementary and high school level in the area of writing. During the 2008-09 school year, a pilot group of our elementary teachers implemented a unit entitled “The Writerly Life.” In the current school year, our entire staff received professional development on this unit in September and implemented it across the district K – 6. In addition, our writing subcommittee of the English/Language Arts Steering Committee met last summer in a curriculum workshop to receive professional development on elements of the writers’ workshop. Previously in May, they had also participated in a similar workshop with nationally known consultant Lucy Calkins. As a result, Writers’ Workshop is currently in place in selected classrooms throughout the district. We are also providing professional development to our staff at grade level meetings this year and anticipate full implementation during the 2010-11 school year. With the Writers’ Workshop approach, our elementary students will be exploring a wide variety of genres. They will also be expanding the tools in their repertoire to approach different writing tasks with consideration of voice or audience. We are looking forward to this work with our elementary students.

Likewise, at Shaker High School, the department began to work on developing a comprehensive vision for writing. This vision, developed in curriculum workshops conducted over the 2008-09 school year, culminated in some more specific work this summer. Like our elementary teachers, our high school teachers are now engaging our students in new and different types of writing. They are working to foster choice, consideration of audience and voice, have created a genuine enthusiasm for the teaching of writing, and enthusiasm for the act of writing amongst their students. This is work on an essential skill that students need to master in order to communicate effectively with multiple audiences for multiple purposes.

In 2008-09, we continued our process of infusing technology across the district. We were in the second year of a replacement cycle that was established to upgrade our technology in all our schools. Our teachers participated in extensive staff development. In November, our elementary teachers were involved in exploring the district Internet page and in taking on-line learning modules on the various software tools available to them. This staff development was continued district wide in March as all our teachers participated in classroom instruction, on-line mini lessons, or more extended on-line professional development on a specific aspect of technology infusion. As always, our goal is not in the use of technology for its own sake but for the purpose of making learning more interactive, more visual and, most importantly, using technology as a tool for students to express knowledge and skills in different ways.

Throughout the district, we are also investigating new ways of looking at curriculum design. Integral to this process are the twin foci of curriculum mapping and Understanding by Design. Understanding by Design is a thinking process about designing curriculum that starts with the end in mind. By starting with the end in mind, teachers now think about deeper and more profound ideas about teaching and learning. Their planning process starts by articulating what they think students know and are able to do as a result of instruction. In another words, at the end of the course, what skills, knowledge and habits of mind should a student exhibit as evidence that they truly understand subject matter. Curriculum planning no longer becomes just a sequence of events to get from September to June, but rather a process by which teachers align curriculum, assessment, and instruction to invoke deep understanding of subject matter. The deep understanding is evident in the fact that students then take subject area content knowledge and skill and transfer that knowledge to new and different situations. This is the essence of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner. Furthermore, it is a valuable skill for our students to have as many of them will hold multiple jobs over the course of a lifetime and often new jobs will be dissimilar to their previous jobs. Thus, the requisite communication, work habits, and habits of mind acquired through schooling and over a lifetime of new and different contexts will serve them well in this new world.

Likewise, curriculum mapping helps us to work smarter and more effectively. With the use of our new curriculum data base, Rubicon Atlas, teachers are able to put district curricula into a standardized format that can be shared across buildings and across content areas. This is a wonderful tool for achieving articulation from grade to grade as well as to ensure that curriculum gaps are filled and redundancies are avoided. It is truly exciting to be in on the ground floor of both of these efforts.

Attention to 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills also refers to developing the entire child. Among the skills listed by the partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning are flexibility and adaptability, initiative and self direction, productivity and accountability, leadership and responsibility, and creativity. These skills naturally should be developed by all academic areas but are especially developed in the areas of art, music, career and technical education, health and physical education. When one witnesses the work of our students, one can see their excellent efforts and their demonstration of these skills in art exhibits, in music performances, on the athletic field, in their practice of better health and nutrition habits and the seriousness with which they approach their career planning and the development of skills attendant to having a successful career. The Character Education program also remains a strong component of addressing these critical skills. This past year, the institution of Rachel's Challenge at Shaker High School, as well as in many of our elementary schools, marks the commitment to character education. Additional programs such as the GIRAFFES Program at Loudonville and the Peaceable Schools Program at Blue Creek, as well as the character education assemblies at Shaker Junior High School provide further evidence of our strong efforts at developing solid student character and strong positive decision making skills.

While we still value results on standardized testing and the results continue to be strong, we are now interested in looking more deeply at other types of assessments. If we wish to focus intently on developing deeper understanding and demonstration of skill acquisition and if we wish to embed 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills into our teaching and learning, then we must consider seriously an expanded repertoire of assessments. Of course, standardized tests such as the New York State tests, in grades 3 -8 and the Regents testing program are important, and we will continue to expect students to do well on these assessments. However, in addition to that, our students must also demonstrate higher level thinking and skill acquisition through the performance of tasks that might be replicated in the real world. Such tasks could include presentations to real or mock governmental boards and solving "real world" problems. This level of authenticity and reality enhances the teaching and learning process and connects it most closely to the learner, making the learning more real and relevant.

During the summer months, we continue to do most of our good work in curriculum development. This represents our "research and design" time. Extensive work done each summer is emblematic of the support offered by our Board of Education and community to the development of a solid educational program. This summer our K – 12 staff participated in fifty curriculum writing and development projects. We are especially proud of the fact over the past years these projects have expanded in scope and curriculum coverage and are comprehensive in that they include all curriculum areas. These projects are vital and essential parts of our curriculum renewal efforts needed to keep our instruction relevant and rigorous.

### Summary of Assessments

North Colonie students continue to outperform our New York State cohorts. Some highlights this year include our work in mathematics at the elementary level where our students achieved very well with students in all grade levels scoring at level 3 or level 4

at the rate of 90% or better. Furthermore, we witnessed some slight improvements in the performance of our English/language arts students in grades 3 – 6, as all of these students achieved better than 80% proficiency on this exam.

At Shaker High School, we continue to perform well in the five Regents exams needed for graduation. In addition, 70% of our students chose the more rigorous Advanced Regents diploma which indicates that they have passed at least seven Regents exams. This is indicative of exploration at the higher levels in mathematics and foreign language. On Advanced Placement exams, our students continue to evidence strong performance and vastly exceed New York State and National norms. In areas where achievement has slipped a bit over the year, department supervisors and faculty continue to monitor the program closely and use available data to adjust instruction as needed.

On other New York State tests, we continue to have strong results. Over 90% of our students achieved competency on the social studies and science tests in grades 4, 5, and 8, respectively. These solid results reflect the efforts of our faculty and students and provide evidence that our social studies and science instruction continues to be of high quality and focuses on developing in our students the critical thinking skills attendant to each of these disciplines.

In June 2009, 96% of our students at Shaker High School graduated with a Regents diploma. Eighty-five percent of our grade 12 students completed a three-year foreign language sequence and 47% completed the rigorous five-year sequence. This compares with 91% and 49% respectively for the previous 2007-2008 school year. Evidence that our students are taking rigorous and challenging course work is found in the fact that in May 2009, 256 students sat for 478 Advanced Placement examinations. Of the students who took the exams, 95% scored at level 3 or above, compared to the very successful rate of 92% scoring at this benchmark during the 2007-2008 school year. The high school also has agreements with many of our local community colleges and universities to provide our students with college credit during their high school years. These agreements are with the State University of New York at Albany, Schenectady County Community College, and Hudson Valley Community College and represent our College in the High School and University in the High School programs. Our dropout rate remained low at 2%. Shaker High School's students actively pursue post-secondary education and 95% planned to attend two to four year colleges, with 57% attending a four year college. The strong results are achievable with the comprehensive, systemic and systematic approach to teaching and learning that are representative of the dedication and strong work ethic of our faculty and staff, grades K-12.

Thus, with a focus on teaching and learning and the development of the knowledge, skills and habits of mind critical for future success, our students, faculty and staff move forward with a combined effort to develop the skills needed for success in a 21<sup>st</sup> century society. We continue to be reflective of our practices and work to monitor and adjust them as necessary, so that the foundation of our being as a teaching and learning institution is sustained and grown.