

Rededication Ceremony
November 9, 2008
1:00 p.m.

Early in my administrative career, I watched a short film titled “A Cipher in the Snow”. It depicted the true life story of a middle school student who died suddenly and unexpectedly one morning on a bus on the way to school. The film focused on a reporter’s attempt to learn about this student. The reporter began a series of interviews, only to discover that this student was known to no one. The principal did not know the youngster. Teachers knew him only by name. He had no friends. What a terribly sad commentary this was on that public education system.

By way of contrast, I present to you my view of Shaker High School, a school that I have come to know in the past 7½ years. One of my first impressions of the school was seeing teachers serving on hall duty and giving students extra help while in the halls. I also saw supervisors in their offices tutoring individual students one-on-one. I saw Dr. Jackson speaking to students outside of classrooms and addressing them by name. Parenthetically, I now see Mr. Murphy interacting with students in the same manner. I also noticed Dr. Jackson stopping in the hall to pick up papers and other trash so that Shaker would always look as good as it could. I heard parents talk about their Shaker teachers and what a phenomenal education these teachers had given them. I heard these same parents express the fact that they were so very proud to be able to give their own children a “Shaker” education. I repeatedly heard the phrase “systemic advocacy” and learned what a powerful part of the school’s culture that concept had become. Special education students were part of the integral fabric of Shaker, and I repeatedly saw students in wheelchairs who had doors held open for them by other Shaker students.

Through programs like PIIP (Personal Improvement Intervention Program), and IRP (Integrated Regents Program), and now R.I.S.E. (Response to Intervention for Successful Education), Shaker High School strives as it has always strived to leave no student behind, no student unnoticed, no student a cipher in the snow.

Recently I attended a dinner at Cornell University for the school's Board of Trustees. The theme was "Pass It On". Simply put, this meant give to the next generation what the institution gave to you when you were there. At Cornell, this theme was being used to initiate a major fund raising campaign for scholarship funds. As I listened to the speakers that night, I thought about how much this theme applies to North Colonie and Shaker High School. We remain committed to "Passing On" the best that Shaker embodies. With every hiring decision we make, we attempt to fill a position with an individual who will serve with the same dedication and commitment as we have seen in those who have left the school. As we initiate new programs, we remember the successes of past endeavors and work to build on those. The legacy of the past continually informs our current practice. Tradition, culture, and pride characterize the first fifty years of Shaker High School, and we should strive to ensure that they continue to characterize the next fifty. As North Colonie's Superintendent, I ask that we all recommit to the principles and practices that have served this school and our students so remarkably well as we confidently march forward into the future.