

# Community Unit School District 200

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Administration and School Service Center

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Dear District 200 Families:

We've had a busy and productive fall in District 200. From the classroom to the performance stage to the playing field, our students and teachers are putting forth outstanding effort with excellent results. There are several issues I'd like to bring to your attention in this newsletter. Please note that page 3 is a survey on the 2004-05 student calendar. We'd appreciate your responses so that we may plan the 2005-06 calendar in a timely way.

## **Communication with Families**

District 200 is catching up to technology in some of the ways we communicate with each other and with our stakeholders. We recognize that technology can't replace the personal communication we value, especially with our parents, but we know that many of you prefer to get news about what's going on in the District or in your child's school electronically. We have several ways to enhance our communication with you this year.

- All of our teachers and staff have a voice mailbox and an email account. You may call or email them directly and expect a response within 24 hours. I have asked each principal to make staff phone numbers and email addresses available to all parents. Please contact the school office if you need contact information.
- We continue to use a recorded voice messaging system to phone you with important school or district information. This system has been in place for a year. We hope you find it a useful communication tool.
- The new home page on our website at [www.cusd200.org](http://www.cusd200.org) offers you the opportunity to sign up to receive District news electronically. When you complete the sign-up process you will receive highlights from Board of Education meetings and other news of general interest and importance to our parents and community. In the future we plan to offer this same option for school news.
- All of our schools will have web pages up and running this year with current information. We have identified webmasters in each school and given them clear expectations for developing and/or maintaining their web page. It is expected that all web pages will be posted by the beginning of the second semester in January.

## **Planning for the Future**

The Board of Education has as one of its high priority goals the development of a new vision and mission statement that will set the direction for future decisions and planning. Beginning this month, we will be inviting students, staff, parents and community members to attend focus group sessions to discuss their priorities for public education in District 200. These meetings will be held in February. Based on the feedback received, we will develop a community survey to identify the beliefs and values the community holds for its schools.

The Board chose this process after finishing its third year of budget reductions. Knowing that the next round would impact the very heart of our educational program—the classroom—the Board said, in effect: “How do we know what to keep and what to save until we know what kind of school district this community wants.” Working with a new vision and mission statement and data from the focus groups and survey, a new Finance Committee will set to work to recommend how the school district can fund the programs the community says it wants.

Each of the District’s 20 schools will hold focus groups. Many of you will be contacted by your child’s principal to participate in a focus group session. If you do not receive an invitation and would like to participate, please contact your child’s school. We are seeking broad community participation in this process, so if you know someone without children in school who might like to participate, please encourage them to contact one of our schools. We will be posting the meeting dates on our website before the end of December.

### **No Child Left Behind**

As I have said time and again during the last six years, District 200 is committed to giving every student the opportunity to be a successful learner. We have set high learning standards that are reflected in what our teachers teach every day. We embrace the concept of continuous improvement and expect our schools to have plans in place to increase academic achievement every year. We also support the intent of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) to help all students meet or exceed state standards in reading and math by 2014.

As parents in District 200, you are accustomed to having access to the Illinois School Report Card for your child’s school each fall. The report card provides a variety of demographic data about the students, staff and district, as well as a breakdown of scores on the various state achievement tests. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) under NCLB is determined using much of the same information; however, NCLB requires that the data be broken down into nine subgroups—six racial/ethnic groups, students who are not fluent in English, special education students and low income students.

If any of the subgroups do not make AYP, the entire school is designated as needing improvement. To make AYP for the April 2004 testing period, at least 37 percent of students in each subgroup of 40 or more students needed to meet or exceed standards on state tests in reading and mathematics. If any of the subgroups did not make AYP, then the entire school did not make AYP. District 200 was notified late last month that four of its schools did not make AYP under the law. They are Wheaton North and Wheaton Warrenville South High Schools, Johnson Elementary School and Monroe Middle School.

Johnson and Monroe receive federal money to give extra reading and math help to low income students. Therefore, under the law, both schools must offer all students the opportunity to transfer to another District 200 school. While we are required to offer the transfer option, there is no requirement for families to take advantage of it. In fact, our Board of Education discourages transfers, believing both schools are working very hard to meet the individual needs of their low performing students. As a point of information, transferring is only an option for students currently attending Monroe and Johnson. It does not apply to fifth graders in Monroe feeder schools or students in Johnson’s attendance area entering kindergarten next fall. Whether the transfer option exists for those students next year is dependent on the 2005 test results and other factors that impact AYP.

Providing the transfer option, or choice as it is known under NCLB, is the part of the law we take exception to. We believe that Johnson and Monroe have excellent teachers who are making progress in helping underachieving students. We also believe it would be disruptive to students to move them mid-year. Nonetheless, we will make the transition to the new school as smooth as possible for any family that chooses this option. The transfer option does not apply to the two high schools because neither receives federal funds for instructional purposes. Nonetheless, both high schools are already at work identifying what they can do to improve achievement for their low achieving students in math and reading.

As I mentioned, AYP status is determined by student scores on state assessments. Those scores are recorded on the Illinois School Report Cards, which will be posted on the District web site before the holiday break along with a summary of each school's improvement targets for the year. As parents and community members, you should take pride in the achievement levels of our students as indicated on the report card. The vast majority of our students are learning at high levels and the scores are improving every year. I hope you will take time to review the report card for your child's school and the school district by visiting our web site at [www.cusd200.org](http://www.cusd200.org). If you don't have Internet access, please call the District office at 682-2000 to request a copy.

### **Hubble Middle School**

We continue to work on finding suitable property at an appropriate price on which to build a new middle school to replace Hubble. There are few vacant parcels in the southwest part of the District. Some are not for sale; others require the cooperation and agreement of several owners before a sale could be negotiated. Several other parcels carry a price tag that we believe is too high. We remain in communication with several of the owners and are optimistic that we will be able to find an appropriate site in the near future.

The Hubble Middle School Committee agreed last month that it does not want the lack of property to keep the group from moving ahead with its charge. Therefore, the five subcommittees will continue meeting and report back to the full committee at the end of January. The subcommittees are working in the following areas:

- The identification and selection of available sites.
- The feasibility of boundary changes when the new middle school opens.
- The alternate uses of the Hubble site when the new middle school is build.
- A referendum timeline and the potential inclusion of Jefferson School in a building proposal.
- Involving the public through communication and feedback.

Earlier this fall I met with representatives of Wheaton's Chamber of Commerce and Downtown Business Association to talk about the potential development of the Hubble property. As a result of that meeting, the Wheaton Chamber has agreed to host a community forum in the spring to gather feedback on development in the downtown area, including the Hubble site. The involvement of organizations such as the Chamber moves the discussion about the future of Hubble from a school-based conversation to a community one. This is an important step forward.

The Board of Education and Administration have talked about solutions for the long-term use of Hubble for several years. Yet some parents and members of the community may not be aware of why the Board has chosen to replace Hubble with a new middle school. Listed below are just

some of the issues that staff deals with on a day to day basis at Hubble. Please do not infer from these comments that Hubble is not safe for students and staff. It is a safe building, but it is substandard in terms of what this community expects of its school buildings and falls short of the standards applied to other District 200 schools.

- Estimates by reliable sources show it is less expensive by \$5 to 10 million dollars (depending on the cost of the site) to build a new school rather than renew the existing building.
- Science labs are inadequate, out of date and with varying degrees of functionality. The water and gas lines in some of the labs operate inconsistently.
- Old heating and ventilating systems cause frequent fire alarms due to dust being released into the air and triggering the alarm. During the week I am writing this letter there have been two fire alarms, which means students have been evacuated from the building twice.
- The age and frequency of repair make the heating and electrical systems expensive to operate, more than twice that of the other middle schools.
- Despite a long standing program of pest control, we continue to have pests, primarily mice, in all parts of the school.
- The presence of asbestos in the school, although it is encapsulated and is no threat to students, prevents us from making some repairs and upgrades, including the installation of some forms of technology that is present in the other middle schools.
- Handicap accessibility is poor in some parts of the school, causing staff to have to lift students up a flight of stairs or move them to another level by going outside.
- Student lockers are old and small and not designed to hold the items students bring to school today, things like musical instruments and backpacks.

As always, thank you for your support of our students and our schools. I wish all of you a happy holiday season.

Sincerely,

Gary T. Catalani, Ed.D.  
Superintendent