

NORTH COLONIE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT  
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TO: Members of The Board of Education

FROM: Randy A. Ehrenberg, Superintendent *Randy A. Ehrenberg*

RE: **Annual Evaluation Report 2005-06**

DATE: November 2006

This year's Annual Evaluation Report represents North Colonie's nineteenth annual accounting of instructional and support programs. This is the sixth 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.

The District and I are both extremely fortunate to have two assistant superintendents with remarkable talents and with tremendous commitment to our school community. I am deeply indebted to both Joseph Corr, Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, and Thomas Rybaltowski, Assistant Superintendent for Business, for both their assistance completing this document and for their tireless efforts on behalf of North Colonie.

As always, 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, Janice Patrie, Sue Krosky, Marian Coffey, Pam Duffney and Kathryn Bell for their help. 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.

The composer J. Papoulis wrote:

"What I have come to understand is that we must send the best part of ourselves into the future through our children. If we want society to evolve, we need to understand the importance of childhood, and how vital our role should be in doing whatever we can to nurture every child. We should all be aware of our powerful influence on their minds."

In North Colonie, we work to assure that all aspects of our students' education are valued and flourish. We go beyond the national and state preoccupation with academic achievement and assessment, which are only small components of student learning and development. Each student deserves a high quality education, one in which there are many opportunities to succeed. Art, music, foreign language, health education, character education and physical education are all valued in North Colonie along with

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the core academic subjects. We continue to take pride in our students' successes on the athletic fields, in music performances, in drama productions, and as we view their artwork displayed in our schools and around our community.

The school year 2005-2006 witnessed continued excellent results for North Colonie. We were again selected as the top school district out of 85 school districts in the Albany area by the Capital District Business Review. The district has received this honor four out of the last five years, and it represents a wonderful testimony to the excellence of our faculty and staff. At Shaker High School, over 97% of our students graduated with Regents diplomas. These represent wonderful accomplishments and are a source of tremendous pride for our district.

North Colonie remains committed to the notion that every child can learn and achieve. To this end, the district continued its initiative in differentiation of instruction. Recognizing that our students learn in different ways, this past summer 28 North Colonie teachers and administrators built upon the work that had been done in the previous summers and throughout the previous school years. They went forward in the construction of units in math and science that incorporated the key elements of differentiated instruction. These units will provide students with multiple activities that will take into account their interests, learning styles and the means that are best suited to express what they know and are capable of doing. Throughout the upcoming school year, we will work to share with other faculty our knowledge and understanding of the planning to develop and implement differentiated instruction throughout our K-6 classrooms. This represents a very concrete means for addressing the needs of our various learners throughout the district.

Another initiative that illustrates our commitment to the growth and learning of every child is that led by our Globalization Task Force. This past year, the Globalization Task Force initiated study circles. Our study circles were led by a group known as Tackling Racism in Albany County (TRAC). These study circles provided opportunities for candid discussion of topics related to ethnicity, gender, race, and other diversity issues. Our groups met throughout the school year, and each group was composed of teachers, administrators, and community members. At the end of last year, the two groups came together and planned a series of activities for the upcoming 2006-2007 school year. These activities involve planning turnkey training sessions so that we can run our own study circles where students and staff engage in the study circle experience and explore the topics of diversity and tolerance with one another. Incorporated into the globalization effort was our Rosa Parks/Coretta Scott King memorial held this past April. This was a wonderful event attended by over 200 members of the community. In addition, our globalization group continues to be very active in providing resources for our teachers regarding effective strategies for instruction, communication, and embracing the diverse families of North Colonie.

Our success as an instructional community depends upon our relentless devotion to research and development in best practices to promote quality instruction. This past summer, our K-12 staff participated in 34 curriculum writing and staff development projects. These efforts were very diverse in addressing the needs of our students. The previously mentioned differentiated instruction workshop was one example of these, but

others included work on SAT preparation, continued refinement and realignment of math instruction to correlate with the new state curriculum, course revisions in English language arts, math, science, social studies, and health, and the development and training of our new turnkey trainers in our instructional reading program. Furthermore, we provided our new staff in grades K-2 and 3-6 as well as ESL, speech, and teacher assistants, with additional reading instruction training. This will serve them very well as we continue to implement our new approach to reading throughout the district.

Our instructional reading program is in its sixth year. We are very proud of the fact that we continue to take control of our own staff development. This year, the Board of Education approved the expansion of turnkey trainers in reading in grades K-6. These turnkey trainers will assist the building principals in providing staff development as well as in offering our new teachers an orientation to the district reading program. Furthermore, they are very important in helping us to standardize, and thus make more reliable, our various reading assessments for our elementary reading program. The development of the turnkey training program is an essential feature as we grow and sustain our reading program for the upcoming years.

We also continue to work with the district writing program. This initiative was begun in the 2004-2005 school year and was delayed somewhat due to the advent of the new testing program in grades 3-8. This past year, we developed the universals for writing instruction in grades K-12. These universals represent our core district philosophy on the teaching of writing and also illustrate the best practices for writing instruction. We commenced our work on a framework for writing instruction and during the 2006-2007 school year expect to finish it and begin the staff development necessary for full implementation. We also hope to begin the curriculum mapping necessary to provide a path for our approach to writing instruction and are very excited about this work.

A major initiative for the 2005-2006 school year was the district reorganization of informational technology. As a result of this effort, we consolidated instructional and administrative technology under one umbrella. Our technology vision is closely tied to teaching and learning, and we believe that technology has the capacity to allow students to learn in new and different ways. As a result, we remain committed to obtaining, maintaining, and growing our staff knowledge of appropriate technology tools to be implemented in the classroom. We are also committed to growing and sustaining the in-house expertise of our faculty by involving more teachers in staff development as staff development course presenters as well as increasing the diversity of technology based staff development courses offered. The Board's approval of the technology resource teachers marks an important step in this direction. Furthermore, to keep our community informed, we conducted parent information programs for our elementary, junior, and senior high school parents. These programs will be continued during the 2006-2007 school year, and it is a goal to make our parent community aware of the many ways in which technology is implemented as a critical part of instruction in grades K-12.

This year, we faced for the first time newly mandated state testing in grades 3-8. This testing occurred in January 2006 for English language arts and in March 2006 for mathematics. By all accounts, the administration of this testing program, although

extremely difficult and time consuming, was nonetheless a success. We continued to be very concerned about the impact of testing on instructional time and are also concerned about its implications for students with special needs. Problems were complicated by the fact that results were returned to the district much later than normal. In fact, we did not receive our English language arts results until early October, and the math results followed in the middle of October. As of the publication of this annual evaluation, we are continuing to assess the impact of these tests on our students and have in place our plan to provide academic intervention services to students not currently attaining state standards. We will also continue the work of our elementary subcommittee to make further decisions about the district standardized testing program. Clearly, we need good information to make sound instructional decisions, and we will continue to examine the role of nationally normed standardized tests, in light of the new New York State Education Department testing program.

This past February, we honored and celebrated the retirement of Dr. James Jackson for 43 years of service to the North Colonie Central School District. Dr. Jackson often spoke of his belief in "systemic advocacy". This meant that the excellent quality of instruction was pervasive throughout the North Colonie Central School District. Thus, all students benefit equally from the principles of equity and advocacy that are trademarks of the North Colonie Central Schools. We take Dr. Jackson's legacy very seriously and look forward in the upcoming year to further strengthening and developing our district to promote the growth and potential of each and every child.

### Summary of Assessment Results

The 2005-2006 school year marked continued solid achievement on most standardized assessments. With the lateness of the New York State assessment results for English language arts and mathematics in grades 3-8, it is difficult to make many conclusive statements at this juncture. Noteworthy is the fact that these assessments now assess standards for each grade level. This is a different approach from the old assessments, which were previously given at grades 4-8 and were looked at as "benchmark assessments" that assessed progress K-4 and 5-8 respectively. Thus, it is somewhat difficult to make comparisons from year to year. In any case, we do know that on all the English language arts assessments in grades 3-8, and in the math assessments in grades 3-8, we exceeded New York State norms at each of the grade levels. We continue to be somewhat concerned about our standing among similar schools, particularly in the English language arts in grades 3-7. In spite of these concerns, it appears that our students begin to make growth relative to their social economic peer groups in other schools. For example, a preliminary review of the data shows that although our students tend to fall in the middle range among Suburban Council schools in English language arts and somewhat better in mathematics in grades 3-7. By the time they reach 8<sup>th</sup> grade, our students are either at the top or very near the top in performance on the New York State assessments. Furthermore, a review of data from the graduation cohorts indicate that our students are consistently number 1 or number 2 in the Suburban Council for all the five Regents exams needed for graduation. These outstanding results reflect the continued efforts of our staff to use testing data to identify students in need of additional assistance and to meet that need with academic intervention services (AIS).

On other standardized measures, our results remain solid. The New York State social studies assessment is administered each November. This year, our students continue to do well and as they did in 2004-2005, when 96% of our students achieved competency by scoring at level 3 or level 4. In the grade 8 assessment, our results also continued strong with 91% of our students achieving at level 3 and level 4. Our science results in grade 4 sustained a solid performance with 94% of our students scoring at level 3 or 4. At the junior high school, our achievement on the Science 8 exam was solid with 93% of our students scoring at level 3 and 4. From these test results, it is apparent that our students have a solid grounding in the content and skills necessary for success in social studies and science.

The class of 2006 continued a strong standard of achievement established by the previous year. In June 2006, 97% of our students walked across the stage and graduated with a Regents diploma. This marks the continuation of our emphasis on providing our students with instruction that enables them to do quality level Regents work. Furthermore, other data provides evidence for the outstanding education offered by the faculty and staff at Shaker High School. Ninety percent of the class completed three or more years of foreign language study. An equally remarkable 48% of grade 12 students completed a 5-year foreign language sequence. Both represent increases over last year (90% vs. 88% and 48% vs. 45%.) In May 2006, 254 students sat for 508 Advanced Placement examinations. We continued our remarkable string of achievements in the Advanced Placement program, as over 91% of the students completed their exams with grades 3 or better, up 2% from the previous year. These outstanding results coupled with programs such as 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 provides our high school students with the ability to earn substantial college credit in the high school. Most importantly, our students complete high school. We have a low drop out rate that is at 1.9%. This year, 95% of our students plan to attend either a two or four year college, with 62% attending a four-year college. These are outstanding results, and they represent the cumulative efforts of our faculty and staff K-12.

We are a district that continues to achieve strong academic results. Where needed, we will be reflective and make the necessary adjustments to improve results. A strong faculty and staff, a supportive Board of Education, and an actively involved community all combine to make North Colonie a wonderful learning community.